



The Right to Place



From rural to urban
and north to south,
global systems of land
distribution and housing
allocation are at a
crossroads.

With agrarian collapse driving the urban slum explosion in Africa, Asia, and Latin America at the same time as real estate markets are crashing across North America and Europe, the allocation of location itself is in question on a global scale. The foreclosed-upon masses in the United States are demanding restitution. The jury is still out, both literally and figuratively, on how to apportion blame between predatory lenders, reckless borrowers, and an entire financial system built on a fundamentally flawed foundation. In the global south, especially in Latin America, the legacies of quasi-feudal land distribution structures from the past two centuries are increasingly subject to deep public scrutiny, with major land tenure and distribution overhauls on the horizon. More than 2 billion people worldwide live in homes without security of tenure, and as this group is joined by dislocated middle class households in the global north, demands for the Right to Place may trigger a global wave of social movements focused on land reform.

—David Evan Harris

critical balances



DISINTEGRATION
integration

Experiments with alternative land tenure systems—including alternatives to mortgages—provide options for diverse populations, from climate refugees to aging baby boomers.



EXPOSURE
accountability

Patterns of land ownership and land settlement come under increasing scrutiny as Right to Place movements grow.



SLOW
fast

“Slow money” investments in small local farms change the current pattern of rural development in post-industrial economies away from large suburbs and large corporate farms.

land: the right to place

LAND REFORM ON THE TABLE: THE LATIN AMERICAN TEMPLATE

Latin America has long held the ignominious distinction of being the world's most unequal region—20% of the wealthiest hold 56.9% of resources. *Via Campesina*, an international network operating in concert with the Brazilian Landless Worker's Movement and dozens of parallel campaigns in other countries, has gained the support of millions of landless farmers around the world in support of their call for land reform and the rights of peasant farmers.

The governing parties in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Brazil are currently considering dramatic concessions to these social movements. This trend is due, in large part, to the successful election of political parties and factions whose leaders hail from civil society movements themselves, or who gained popularity through their close associations with popular movements. The proposed land reforms will likely set a maximum amount of land that any individual can own, and in some cases will split up large corporate holdings. Government payments to current landowners at market-driven rates will be justified based on the need to retain confidence in land markets.

In Bolivia, land reform proposals come on the heels of a major restructuring of the mining sector, which, while dramatically increasing taxation and regulation, fell short of the full nationalization that some wanted. In Brazil, the recent win for a third presidential term for the Worker's Party has demonstrated the party's ability to generate stable economic growth while enacting one of the broadest redistributions of wealth in history through conditional cash transfers to the poor.

Such major reforms in other sectors demonstrate the tone that successful land reforms in the next decade are likely to take—non-violent, non-revolutionary, and rooted in strong relations between states and civil society. A new generation of activists is cultivating the political know-how and support to win elections and work on change from within the government as well as outside it.

“ We have to make a renewed effort to preserve farmland for what I'll call the next million new organic farmers. We're losing about a million acres a year to development. There may be as many as a million new organic farmers that are ready to go out on the land, but land has been priced out of the value of it as food production land. There needs to be a massive shift of consciousness about the importance of reserving this land and getting the next generation of farmers on it. It was a radical idea in the early 20th century to preserve wilderness, but now we have to have the same consciousness about farmland. ”

Woody Tasch
Author, *Slow Money*



“ One of the key strategies will be to literally formalize the usage of power to people in the *favelas*. When you actually can generate a list to bill, that means you have a formal address. ”

Pablo Handl
Founder, Saõ Pablo Hub



FROM SQUATTING TO SETTLING: SOCIAL INCLUSION OF URBAN MIGRANTS

Across the global south, the 21st century urbanization trend is steaming ahead. Upon arrival in poor urban settlements, migrants face high unemployment, along with ubiquitous crime, corruption, and instability. These unsettled settlements are ground zero for the creation of new social movements.

By 2020, 889 million people worldwide are expected to live in slums. In the developing world, 5 million people are added to cities every month, according to UN Habitat estimates. This urban expansion has moved far too quickly in much of the global south for urban infrastructure to keep up. Informal housing settlements have open sewer lines, permit-free buildings, and no semblance of resilience against seismic or other natural disasters.

From the *favelas* of São Paulo to the slums of Kibera, Soweto, or Dharavi, increasingly influential mass citizens' movements are pushing to change reality in the slums and be included in formal society. These movements seek to secure land title to their homes, access to city services like gas and electricity, maintained roads, as well as health care and education. The Movement of Roofless Workers (MTST) in Brazil is a clear example of this organized desire on the part of squatters' groups to take matters into their own hands by laying claim to entire abandoned buildings in brazen grassroots eminent domain claims. While these movements will make strong gains in some parts of the world, they will struggle to make any progress at all in others due to corruption, drug gangs, oppression of women, and unresponsive political leaders.

“It's important that, in our communities, we begin to develop educational platforms that focus on financial literacy, that not only help users understand the value of debt and the importance of financial stability but that also ensure we have participants in our economy that will build vibrancy in our national economy.”



Taylor Stuckert
Co-Director, Energize
Clinton County

FROM SUB-SAHARAN TO SUBPRIME: SEEING THE SOUTH IN THE NORTH

Now consider these challenges facing the global south in the context of the historical model for development: the United States. The country has slipped into one of its largest housing, employment, and credit crises in history. Similar conditions prevail in other western, industrialized nations, creating the conditions for the emergence of alternatives. And some of these alternatives may, in fact, come from the global south. The institution of the mortgage (“grip of death” in its original French) has proved difficult to deploy in southern business climates where currencies are constantly shifting in value and buyers are more likely to default on loans. In Brazil, mortgages generally last no longer than 2-4 years. At the same time, public housing in parts of Europe and East Asia offer the poor and even middle classes access to excellent housing at subsidized rates.

The coming decade could see a fundamental questioning of the very notion of the mortgage and the duties of the state *vis-à-vis* the provision of shelter across the global north and south. The United Nations Human Rights Council reviewed the situation in the United States in 2010, as part of its Universal Periodic Review process. The homelessness problem and the insecurity of housing in general came under deep scrutiny—53% of Americans report being worried about having the money to make their monthly housing payments, and HUD assistance programs often have waiting lists that run for many years before any help is provided.

While no singular new perspective on reforming the housing tenure process in the United States has emerged, it is clear that the lending practices that led to the millions of foreclosures in the past few years will have a lasting impact on Americans for much of the coming decade. The American right to place has been shaken in this crisis, as the resiliency of the current housing system and the families that depend on it were shown to be weaker than anyone understood. Perhaps more importantly, as this crisis unfolds, the whole world continues to watch. At this intersection of developed and developing markets, the processes for determining the future of global land and housing tenure are certain to be at the foreground in the coming decade.



itaniara.tl/eng/

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is funding a five-year project to develop a “sustainable and transparent” system of property rights in East Timor. This

major investment of \$10 million is designed to help the Timorese people, though an obvious subtext is to provide U.S. companies doing business in East Timor with a stronger sense of security that the properties they develop will be able to be retained and sold without interference from private or government forces. This type of program is emblematic of how land tenure law transparency can potentially serve the interests of individuals, businesses, and governments.



viacampesina.org

Via Campesina is a growing movement of movements—an international coalition made up of small farmer organizations from 69 countries around the world—with a headquarters

that shifts from continent to continent every half decade. With their own trilingual website, numerous web videos, and a strong Facebook presence, they lobby continuously at global, national, and local scales, while linking grassroots struggles through their sense of global solidarity. Their principle aim continues to be agrarian reform, defined as a policy shift where “agricultural land is distributed to landless and small scale farmers; governments support agroecological and sustainable peasant agriculture models; governments protect national and local markets from international commodity and financial markets, and build national and local buffer stocks of food.”



rioonwatch.org

A group of community journalists in Rio de Janeiro has launched a new web campaign—RioOnWatch.org—to monitor the anticipated forced evictions of thousands of city residents, along with

other major changes in preparation for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics to be held in Rio. RioOnWatch.org is already reporting from the perspective of *favela* residents on all these transitions, with videos, photos, and reporting in both English and Portuguese.



ussf2010.org

More than 20,000 activists converged on Detroit in June 2010 for the United States Social Forum, where housing rights and land played a particularly prominent role. Workshops included:

- Fighting for a Moratorium on Foreclosures, Evictions, and Utility Shut-offs
- Sledgehammer Visions ... Direct Action Solutions to the Housing Crisis
- Equitable and Inclusive: Planning Strategies for a New City

the quick list

- › *Development As Freedom*, Amartya Sen, Norwell, MA: Anchor Press, 2000
- › *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro*, Janice Perlman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. See also: The Megacities Project, www.megacitiesproject.org
- › *Planet of Slums: The Struggle for the City*, Mike Davis. New York: Verso, 2006
- › *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010
- › *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil*, Wendy Wolford. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010