

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), in response to the world-wide concern about the human environment, created in 1969 the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE). One of the tasks given to this Committee is the assessment of the state of knowledge in various fields of environmental relations and management. The environmental aspects of human settlements, one of the major fields identified for study, is of particular concern to developing countries. Assessment of the existing state of knowledge in this field must necessarily be interdisciplinary in nature. Yet, if unstructured, such an appraisal could come to involve virtually all human activities.

Considerable care was, therefore, taken to identify topics that would be amenable to scientific study through comparative research programmes. One such topic, regarded as of highest priority, is the evaluation of the rationale for standards and criteria that influence the relation between the provision of human shelter and the environment, especially in the developing regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Such an evaluation involves a review of current construction methods and density of building (with special emphasis on the climate, the use of renewable and non-renewable resources, cultural values, and the costs of building and administration), water supply, air quality, occupational noise levels, geophysical hazards, sanitary and educational services. It was hoped that this reappraisal would provide a better overall understanding of essential human needs in a wide range of settlements, and lead to better definitions of, for example, minimum standards for housing density or water supply.

The principal objectives of this evaluation project were, therefore:

- (1) to collate existing information on the various standards and criteria that define the environmental context of human settlements and that, in particular, determine the supply of housing and other services and amenities;
- (2) to carry out an interdisciplinary evaluation of the rationale underlying these standards and criteria;
- (3) to develop proposals for comparative research leading to the development of new standards and criteria which may ameliorate the current environmental crisis in human settlement.

The SCOPE Bureau created a Working Group to carry out the project under the direction of Professor A. L. Mabogunje of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Other members of the Working Group included Professor J. Hardoy (Argentina), Professor

R. P. Misra (India), Professor Norton Ginsburg (U.S.A.), Professor J. S. Weiner (United Kingdom), Dr. C. I. Jackson (Canada) and Professor A. Kuklinski (Poland). Quite early in the activity of the Working Group the United Nations Environment Programme indicated its strong interest in the project, and subsequently provided substantial financial support for the various activities.

A major feature of the project was the designation of three institutions, one each in Africa, Asia and Latin America, that accepted responsibility for the collation of existing information on standards and criteria within their regions. The Planning Studies Programme, University of Ibadan, Nigeria was in charge of work in Africa; the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Mysore in India took responsibility for the Asian region; and the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies of the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, Buenos Aires, Argentina, undertook the task for Latin America.

The project began with a meeting in Paris in March, 1975 to define more clearly the conceptual framework for the assessment, to ensure consistent use of certain terms, and to agree on a common procedure. For example, it was necessary to define the basic terms, 'standards' and 'criteria'. *Standards*, it was agreed, are of two types: official and cultural. Official standards are those established by legislation, byelaws, or other rules and regulations, while cultural standards are those derived from traditional practices or found tolerable and acceptable by a large number of people. *Criteria*, on the other hand, are guides to standards; they may be related to social values or they may be recommendations offered by professional or scientific bodies and based on research, case studies or professional judgement.

In many developing countries and frontier areas, one reason for the relatively inefficient functioning of human settlements, especially in the provision of shelter, is the conflict between official and cultural standards. This is due, in turn, partly to the difficulties involved in adopting official standards that express widely accepted social values. As a result, it was decided that the project should investigate both official and cultural standards. Official standards were to be investigated in each continental region through questionnaires sent to appropriate agencies and individuals in various countries, followed up through personal visits by members of the research team. Cultural standards were to be investigated by surveys conducted in the countries in which the collaborating institutions are located: Argentina, India and Nigeria.

For Latin America, however, it proved possible to collate the necessary information for official standards for only four out of the twenty-two countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay. Fortunately these four countries account for nearly 45 per cent of the total population of the region. Surveys to evaluate cultural standards were undertaken in two agglomerations in Argentina: Greater Resistencia and Greater Tucumán. In Asia, the investigation of official standards covered India, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, representing 49 per cent of the total Asian population excluding China. Within India itself ten case studies were undertaken covering six urban and four rural settlements in different parts of the country. In Africa information concerning official standards was collected in ten countries: Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Here again their combined population represents nearly 50 per cent of the continental total. The investigation of cultural

standards was limited to four settlements that have recently developed within the metropolitan area of Lagos.

All these activities had to be crowded into a period of six months from March to September, 1975. A workshop to discuss the results of the various surveys took place in December 1975 in Ibadan, Nigeria; this provided an opportunity to elicit the views of other experts in this field who had not participated in the survey itself.

This report is being presented in the hope that it will stimulate new and imaginative thinking about the plight of millions of people in the Third World concerning the provision of their shelter. Two facts that stand out in all the surveys appear to need special emphasis. The first is that *in virtually none of the countries can the government afford to provide shelter for all its people, especially the poorer ones, and therefore it must be accepted that most shelter will have to be self-provided. Secondly, such self-provision takes place initially in a poor way but is maintained by continuous efforts at improvement.* The message of this volume is that instead of rejecting this approach to shelter provision, governments should accept as a starting point this willingness of people to help themselves. A more realistic approach to standard setting, and appropriate institutional and other support, will assist these people to bring about a steady improvement in the quality of their environment.