



09 Oct 1970

## A Role For Educational Institutions in Housing Development

Paul J. Grogan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsmine.mst.edu/islchp>



Part of the [Civil Engineering Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Grogan, Paul J., "A Role For Educational Institutions in Housing Development" (1970). *International Symposia on Low Cost Housing Problems*. 21.

<https://scholarsmine.mst.edu/islchp/21>

This Article - Conference proceedings is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars' Mine. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Symposia on Low Cost Housing Problems by an authorized administrator of Scholars' Mine. This work is protected by U. S. Copyright Law. Unauthorized use including reproduction for redistribution requires the permission of the copyright holder. For more information, please contact [scholarsmine@mst.edu](mailto:scholarsmine@mst.edu).

By

Paul J. Grogan\*

A Synopsis of the Housing Problem

Educational institutions are moving ever closer to participating to the limits of their mission and capabilities in the problems of housing development to meet the difficult housing goals for this nation. The issues with which they are confronted in this fledgling effort may be thought of in terms of satisfying three principal areas of interest: physical, social and political. Each of these ideas carry within itself the essence of a more concrete term, namely and respectively, technical, personal and community. In these latter contexts, one can visualize a specific form of housing serving a very real human need in a community that cares about how its citizens are housed. In the final analysis, this is the essence of today's housing problem; however, the alternate choice of words as presented initially above seems to have greater applicability to the discussion that follows.

The more encompassing word, economic, has not been used in the above simplification of the issues. The great affluence of this nation and its overt display of wealth in defense and space has become a glaring inconsistency among an ever increasing number of our citizens. There are many today who have reasons to deplore the conditions of housing to which one-fifth to one-third of our citizens are relegated. The absence of choice is more overwhelming than any possible economic constraints one might depict.

You may have noted this in July 1969, during the general euphoria that swept the country at the time of the first landing on the moon. Man-in-the-street interviews revealed a vast area of misgiving among the old, the young, and the disadvantaged. Too often their reaction was that with so much not right at home, why should we be spending money on the moon? Frankly, I believe that feeling has become more general since a year ago July. We have confirmed at last that the moon is not green cheese; it is more of a hot potato. Neither to extend the metaphor at all nor to raise an unnecessary extraneous issue, the Viet Nam War has long since proven to be essentially the same. Thus, both aerospace and defense have become suspect activities nationally while our housing conditions deteriorate apace. Let us discuss first the physical aspect of the housing problem or question as I see it.

Physical Aspects.

This area of concern includes all aspects of the building process such as planning, zoning, site selection and development, finance, design, construction, management, maintenance, etc. Several of these needs are now being served, although thinly, by on-going activities in our institutions of higher education, both private and publicly supported. Examples of such activities taken from the current program offerings of such institutions include: Critical Path Method, Construction Contracts and Specifications, Environmental Design for Cities, Building Better Housing Environments, etc. This conference, with its highly significant international posture and flavor, is another significant example of what can and is being done with respect to increased educational effort and emphasis in the quest for low cost housing.

\*Professor of Engineering, University Extension, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

There would appear to be an opportunity to organize various other educational and training programs designed to serve one or another interest groups within this broad charge. Discussion should take place with private sector interests, the federal and state agencies, and others in the private, nonprofit sector concerning how this level of service may be expanded by institutions, by states and within regions off the minimal base it is now operating. It must be expected, however, that the rate of growth of such activities will be both limited and sporadic in the light of present circumstances because of the general absence of start-up funds for programs and because of the multiplicity of disciplines engaged across the spectrum of technical and managerial subjects to be served within the context of how housing comes into being.

It also should be noted that the target audiences for these programs are largely professional and therefore may be expected to be reasonably up to date in the techniques of their respective lines of work. Moreover, their interests may be across-the-board in the particular field, whether finance, accounting, architecture, construction, project management, etc. Thus it would not appear likely that technical content courses for the various specialties dealing exclusively with housing programs, particularly where the public sector - federal, state, and local governments -- is involved, would achieve significant success except in the short term and on the level of virtual on-the-job training for lower echelon technical personnel in the participating organizations. The reasoning here is that the responsibilities of subalterns with respect to housing development, where the public and non-profit sectors are involved, may be considerably more narrowly defined than that of principals and professionals serving the housing industry per se.

Social Aspects

Within the social arena it may be noted that the pawn with respect to housing development intended to serve persons with limited means is the would-be occupant, himself. It is he who must await upon the political and physical processes by which such housing is obtained. Too often the byplay of political and economic feasibility take precedence over social need. And when needs are served, they very often reflect several conscious or subconscious biases in terms of: 1) the groups to be served, 2) the sites to be used, and 3) the general quality and esthetics of the housing to be built. So it is that low-income housing is built: 1) where there is neither immediate employment nor good mass transit connecting with the available jobs, 2) for the elderly and not the poor, 3) often according to inadequate design standards and attention to esthetics, 4) with the use of inferior or inappropriate materials, and 5) carried out with indifferent supervision and workmanship. The consequences of all this is that the occupants suffer not only the indignity of inferior living conditions but then are accused unjustly of reducing the substandard structures to "instant slums." Remove these and similar incongruities from housing programs in which governmental units are involved and many of the present-day social concerns about the role of the public sector in making more low-income housing available will disappear as well.

It should be kept in mind at the same time that the occupant of housing developed under one form or another of local government authority or nonprofit organization sponsorship is no less a consumer than the person who buys a new refrigerator or automobile. Think how much greater the chances for long-term success with limited income housing projects if the concerns of those individuals for whom the product is marketed were taken into account as the project is brought into being.

Housing for the elderly, the indigent, the disadvantaged, the unemployed, and the underemployed should be the vantage point from which many of these less fortunate citizens can aspire to move on in time to open market housing as an alternative to becoming a last resort from which there is no apparent escape. This opportunity should be both real and imaginary. That is to say, wherever public and private assistance is provided insofar as the more adequate housing of the disadvantaged is concerned, there should be the opportunity for those with potential to be accommodated at a later time by free market housing of their own means and choice. Conversely, those without hope should be given the equal opportunity to live out their lives in low-income housing with comfort and dignity. Distinctions should not be drawn between the two groups passing one another in the milieu of limited income housing insofar as their relative dependence upon one form or another of housing assistance is concerned.

#### Political Aspects

Federal support of housing dates back to the early days of the Franklin Roosevelt era. The forgotten contribution of that involvement has been the surfeit of success in the suburbs, through the guarantees given to FHA and GI loans. Time alone will tell how much irreparable damage has been done to the landscape and to society at large in the forms of traffic congestion, environmental pollution, class separation, etc., that must be attributed to the thirty-year flight to the suburbs which has been aided and abetted by these legislative enactments. During the same time, the comparative lack of success with housing development in central cities -- where the insatiable requirements for freeways and parking lots have been represented by stronger lobbies than low-income housing proponents could afford -- carries the popular image of the failure of just another governmental program.

Federal programs of housing support nevertheless have been innovative and reasonably well funded. Moreover, rather than be allowed to lose the significant headway that has been obtained, this posture on the part of the federal government surely will improve in the face of the growing need and with the re-ordering of the national priorities post-Vietnam and post-Apollo.

The problem with federal housing programs to date comes in the application, where misunderstanding, apathy, prejudice, and an inherent reluctance on the part of many to become involved with federal programs all tend to delimit the possibilities of such well-intentioned and reasonably well-funded programs. In keeping with these hard facts, there would appear to be an opportunity to engage in programs that might be termed "public-affairs education for elected and appointed officials" in which the paper work processing and public relations aspects of a housing program sponsored by the local community can be treated for the enlightenment of local officialdom and the expedition of low-cost housing efforts.

As with other federal programs working in companionship with state and local governments, the ultimate success depends more upon the ingenuity, persistence and expertise of local resources in thousands of local communities around the country than upon the limited number of highly qualified counterpart resources that can be gathered together in Washington. The educational programs as envisaged here would serve in part to redress the balance with respect to the several ready classifications of consumers, whether aged, indigent, low-income, etc.

#### Program Approaches

Follow-up Activities. It would seem to be desirable, if not essential, that the posture of educational institutions with respect to serving the interests of greater housing development for this country not be exclusively that of programs in the typical formats of conferences, short courses, and institutes. There should be an appropriate balance with respect to follow-up activities in the field in which there is maximum opportunity for meaningful dialogue and through which the educational institution and its personnel can be the learner as well as the purveyor of learning. The former techniques, of course, have become the paramount means of information dissemination throughout the post baccalaureate educational industry that has emerged in the last two decades because of the comparative ease with which a high level of self support can be generated. This suggestion that educational institutions manifest more interest in the consequences of their educational programs, possibly helping to shape the results thereof, by greater concern about what actually happens to individuals after they have been exposed to a new skill or a new area of knowledge, has been voiced in other areas and represents both an opportunity and a responsibility whereby such organizations may optimize their effectiveness.

This matter of follow-up in the field raises the question of program support referenced above. In the final analysis, intensive field services may also place educational institution personnel in competition with the private sector interests (e.g., developers, realtors, lending institutions, consultants, accountants, etc.) and with public and social service employees at all levels of government and nonprofit organizations who have responsibilities in the housing and welfare fields.

In keeping with this thought, the history of the Cooperative Extension Service, USDA, does not provide an appropriate parallel. The much heralded success of the county agricultural agent was obtained in a special set of circumstances not to be duplicated today on the farm, much less the urban or community environment. In short, the farmer of several decades ago did not enjoy the cash flow by means of which consultant fees could be paid. Neither was he immediately and profitably accessible in the sense of a mass market to individuals in the private sector with a consultant service to sell. The agricultural agent, with government subsidy in one hand and without significant private sector disclaimer to fend off with the other, achieved success after a few quick decades by putting the farmer in the business of farming rather than the business of feeding his family and the assorted coterie of livestock he maintained - a form of diversity that averted disaster but also assured a limited net profit overall after a year of fence mending and toil in the fields. The corporate farmer of today, with heavy commitments to specialized crops or livestock, increasingly gets his information from vendor sources and from professional advisory services.

Interdisciplinary Content. The greater infusion of social (personal) and political (community) concepts in the physical (technical) programs now being offered through educational institutions should be encouraged. There has been some example of this suggestion already. In our own institution, we cite the example of James Potter, AIA, speaking on "A New Face for America" at a recent learning experience on Critical Path Method. There would be other opportunities, particularly at organized institute luncheons and dinners, to break pace with the technical content of programs by illustrating the human side of the housing equation. It should be pointed out that the typical audiences in such programs are not the policy-makers to whom the present shortcomings and full potentials of housing programs should be made clear if immediately favorable results are to be obtained. Thus, the need to reach the principal officeholders who have a responsibility for meeting the housing needs of the community remains as a challenge to educational institutions and their public service oriented employees everywhere.

Innovation and Cost Control. The question occurs from time to time as to the extent to which breakthroughs in technology might provide answers to the housing problem. However, that inquiry may be countered with the statement that "the eternal quest" with respect to enclosing space has been for some new wall panel that would suddenly and miraculously serve to reduce housing costs. However, the costs of housing are in an number of difficult-to-control areas quite apart from the nominal few percent required for the building enclosure per se: e.g., land, the development thereof (streets, sewer, water, gas, electricity, telephone, schools, police and fire protection, etc.), the increasing cost of money itself, comfort conditioning (e.g., automatic temperature control, multiple bathrooms, and now air conditioning and acoustical treatment), automatic water softening, increased electrical service (from 30 amps to 60 amps, more recently from 100 amps to 200 amps, and now 300 amps for residences), steadily increasing labor scales, stricter inspection and enforcement of codes, the currently rising cost in spite of money-saving new standards and conventions that appear from time to time in the example of prefabricated roof trusses, dry-wall construction, use of carpeting directly over sub-floors, prefabricated door and window stair assemblies, etc.

Moreover, it is suggested that there should not be excessive pre-occupation at this time or place with respect to money-saving standards of construction for various forms of subsidized housing since the conditions of service in rental housing are typically more severe than for private dwellings. Cited in this respect are such factors as rapid turnover, lack of equity interests, common indifference where public or absentee ownership is concerned, etc. Indeed, calling for better-than average construction specifications are such concerns as the reduction of noise transmission and cooking odors between dwelling units, minimization of service calls, the attainment of low overall maintenance, ease of refurbishing between occupancies, etc.

Another possibility for improved living at less cost would appear to be in terms of providing occupant incentives in rent-supplement and low-income housing through such "built-in" features as common recreational areas for social gatherings, TV viewing and the pursuit of hobby interests, part-time employment facilities, financial inducement for better-than-average care of facilities, etc. This concept of looking for "built-ins"

as a feature added to housing for those persons with limited means also may be extended to packaged items of a physical kind in the nature of drawers, bunks and other furnishings built into walls, built-in appliances, central vacuum systems, garbage disposals, inside shutters or screens in place of draperies, etc. Close attention to details of this kind should provide the occupant greater comfort and convenience in furnishing a dwelling unit at costs well below their free standing equivalents. These same innovations also effect other savings in overall floor space requirements, housekeeping effort, moving expenses, and largely eliminating the need to finance furniture and appliance purchases whether as original investment or as replacement.

Base-Line Information. Any organized approach by an educational institution effectively to interface with the housing development activities throughout the locale it both represents and serves immediately introduces the need for good fundamental information concerning the presently existing local housing conditions. To a certain extent, this may be found in the forthcoming census information and in the existing county-by-county compilations prepared in many locales either for or by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA). Even in the absence of definitive information, there is the almost certain knowledge that all large and growing communities in our country have substantial percentages of substandard housing. This phenomenon is a direct and natural consequence of the persistent movement of people into these areas in search of a better life than their former largely rural climes afforded. This aspiration of a better life includes both job opportunity and housing as its greatest priorities.

Many other more slowly developing communities do not have housing available that is consistent with the current and projected levels of industrial employment. This is particularly true when considering whether or not the cost of available and potentially available housing is commensurate with prevailing wages. Indeed, the absence of suitable housing, even the prospect of it, stands in the way of further industrial development for many smaller and comparatively isolated communities throughout our country that in practical fact offer the better opportunity for accommodating the population pressure of the future than the crowded central cities to which our unskilled and undereducated persons have fled.

Community Acceptance. Local communities planning efforts are often caught in a crossfire of interests where housing development is concerned. Predominant at the outset are the altruistic motives from which much planning begins. However, subsequent circumstances often dictate that capital formation in the private sector be served over human resources development in the social sector. It must be noted that communities generally do not have housing goals in their master plans; at least the community goals for housing are never as clearly stated as the capital budgeting plans for streets, schools, hospitals, parks, and other public facilities despite the fact that new and improved housing should be the precursor of all these community improvements. Small wonder, then, that the real needs for housing in the community do not have a broad base of public support whenever the issue is joined.

The key to this lack of forward thinking with respect to housing, in the view of the sociologist, is the need for a basic attitude change on the part of the citizenry at large. One worthwhile program directed to communities would be to legitimize the scope of the housing needs.

The survey information referred to above would support this effort. This program should have a powerful voice from the educational sector whenever an institution moves more aggressively in this direction and should enlist the support of the local power structure, including the media, industry, banking, real estate, and public officials. The community should realize that better housing is an integral part of economic growth. Indeed, the availability of sound housing at attractive rentals and purchase prices often represents the initial ingredient around which industry frames its relocation and on-site expansion plans.

Industrial Acceptance. The question might be posed, why not a federal, state, and local program with respect to housing comparable to the recent massive assault by industry concerning hard core unemployment, under the acronym JOBS, as headed by Mr. Henry Ford II with the full support of the Johnson administration? Hopefully, Mr. Romney's background might lead him, and therefore HUD, to the same conclusion in the course of the Nixon administration. The logic of this decision and follow-up implementation seems all the more logical while the nation ponders the deterioration of its cities and the plight of its urban citizens who are soon to number three-fourths, of the population. The poor, the elderly, and all those on fixed, limited incomes share this plight. More direct action with respect to housing would reduce the need for increased social security benefits, medical benefits, welfare payments, student assistance, etc.

At the local level, the successful industrialist who equates available housing with available labor potentials can overcome all of this other innate reservations concerning public involvement in the procurement of housing for those whose incomes are limited by one circumstance or another. If the support of industry can be enlisted, even if limited to the instance of showcase examples, then direction and incentives become manifest at the highest level of decision making in other communities to follow the example that has been set forth by a few.

State Orientation. It is interesting to observe that the several recent administrations of state government in the midwest have concentrated upon "industrial and economic development" with significant success. The transition in thinking and emphasis to housing as the ultimate underpinning of the potential for industrial development is not difficult to make. Indeed, many communities are presently stymied by housing limitations where industrial development is concerned. The submarginal housing presently available to minority groups, not prevalent but persistent throughout the area, represents a further deterrent to the continued industrial expansion of the region whether from the point of view of location with respect to jobs or as the environmental base from which a productive employee sets forth on his daily routine.

Institutional Orientation. The latent state of readiness with respect to recognizing housing as essential to available labor, and in turn, as essential to industrial development, carries onto educational institutions where administrations have been characterized by their focus upon agricultural and mechanical problems in the tradition of their land-grant founding. Current administrations in these selfsame institutions are indicative of stronger ties to the land, the problems of local communities, and the development of the human resource to the fullest extent of its capabilities.

## Future Directions

Advisory Committee. Institutional operations and programs with respect to low cost housing very well might benefit from further identity and direction from one or more advisory committees conceived and staffed according to areas of interest and responsibility. It might be argued in "chicken and egg" fashion that there should be more of a visible program upon which "advice and consent" are sought before any such external committees are formed. If and when advisory committees are created they should include as a minimum strategical consideration such establishment interests as an architect, banker, builder, developer, industrialist, public housing official, mayor, and state and federal agency officials, with an appropriate counterbalancing membership serving occupant interests in such examples as community organizations, legal and counseling services, key social welfare person, social psychologists, social critics, etc.

An attractive alternative to the suggestion of a single advisory committee would be a number of technical panels in the pattern of the Rural Area Development activity that has been common in community development circles these past several years. Such panels would have a broad and continuously evolving representation with each panel being able to focus upon a particular regional area or a particular technical aspect of the overall housing problem.

Piggyback Operations. There should be opportunities for educational institution activities related to the need for greater and more broadly available housing development to be made a part of the "growing edge" of present programs. For example, there are current subcontract operations between the Department of Engineering in our University Extension and the State of Wisconsin, Local Affairs Department (LAD), with respect to Title VII funds available from HUD. These programs are largely concerned with urban planning, but are cited here as an example of a program that can be examined on a year-to-year basis for opportunities to expand the services into activities more immediately related to the tangible problems associated with public housing. In addition, there should be continued effort to serve housing needs in the best possible manner off the base of existing programs now showing up here and there among educational institutions although not now enjoying the benefits of federal, state, or foundation support.

Area Contacts. Meanwhile, educational institution contracts should be expanded to include a maximum of dialogue with the three large interest groups where housing is concerned: 1) governmental; as represented by federal and state officials, mayors, housing commissions, redevelopment authorities, planning bodies, etc.; 2) private sector interests; as represented by developers, architects, bankers, contractors, land owners, etc.; and 3) user interests; as represented by the potential consumer, his community action groups and private, nonprofit sponsoring agencies.

Extramural Support. In short, the time would appear to be at hand for a proposal to be drafted for federal and foundation funds to support a comprehensive commitment by major public institutions to the political, social and physical problems of providing housing suitable for all of those constituent parts of the general population not now satisfactorily accommodated. Each institution, each state and each region can build its own rationale for such support. Plus factors to be cited in favor

of Wisconsin, for example, as the locale and institutional base for such effort include:

1. Wisconsin's traditional lead role in the nation where social action programs are concerned.
2. The relatively heavy proportion of Wisconsin Counties that have been determined to have moderate to severe incidences of rural poverty.
3. The several categories of disadvantaged in Wisconsin, including the indigenous Indians, the comparatively recently migrated Negroes, present-day migrant workers, recent Latin-American migrants, vestigial residents of the now-depleted north, members of the ever-increasing number of no longer economically viable farms, and the low-to-moderate incomes for semi-skilled factory personnel from largely rural families and upbringing now engaged in assembly and light manufacturing operations in many outlying communities.
4. The most unified and comprehensive university extension service in the country.
5. The newly reorganized state government having virtual cabinet counterparts of the federal departments dealing with internal affairs.
6. The good and growing cooperation between University Extension and state agencies in such areas of common concern.

#### Summary

The time would appear to be at hand for each of us, whether representing institutions, private or public agencies, or private interests at large in both the spirit of free enterprise and the spirit of human resource development to rally around the interest and potential generated

by this meeting. I will simply close by posing a series of abstract questions that leave all of us with an unfinished job before us whatever our affiliation and whatever our motivation following these two days of meetings.

1. How to overcome the adverse reaction at local levels to further involvement in federal programs?
2. To what extent is the role of the local housing official analogous to that of the county agricultural specialist some decades ago?
3. How much time is needed for general acceptance of the role and responsibility of the former?
4. What is the true function of the local housing official?
5. How may the local housing official be helped in his job?
6. How long will it be before the current student protest against the relevance of the academic institution be manifested in terms of the general citizen protesting against the relevance of the Extension institution? Indeed, has not the unrest in the cities -- which preceded the campus revolt -- by two or more years -- been such a manifestation?
7. What is there to replace the city as a place to live just as the city has replaced the rural area? Suburbia? Marina Towers? John Hancock? New Towns? Habitat? ?????

Time is running out. Halley's comet, a once-in-a-lifetime event, is soon due. Even the new century will arrive on an ordinary two-day weekend. Our task is monumental; let us all go now and make a beginning toward meeting the low-cost housing needs of this country, much of which is a logical corollary to essential programs of urban renewal and development.