

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE:
INSTITUTIONS AND USERS

Structuring Low-Income Housing Projects in Developing Countries

Subject 4.236J/11.463J 3-0-9 H Seminar/Lecture Format
Fall 2008

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Monday and Wednesday, 11:00 - 12:30 p.m., Room 1-371
Class size limited

SUPPORTED BY SIGUS

This course explores the divergent motivations and resultant dynamics among international funders, national ministries, local authorities, and project benefactors in housing project development. Issues of development are tested against actual projects in a comparative format.

The course is intended as an introduction and understanding of current issues in Third World housing policies and projects, and particularly for those interested in a practical understanding of how projects are prepared by development agencies.

The course prepares students to participate in development projects, and stresses hands-on, 'real-life' issues that challenge professionals.

Description: Tensions and contradictions between the theories of developing projects for the low income are compared to the reality of compromise necessitated by real project demands, a key issue particularly when projects are supported by the international donor community. The underlying belief is that theory-building cannot be divorced from practice: both must be complementary for effective programs. Focus is at the project scale, with ongoing or planned projects as prime references. Case examples will provide a comparative basis for understanding the preparation and implementation of housing projects. Projects will be explored within the changing world of development practice and shifts among key actors.

Topics covered: An overview of the full range of project issues are explored, from inception to post-project issues: Project goals, features (implicit and explicit goals, scope, rationale, physical vs non-physical); organization (structure, tasks, staffing); affordability (determination, rationale, willingness to pay); cost recovery (items covered, subsidies, terms, equity); loans (terms, collection/defaults); user issues (selection, advertisement, allocation); land (location, competition, speculation, overflow); monitoring (goals, feedback, mechanisms); and post-project concerns (turnover, resale, long-term support, termination).

Learning objectives: Students should leave with:

- A basic understanding and background on Third World housing issues, particularly 'site and services' and upgrading projects, and an understanding of the context in which projects are prepared.
- Awareness of how to prepare project proposals following accepted customary practice, particularly the logical project framework approach.
- Identification of issues and dilemmas among the various actors when implementing projects. Awareness of the varied perspectives and motivations of the lender, government, local agencies, and user.
- Exploration of tradeoffs and alternatives in project practice.

Format: The class will be divided into groups, with each group championing one project during the term. Each week will explore a theme: the first session will outline the underlying theory, basic considerations and tradeoffs. The second session will be devoted to actual practice as seen through the case examples, with each group reviewing their projects according to the previous discussions with a summary presentation to the class. Guest faculty will present project related topics throughout the course.

Assignments: Brief weekly summaries are required by each team. These summaries will be combined at the end of the term, giving an overview of the projects reviewed. A closing 'debate' by the teams will offer the opportunity to summarize and reflect on their chosen project. Individually at the end of the term, a project proposal will be required following the 'logical project framework'. Grading is based on class participation, weekly team presentations, final individual paper, and the final team debate. Readings will be handed out in class relating to the topics being discussed.

Three books will serve as key background readings in understanding the context:

- 'The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can be Done About It'. Paul Collier, Oxford University Press, 2007; 'The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good'. William Easterly. The Penguin Press, 2006; 'The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time'. Jeffrey D. Sachs. Penguin Books, 2005.

