



The particular forms of domestic and residential organization in the informal habitat: cohabiting and support networks in two neighborhoods of Bogotá*

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze the particular way of residential and city production in the informal habitat interacts with the residential and domestic organization of those who inhabit it. For this purpose, different residential strategies of the population are analyzed, being cohabiting and support networks the most relevant. Through a qualitative approach, applied to two informal-origin neighborhoods in Bogotá, it is found that the flexibility offered by informal housing allows shaping certain forms of residential organization that complicate the formulation of domestic agreements. Simultaneously, these residential organizations are conditioned by the networks of relationships that they establish outside the dwelling which facilitate or hinder the development of life in this context. It is concluded that the relationship between households, dwellings and families in informal contexts leads to questioning the different categories used for housing policy making.

Key words: urban informality, domestic organization, forms of residential organization, cohabiting, support networks.

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Las formas particulares de organización doméstica y residencial en el hábitat informal: allegamiento y redes de apoyo en dos barrios de Bogotá

Resumen: El artículo busca analizar la manera en que la incidencia de la forma particular de producción residencial y de ciudad en el hábitat informal, interactúa con la organización residencial y doméstica de quienes la habitan. Para ello se analizan diferentes estrategias residenciales de la población, siendo el allegamiento y las redes de apoyo las más relevantes. A través de una aproximación cualitativa aplicada a dos barrios de origen informal en Bogotá, se encuentra que la flexibilidad que ofrece la vivienda informal permite la configuración de ciertas formas de organización residencial, que complejizan la formulación de acuerdos de convivencia doméstica. A su vez, estas están condicionadas por las redes de relaciones que entablan por fuera de la vivienda, que facilitan u obstaculizan el desarrollo de la vida en este contexto. Se concluye que la relación entre hogares, viviendas y familias en el contexto informal conlleva a poner en entredicho las diferentes categorías utilizadas para la formulación de políticas habitacionales.

Palabras clave: informalidad urbana, organización doméstica, prácticas de coresidencia, allegamiento, redes de apoyo.

Introduction

Urban informality, as a form of emergence and production of space in the city is understood as «(...) a set of irregularities —or (a)regularities— in terms of rights: urban irregularity, structure irregularity and irregularity in relation to the right to own land» (Alegría, 2005, cited in Camargo and Hurtado, 2013, p. 81). It is a phenomenon that has marked the development of Latin American cities in recent decades. Urban informality in Latin America is the result of simultaneous urban and demographic growth, along with a capitalist economic system that excludes the poorest, and in which the participation of the States to solve housing needs¹ and

¹The strategy to facilitate access to housing for the poorest social groups has mainly focused on the management of subsidies which, in addition to the credits provided by the banking sector and family savings, impose highly restrictive conditions and high exposure to the real estate market conditions of these groups with little capital for their access (García, 2019).

formulate effective housing policies has been weak. These factors bring thousands of people with low income and low educational levels to be forced to build their own habitat (Torres, 2007).

The present work puts to test the hypothesis that irregular land ownership, progressive development, precarious housing design and the multiform space available to develop different family and individual activities, characteristic of informal mechanisms of residential production, generate a specific habitat that hosts, produces and interacts with forms of domestic and residential organization² developed by families and households in vulnerable conditions. This organization will be understood and explored as: 1) co-residence practices that would be gathered through the concept of household; 2) the strategies used to organize those co-residence practices inside the dwelling (of one or more households); and 3) support networks set outside the dwelling and that make use of other family and non-family relationships.

Thereby, it is important to understand the domestic and residential forms that are located in the informal-origin habitat which configure a *habitus* and condition the quality of life, welfare and social mobility expectations for people, being a phenomenon shared by a large population group that resides in these contexts across the continent.

The inquiry is carried out based on a previous research whose case study was two informal-origin neighborhoods in the city of Bogotá, Colombia. To do this, the paper begins with a theoretical framework to understand the different residential strategies of households in urban informality emphasizing on the type of residence and on the family and social relationship networks that are forged in this context. Then, the methodology used for the collection of information and the context where the study was carried out is exposed. Finally, the analysis of the results and a section of conclusions are presented.

Theoretical Framework

To start, it is necessary to specify the complexity of the unit of analysis on which the work is carried out in as much as the residential strategies of household will be mentioned, understanding household as «(...) a form of grouping of individuals who meet in the same place to live daily for some time including a shared economy, a collective domesticity (Jelin, 1998) regardless of their family ties » (García, 2019, p. 23). This is the traditional unit of analysis in housing studies as it implies patterns of co-habiting which, although not necessarily implying family relationships, frequently refer to this type of ties. However, it will not be the only one used in this case given that, in the ways of inhabiting and producing informal habitat, there

² According to French-speaking references, the family and residential project coincide and therefore, the study of habitat transformations accounts for the changes in the family and in society in general (García, 2019).

are also economic, organizational and daily logics that go beyond dwelling limits (García, 2019) and that refer to the concept of family, understood as a social and legal organization with its own production relations, ideological and affective components, and its power structures (Jelin, 2005).

Thus, to get a sense of how households and families make use of their residence, housing strategies (Di Virgilio y Gil and de Anso, 2012) or residential strategies (Bonvalet and Dureau, 2002) are understood as “decisions made by families/domestic units and the objectives they pursue in terms of habitat [...] located at the intersection between housing needs and expectations of households and structural determinants” (Di Virgilio and Gil y de Anso, 2012, p. 160). These decisions constitute a subset of family life strategies (Bonvalet and Dureau, 2002; Di Virgilio and Gil y de Anso, 2012) and represent the margin of freedom that households have to intervene on their habitat and residence according to the resources they have, even in contexts of poverty. The conceptual approach of these strategies and their expressions in the context of urban informality will be discussed in this section.

According to the scheme proposed by Bonvalet and Dureau (2002), there are four types of residential strategies. The first residential strategy refers to the location of the dwelling within the city that conditions the possibilities of access to various urban services and, in turn, configures a certain lifestyle for households (Di Virgilio and Gil and de Anso, 2012). The second residential strategy is the occupation mode of the house or type of possession either through ownership or rental system of the dwelling. The advantage of informal housing is that, despite being located in the urban periphery, it provides access to property especially for the first inhabitants. This symbolizes heritage, housing and economic security for households (Sáenz, 2013) in addition to facilitating the transformation of the dwelling into a multiform space to be used for different purposes. One of these purposes is the economic use of the household that allows the formation of an informal rental market (Abramo, 2012; Parias, 2008) where shared or independent spaces are allocated for one or more external households to reside in the dwelling, thus requiring some coexistence and domestic organization guidelines that can also be informal.

The third residential strategy is the type of habitat chosen by households (Bonvalet and Dureau, 2002). In informality, this choice not only refers to the type of dwelling which usually alludes to the *house*, but also to the way of production through self-construction and progressive development. The first refers to the fact that housing is built mainly by the household members that inhabit it given that they provide most of the materials, labor, time and other resources. However, mutual aid networks can also participate in this process (Di Virgilio & Gil and de Anso, 2012). The second refers to the fact that self-built housing is a process over time (Echeverry, Anzellini & Rubio, 2003) which consolidates gradually based on the needs and expectations of the household.

Despite the lack of technical assistance or advice during the building process, the main characteristic of this form of residential production, which affects co-residency practices, is its flexibility. This is “a potential that allows developing the evolution of housing over time, by promoting change and transformation during its useful life” (Gelabert and Gonzalez, 2013, p. 25). Therefore, the informal progressive dwelling adapts according to the household needs and expectations (Gilbert, 2001) by modifying the space and making it multifunctional. This type of transformation can also be added to those that normally occur throughout the housing life cycle which, from its construction and during the aging process, undergoes different transformations such as its (de)valorization in the market, the obsolescence of its technological conditions, or change in the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of its occupants (Clark and Dieleman, 1996).

This being the case, dwelling is also transformed in relation to the different stages of the household life cycle³ (Jaramillo, 2008). This concept serves to understand the dynamism of domestic life through time (Camargo, 2017, taking up again González de la Rocha, 2009). It is neither a static construction nor a standardized model, but a guide to understand the changes in the size and number of household members that allows interpreting certain residential and domestic dynamics. Based on González de la Rocha, Camargo (2017) identifies three stages in this cycle: the first stage is the expansion phase, which begins when the couple is constituted and ends when the woman’s fertile life ends; the second stage is the consolidation phase, which takes place when the couple has decided not to have any more children or at least one of them is part of the job market; and the third, and last stage, is the dispersion phase that begins when one of the young members emancipates and ends when one of the parents dies in old age, thus generating a period of imbalance.

It should be clarified that the self-construction process occurs in a different way for each household, since it is conditioned by its size and composition, as well as by employment and educational trajectories, and the participation of its different members during the construction process (Astudillo, 2020). In this sense, housing is constantly redefined because the use that household members make of it reflects the use of a space that is not only used for living. Specifically, in contexts of urban informality, the dwelling is a place of work and economic support for a population characterized by participating in the informal labor market and having low income.

³The life cycle approach approximates the behaviors of individuals according to the life stage in which they are. On the other hand, the life course is the approach used today, as it recognizes the free will of the individual (Blanco, 2011) when analyzing individual life paths according to the changes that may occur in domains such as education, labor, migration or reproduction, which may have a higher probability of occurrence according to a system of expectations around age, culture and geographical area (Elder, Kirkpatrick and Crosnoe, 2003). In the case of the concept applied to households, it mainly accounts for those having family ties and revealing a specific moment of configuration, depending on the age of their members and dependency relationship between them (Ullmann and Valera, 2014).

The last residential strategy, which is more relevant for this study, is the establishment of social and family relationship networks (Bonvalet and Dureau, 2002) or support networks. According to Di Virgilio and Gil y de Anso (2012), relationship networks facilitate access to either economic, family or habitat resources for low-income sectors through social capital. Thus, belonging to these networks increases the possibilities of collaboration, exchange of favors and flow of resources among participants which are essential to maintain well-being in adverse living conditions (González de la Rocha, 2001).

In contexts of urban informality, housing flexibility allows support networks to be located within it, favoring cohabitation practices of family nucleus⁴ and households whose coexistence contributes to the reproduction of material life. In this way, it is possible to give rise to practices that challenge the paradigm implicit in public policies, referring to the presence of one household per dwelling —where individual privacy and autonomy must be guaranteed (Salazar, 2008)— which is used to evaluate housing deficit conditions (García, 2019). This type of practice is included in the concept of “*residential coexistence (allegamiento)*” which emerged in Chile in the 1980s. It has been used in the technical language of housing policies and social sciences as an interpretation scheme to understand the configuration of the household in contexts of urban poverty and informal habitat. It is understood as “the strategy used by households and family nucleus to solve the lack of dwelling by sharing a house with another household or family nucleus” (Araos, 2016, p. 198)⁵.

Residential coexistence (*allegamiento*) has been classified into three main types. The first type is in-site residential coexistence in which, within an informal land that has already been acquired for the construction of a house, an additional house is built (Arriagada, Icaza and, Rodríguez, 1999). The second type is the internal residential coexistence which occurs “when the household is composed of a main family nucleus and a secondary or related one” (Arriagada et al, 1999, p. 2). The coexisting nucleus have some economic insertion within the main household (Necochea, 1987). This may occur downwards, when children are taken in, or upwards when parents are sheltered. Finally, the third type of residential coexistence is external, which occurs “when there are two or more households within a dwelling” (Arriagada et al, 1999, p. 2). These are households that share the same house but are economically independent. They may or may not be related by blood ties, or even be tenants of some space in the same dwelling. The types of relationships mentioned are more frequent in urban informality (García, 2019).

However, it is pertinent to add that a residential coexistence situation is not only a measure to which people are forced to solve housing shortages. It can also

⁴ Understood as reproductive or matrimonial nucleus, either complete or incomplete (Ullmann and Valera, 2010).

⁵ Definition taken by the author from the Social Observatory of the Ministry of Social Development and Family of Chile.

be an option or preference relative to domestic life (Araos, 2016) where family solidarity appears as a resource mobilized on a permanent basis (Di Virgilio & Gil y de Anso, 2012) considering that it functions as a daily support network. A form of organization of co-residency is configured that requires certain agreements and rules of coexistence in which all households' members participate in order to solve their economic, housing and domestic needs.

Likewise, it is important to remember that the household is not isolated within its own dwelling but rather it is immersed in the neighborhood where it is part of a series of social ties established between neighbors, relatives, and extended family which are of great importance for the satisfaction of needs of all kinds, including residential needs (Bonvalet and Andreyev, 2003). These social ties form networks of mutual help or support networks which are "(...) a set of "external relations of kinship and friendship, based on exchange links and reciprocity norms that constitute fundamental resources to satisfy the needs of the domestic unit" (Oliveira and Salles, 1989: 19)" (Acosta, 2003, p. 26). Such ties are strengthened when there is a local family circle (Bonvalet and Andreyev, 2003) understood as a family system characterized by geographical and emotional proximity in which there is mutual aid and frequent contact between members despite not residing under the same roof.

In informal-origin neighborhoods, these contacts are even more frequent given the family residential proximity (Araos, 2016) as it is common for several households belonging to the same family to live in the same neighborhood. In addition, it is usual to find that if they change their place of residence, they do so in the same geographical environment in order to preserve the social relationship networks formed, which would be endogenous residential mobility (Parias, 2008). These supports are key for the household to locate a place to live within the city, to remain within the neighborhood and to facilitate the construction of housing (Di Virgilio and Gil y de Anso, 2012) since, for example, they provide labor given the construction experience of the people who inhabit these contexts.

However, as in any social relationship, support networks, both internal and external to the dwelling, are not exempt from conflict. As Acosta (2003) says, taking up again González de la Rocha's proposal, there is a "(...) need to not mythologize the bonds of collaboration and cohesion established by family members" (p. 27) as conflict and solidarity can coexist simultaneously in relationships. According to González de la Rocha (2001), the household is a social unit of contradictions where there is a constant conflict of interests and a struggle to access resources existing within it.

Despite being a central residential strategy for households in contexts of marginality, support networks can be affected when poverty conditions increase (Di Virgilio and Gil y de Anso, 2012; González de la Rocha, 2001; 2007) especially when there is a reduction in economic resources. This causes that the

“shock absorbing” effect represented by networks (Di Virgilio y Gil de Anso, 2012) be threatened because it is not possible to maintain either the exchange or the flow of resources that guarantee the conservation of the social ties that have been created (González de la Rocha, 2001).

For this reason, it is possible that the situation of social disadvantage increases for women-headed households, considering “(...) the impossibility of these households to establish and maintain social relationship networks because they do not have either the time or the resources that social relationship networks demand” (Acosta, 2003, p. 31). In other words, they are unable to participate in support networks due to the fact that the domestic and labor burdens and responsibilities they must take do not allow them to belong in an active manner to a reciprocal or exchange relationship between equals, both at the social and economic level. Therefore, they are more vulnerable “to fall or remain in a situation of poverty or misery” (Sáenz, 2013, p. 217).

With all of the above, it is possible to propose that residential strategies in informality are not simply a subset of family life strategies but they *are* a life strategy (Astudillo, 2020). In other words, the relationship between household and informal housing is so close that deciding on residence implies, almost directly and proportionally, a life decision as “the family and the residential project are built together” (García, 2019, p. 22, taking up Bonvalet, 2005). Therefore, for people who live in settlements of informal origin, the house, besides being a place to live, is also considered a source of security, welfare, social mobility, a possibility of improving the quality of life and overcoming poverty and vulnerability conditions that permeate these contexts (Camargo, 2017).

Methodology

Information gathering for this research required the development of an instrument that would allow the simultaneous collection of the household trajectory and its transformations over time as well as the construction process of the house. The main challenge consisted in approaching the different transformations that a co-residence group has in the same house that also changes over time. Unlike other studies on household trajectories in residential terms, in this case residential mobility is not tracked but transformations in a context of immobility are, because it is the dwelling what is in constant movement.

Following a qualitative approach, the information gathering instrument used was a semi-structured interview, which sought to account for the transformations of the household and the dwelling over time through the testimony of those consulted.

Men and women from both neighborhoods, who had been part of the entire construction process of their dwellings, were chosen to trace the different

transformations of their household and residence. The instrument was applied to 9 people in total, 3 men and 6 women from both neighborhoods⁶.

At a general level, it should be noted that the interviewees were characterized by a low educational level, which implied that in all cases they worked throughout their lives in low-paying jobs such as construction or cleaning, and therefore they had low income or labor informality. This means that they do not currently have a pension as an economic insurance for their old age, which is the stage of life they are currently in. It is also important to note that all of the interviewees are part of a second generation of informality. In other words, their parents were the first settlers of the neighborhoods and, therefore, the interviewees were born or raised from a very young age in this context, which accounts for a reproduction of practices of living in urban informality. Finally, it should be emphasized that all the interviewees and their families, including children, siblings or in-laws have had endogenous residential trajectories (Parías, 2008) and therefore, an important family residential proximity persists (Araos, 2016).

The neighborhoods chosen for the field work were Pardo Rubio and Paraíso, located in the Zonal Planning Unit (UPZ for its acronym in Spanish) 90 in the locality of Chapinero, on the Eastern Hills in the city of Bogotá. Both neighborhoods have a common past of extractive activities that ceased in the mid- 20th century and began their subsequent settlement, development and consolidation in irregular conditions. Finally, Paraíso was legalized in 1996 and Pardo Rubio in 1999. The age and informal origin of the neighborhoods reflect the significant informal housing production process that has taken place and that exemplifies the diversity of residential and domestic organization forms that persist in time even after the formalization of the neighborhoods.

Results

The following are the main results found which seek to reveal the residential and domestic complexity in contexts of urban informality. This section is divided into three parts: the first part deals with the problematization of the family structure in terms of the forms of residential coexistence (*allegamiento*) that occur and that question certain attributes, such as privacy or autonomy, that are taken for granted in formal residential contexts; the second part analyzes the social and family relationships that are established within informal dwelling; and the third part explores the relationships that take place outside the dwelling and are key to living in informality.

⁶ At the beginning, the plan was to have an equal number of men and women to find out if gender made any difference in the trajectories, but the field work conditions did not allow this. The sociodemographic characteristics of the interviewees can be seen in the annex.

1. Who live together?

The following is a description of the residential coexistence cases found in the field work that present specific nuances compared to those described in the conceptual section. Subsequently, other factors that make forms of domestic organization in the informal habitat more complex, such as the household life cycle and the tension between the individual intentions of the members, are presented.

Children as co-residents

Residential coexistence with children was a common factor for most of the interviewees, although different motives and meanings underlying this practice were revealed.

In the first place, the case of unmarried children of an adult age, older than the age foreseen for emancipation, who work but who have never undertaken residential projects outside their parents' household, is identified. In most cases, these adults have not expressed intentions or plans to leave their parent's household and maintain their intention of permanence, even when there are plans to purchase a house of their own. This can be understood as a strategy in economic terms in which the possibility of saving is prioritized over the desire for independence. The acquisition of a dwelling is planned more as an investment than as a place to live in the future because, in the words of one interviewee "what is missing for her in here?", referring to her daughter who intends to buy an apartment to rent but not to move in it. Although this type of residential coexistence does not correspond with the expectation or assumption that each household should enjoy residential independence in their own dwelling, coexistence between the two generations, according to the testimonies, is not necessarily problematic since it is an internal residential coexistence deeply imbricated in the main household and, therefore, emancipation is not considered a problem to be solved.

A second type of downward residential coexistence identified corresponds to living with previously emancipated children that, due to marital separation and the residential instability this situation entails and regardless of whether they have children, decided to return to their parents' house in a permanent way or until they can recover their residential autonomy in a sustainable way.

The circumstances in which this downward residential coexistence occurs, constitutes for the children a way to recover the well-being and tranquility at the residential level, because the parents' house is seen as a refuge since they do not have other alternatives to solve their housing need or to avoid precarious conditions in residential quality, or in ownership, as it would be necessary to resort to renting. This is how one interviewee expressed it referring to the return of her son to the

parental house: “As my husband said, ‘how can we throw him out on the street if this house is also his,’ so he stayed here with us”. In this sense, the family becomes a resource or an anchor (García, 2019, taking up Bonvalet, 1997) especially in contexts of urban informality where the family house is usually their own, and its use allows them to overcome adverse circumstances which may compromise future social mobility (Camargo, 2017).

Finally, the case of children living in in-site residential coexistence, that is, in a house built on the same property where the parental house is located. This is a definitive and permanent solution in residential matters for the next generation and their respective households. It facilitates access to a dwelling of their own since the land is available for this purpose, and it allows maintaining the family and relationship networks that have already been established. One of the most notable cases in this regard was an interviewee who stated that his property was of a significant extension so, as his family grew and went through the different stages, he saw the possibility of subdividing it so that each of his three children could build their own house. Two of his children built their respective dwellings and today, each one is a three-story house. The third child still has the option of building a second and third floor on top of the interviewee’s home but he has not taken this alternative so far.

Sibling residential coexistence

As discussed above, the literature on residential coexistence suggests that it can be either upward or downward that is, residential coexistence between different generations. However, there is less development on residential coexistence as a form of residential organization that happens horizontally. According to the field work carried out, it was found that it is common for members of the same generation of a family group to live in residential coexistence between siblings, either inside the dwelling or in the same property.

One of the most representative cases of this situation was found in a dwelling in which a total of seven siblings were in residential coexistence since none of them were emancipated. It should be clarified that two of them live in the dwelling with their family nucleus and even with extended family, for a total of sixteen people. Although they all share the space of a single dwelling, each one is independent both economically and domestically since “we are independent republics”- an expression that denotes the complexity of family and residential relationships which will be discussed later. In this case, it is difficult to say what type of residential coexistence is present because, despite the autonomy that may exist between the different members, which would allow to think about independent households, there are decisions about coexistence or about housing that are made jointly. Additionally, it is complex to

define who is part of the main household and who is considered co-resident because the interviewees and their siblings are in similar conditions.

Another frequent situation was the identification of siblings living in in-site residential coexistence which results from an arrangement to obtain equal residential security, as an outcome of an available patrimony whose subdivision is allowed by informal land market characteristics, such as the area to which people have access. In two recorded cases, it was found that the piece of land left as an inheritance from the parents was divided into equal parts so that each sibling could build and have their own place of residence. One of these pieces of land was divided among four siblings and the other between two. Despite being independent households, this residential strategy allows a high degree of relationship and dependency given the closeness of sharing the same property which, in addition to forcing them to make joint decisions, constitutes a very narrow support system, almost as if they lived together.

The external residential coexistence: the tenants

As has been explained, in downward residential coexistence or residential coexistence between siblings it is difficult to determine the degree of autonomy between the households inhabiting the dwelling. However, it is easy to identify this independence with households in a tenancy condition, which are not necessarily part of the main nucleus.

It was found that in most cases, one or more co-resident external households are living in a rented section of their dwelling. It should be noted that all the tenants live in apartments or studio apartments completely separated from the house of the interviewees, that is, dwellings were modified over time to guarantee a comfortable space for the main household and an independent space for the tenants, which gives more privacy to all households since they do not share any space. Only one of the interviewees has a family member living as a tenant, but this does not make the relationship or arrangements any different from those she has had with other tenants. This demonstrates how common it is to allocate spaces in the same dwelling for the informal rental market in neighborhoods whose age and development are significant.

Household and housing life cycle: implications on privacy

As mentioned above, the illustrated cases of residential coexisting only reflect the household composition at a given time. However, it must be taken into account that households transform over time according to their life cycle stage, the number of members, occupations, roles, functions, etc. All these variables make co-residence in informality more complex and call into question aspects such as privacy, autonomy

and intimacy, which are taken for granted in formal residential structures that are more difficult to transform.

According to the interviewees, it can be inferred that during the first stages of informal dwelling construction the overcrowding levels are very high, as there is still not enough space for all household members to enjoy a certain degree of privacy within the residence. This occurs especially when the household is expanding and there are young children, which makes sharing the same space more viable. This was expressed by one of the interviewees referring to the only room in the house: “that was where practically all of us slept, the only thing we had separate was the beds. I remember that I slept in bed with my father, my mother and another sister. And my sisters slept in the other bed and that was it”.

Despite overcrowding, household members cannot always make the necessary extensions to the house, as sufficient resources are required to continue the construction. When there are many children, few household members work or generate significant income, which makes investment in building construction difficult. In informality, it can take a long time, possibly years, for households to have the necessary resources to do so. Therefore, it is not even problematic to think that children sleep with their parents in the same room, regardless of their age, or even that they sleep with extended family members, as in one of the cases studied where a single room was shared with parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives.

Over time, household moves into the next stages of its life cycle. As children grow older and begin their working lives, they participate in the development of the dwelling. Now, in addition to the parents who own the house, the next generation has evident purposes and intentions in the planning and construction of the dwelling. It becomes a house that responds to the needs of several people and, therefore, each household member generates particular and individual expectations about its growth (Bazant, 1988).

Thus, the incidence of multiple opinions and projects on a single house in informality may or may not be a source of tension and discrepancies among the co-residents. In one of the documented cases, the absence of conflict is revealed since the cohabitation of the interviewee with her adult son who works in construction, has made it easier for him to make several repairs and renovations to the house. Given that mother and son used to sleep in the same room, four years ago the son decided to save money and take charge of the construction of his own room, which now makes up the top floor of the house. In contrast, the situation of another of the interviewees exemplifies the possible conflicts that may arise. In her case, the interviewee and her three children appear as signatories of the house deeds and one of her daughters used this argument to build a fourth floor in the house without the consent of the others. This situation became a permanent problem for the family, since the daughter who built the fourth floor filed a lawsuit against the other three owners, claiming a high

sum of money for her share of the house. Fifteen years have passed since the problem began “because of a few bricks” which, in addition to having caused the breakdown of family relationships, is still an unsolved lawsuit that has involved a significant economic expense to the other owners for legal advice, money that could have been invested instead in dwelling repairs.

All things considered the active participation of different household members in the development of the dwelling can be understood as the search for individuality in a space that begins as a collective space. In this sense, the challenge of building a private and individual space (Salazar, 2008) inside a dwelling that is neither private nor individual arises as a solution to housing shortages suffered by a low-income population.

2. Coexistence and domestic agreements in the informal habitat

As is to be expected, when there are multiple households and members residing in a single dwelling which is also transforming, living together becomes more complex and relationships of cooperation and solidarity may occur or, on the contrary, conflictive relationships may appear. This results in a context of internal power inequality among household members, which encourages the development of confrontations. This situation implies daily negotiation of agreements and responsibilities of each one in domestic life (González de la Rocha, 2001). Thus, it is important to identify those strategies developed by the households consulted to mitigate or prevent possible domestic conflicts.

In regular circumstances, when the expectation of a household living in a dwelling is met, the payment of utilities and taxes, which must be met periodically, would be a simple matter to solve. However, the vast variety of forms of residential coexistence that occur simultaneously in informality, makes it necessary to devise mechanisms and consensual rules to respond to these duties. For example, utilities are paid by the members of the household who generate income, or according to the number of people living in the house. Even so, it should be noted that payment is also made according to the installation of the utilities, that is, if they are shared with another dwelling located on the same property, as is the case of an interviewee who has his own electricity meter but shares the water meter with his brother, which requires them to make a joint payment for water bills. Regarding taxes payment, it was found that an equitable distribution is made among the homeowners. Both situations represent arrangements that have been in place for some time, which seem not to generate any kind of problem.

Regarding the organization of domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, or buying groceries, there are various agreements that are reached. It usually depends on income generation, time availability and the functions of each household member.

Thus, there are cases where stay-at-home moms prepare food which they have previously bought for their co-resident children, but this does not mean that they must also do more house work for them, such as doing the laundry.

Due to the multiple households and people living in informal housing, cooperation and coexistence can be exhausting as it requires coordination among various individuals for logistical issues such as the distribution of tasks, domestic responsibilities and economic burdens as well as for coexistence agreements in terms of the use of spaces, privacy, autonomy to make decisions about residence, etc. For these reasons, it is difficult to assess the independence of households living in these contexts, as there are small nuances that put the notion of residential coexistence in question.

In addition, it is possible that the relationships between the different members can lead to an environment of constant tension in the dwelling and, for this reason, extreme cases are found, such as the interviewee who lives together with fifteen other members of his family as “independent republics”, to the point that their only shared responsibility is the payment of utilities and property taxes. Other activities within the dwelling, such as cleaning or cooking, are carried out individually in a space that is necessarily shared and where the number of co-residents makes it difficult to believe that everyone lives autonomously, without generating some kind of conflict.

Just as agreements are reached within the household, it is also necessary to reach agreements with the other households that inhabit the dwelling as tenants. As they are neither subject to legal regulations nor mediated by a third party, the relationships that the interviewees establish with their tenants are also informal (Acosta, 2003). According to what was found, the agreements and conditions settled with the external household arise from the experience, convenience, intuition and security of the interviewees. For example, interviewees who have had several tenants use verbal agreements and also written contracts with them as a way to make the rules of living together clear from the beginning. One of the interviewees uses formal methods such as employment letters, recommendations and written contracts to rent the apartments she has inside her dwelling, while another, in addition to signing a contract, gives greater value to the verbal agreement established with the person who is going to be the tenant.

3. Support networks: between collaboration and competition

As mentioned in the previous section, the relationships that the household establishes outside the dwelling are a fundamental residential strategy for the population living in an informal environment, since they either make possible or hinder the development of life in precarious conditions and in a changing habitat. As previously stated, support networks are useful for individuals and households to

the extent that they can take an active role within them. Participation through work, solidarity or time allows for the strengthening of external family and neighborhood relationships, which is advantageous for developing life in a context permeated by different adversities.

Several interviewees recognize the role that support networks, especially their local family circle, have played in their lives due to their presence during the different building stages, from the acquisition of the property, its division and adaptation to the support during the different construction stages. One interviewee stated that for the construction of his house he received help mainly from his father and brother, an action that he continued to replicate for the construction of his children houses and the dwellings of various neighbors in the community. Support networks have also been present to facilitate daily domestic responsibilities, such as caring for small children or cooking while attending to other responsibilities and even to participate in activities typical of informal settlements, such as fetching water when there was no regular supply. For some interviewees this reflects a “communal co-existence” that they managed to forge over time.

However, with the sum of vulnerabilities represented by the informal habitat, and the difficulties that people have to overcome in order to improve their quality of life, support networks, instead of being forms of collaboration, can become sources of competition.

The cases of two interviewees reflect this difficulty. When the first interviewee wanted to begin the construction of the second floor of her house—an activity that is quite common in informal-origin areas, regardless of whether or not she had the necessary licenses—her neighbors hindered the process in many ways by calling the authorities and stopping the cement mixer several times which, once construction could be completed, brought structural and humidity problems in the dwelling. The second interviewee used her house for economic purposes by having a restaurant. Given her high economic dependence on it, and the success she was having in giving the space this use, her neighbors prevented her place from functioning normally on several occasions.

Female-headed households and support networks

The gender variable was of great importance to understand the role of support networks and the local family circle in residential and family practices. In this regard, the circumstances of three interviewees who are heads of household and lack another adult figure to distribute domestic and economic responsibilities were special, they had to face alone the entire construction process of their households and the reproduction of their family. Given their low educational level, they were forced to divide their time between working in a low-paid job, raising their

children, doing domestic work, taking responsibility for all household expenses, and guaranteeing the resources for the construction of their house, a situation that was particularly difficult in the early stages of their family life cycle. The fact of assuming alone all the burden of building a life in an informal environment, which is in itself a complicated process, led them to be more exposed to circumstances of vulnerability, material deprivation and poverty. This happens because they are not able to maintain and participate constantly in the social support networks, since they lack time, money and resources in general (Acosta, 2003) to be part of what the neighborhood networks demand in urban informality contexts. For this reason, the three interviewees stated that during this period the concerns were constant in their day-to-day lives, especially those that compromised the well-being of their children, such as care or lack of food on some occasions.

Conclusion

After making a brief approach to the phenomenon of urban informality as a form of city production in Latin America, which is reflected mainly in self-constructed and progressively developed housing, it is possible to conclude that this type of habitat does lodge particular forms of domestic and residential organization.

The particularity of these is evidenced in the diversity of forms of residential coexistence presented more frequently in urban informality, due to the possibilities that exist of making housing more flexible and adapting it according to the needs and possibilities of those who inhabit it, especially because it implies an expectation of social mobility access through heritage. These forms of co-residency within informal dwelling can occur by necessity or by preference, which leads cohabitants to develop certain domestic agreements to guarantee coexistence and minimize conflict. Likewise, the adversities that arise in the informal habitat are an additional element that may undermine the functioning of household relationships extrapolated to its closest environment, where support networks can become facilitators of individual and collective achievements, or into networks where competition prevails.

The flexibility and progressiveness of self-constructed housing from which they can take advantage, make it possible for households to seek strategies for solving their housing needs and expectations. This type of habitat implies a constant effort to mobilize resources and accommodate daily family life in a certain way in order to use strategies to lead the residential project and the life project along the same path, since self-construction is embedded in the household dynamics.

There are residential practices that cannot be classified positively or negatively. Among them is the strategy of indefinitely sacrificing privacy, autonomy or comfort in the house, a situation that is not problematic as long as an immediate need is being met as it is considered a transitory discomfort that is solved as the habitat

is regularized, but that can make certain household members vulnerable, such as the younger ones. In turn, among such residential practices, is the normalization of the lack of need for residential independence, which results in greater complexity in intra-family relationships, especially when the parents grow older and the functions and power dynamics between members residing under the same roof begin to change. Both are a reflection of some of the social and cultural practices that take place in informal contexts, and that are reproduced over time.

Likewise, the diversity of agreements and co-residency practices that were found in this work, call into question the ways of measuring variables for data collection, systematization and formulation of housing policies, such as household, dwelling or household headship, which are not completely adequate to interpret the reality of urban informality contexts.

It is not just about debating whether there is a quantitative housing deficit when the one-to-one relationship of a single household inhabiting a dwelling is not met, nor is it a matter of thinking that people will always find a way to accommodate, organize and coexist well within a single house, despite the economic, social, overcrowding and poverty circumstances in which they may live (González de la Rocha, 2001; 2007). This work challenges these opposing perceptions as it is located in an intermediate zone between the two, revealing both their functionality and their conflict.

Finally, it should be noted that due to the transition to formality in legal terms of neighborhoods that emerged informally, the category of informality may lose importance as it is known. However, a series of informal socio-cultural practices and logics that are constantly reproduced persist simultaneously, such as residential coexistence and forms of domestic organization, which require reformulating the guidelines and mechanisms to support the different processes that a large number of people go through while developing their life in informal habitats.

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Annex

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the people interviewed

Interviewee	Gender	Age (years)	Marital Status	Current occupation	Pension	Neighborhood
1	Female	66	Married	Home	No	Paraíso
2	Female	78	Widow	Home	Yes	Paraíso
3	Male	63	Single	Unemployed	No	Paraíso
4	Male	71	Married	Home	No	Pardo Rubio
5	Male	64	Divorced	Unemployed	No	Pardo Rubio
6	Female	64	Married	Home	In process	Paraíso
7	Female	61	Separated	Home	No	Pardo Rubio
8	Female	55	Separated	Maid	In process	Paraíso
9	Female	72	Widow	Home	Yes	Paraíso

Source: Self elaboration from field work.