

## **Torre de David as an example of spontaneous city and erratic policies**

Yaneira Wilson

yaneiraw@gmail.com

The Global Report on Human Settlements by UN-Habitat says, *“slums and urban poverty are not just a manifestation of a population explosion and demographic change, or even of the vast impersonal forces of globalization. Slums must be seen as the result of a failure of housing policies, laws and delivery systems, as well as of national and urban policies”*. Torre de David is an example of an allowed permission, outside of legality. There is an inconsistency in the decision making process of the government, in relation to the un-favored society. “Vertical city” and “Socialist city” are new concepts in Latin American urban development.

David Brillembourg, president of the financial group Confinanzas, starts building an impotent skyscraper complex in the downtown area of Caracas in 1990. Of forty-five stories high, glass covered facade, prime location in the downtown area of Caracas, it is one of the most outstanding building complexes of the Venezuelan capital and the third tallest building in the country. After Brillembourg died in 1993 the construction is paralyzed and the bank funding the project enters a financial crisis. The building becomes the Venezuelan State's, in 1994. In 2007, 200 families who were left homeless after the natural disasters of rains and storms invaded the tower.

A sudden new validation of this housing development became a subject of interest for various medias. In 2012, the architectural and town-planning agency “Urban Think-Tank”, won the Golden Lion prize of architecture for their "Torre David/Gran Horizonte" project, a "favela vertical" in Caracas, a project that showed self-management and adaptation of the space of those families alone. The community transformed the building into a vertical city; a city within a city with corner shops on each floor and other types of informal businesses. In 2013, Homeland, the North American TV Series, took Torre de David to develop a story charged of violence, and to show the unusual nature of this new type of housing environment.

The authority ignored the population inside Torre de David for seven years until two years ago, shortly after this sudden validation from the international media, the government decided to move the inhabitants to outside of the tower. This was part of a national operation called *“Misión Vivienda”, “Ciudad Socialista”*.

Though the building was not safe because it wasn't finished at the moment of the occupation, the families tried to create a comfortable space to live in; a new habitat legitimized by them and for them. The emptied structure of Torre de David allowed the families to create the finest appropriation of the space which attended to the their own necessities. Now these families have been moved to an operation of massive housing relocation in unit habitations at 72 km from the center of Caracas. In 2015 the movement of 72 % of the families was completed, 300 families stayed in the tower.

Hypotheses and uncertainty surround the future of the Tower. A Chinese bank has shown interest in the purchase and renovation of the Tower, to be repurposed for its original use. In 2014 it was announced three options were being considered by the national government: demolishing it, repurposing it to

become a financial and apartment complex, or the opening of the floor for a debate. A year later it was indicated that the infrastructure of the tower would serve to install the National Bolivarian Guard, the Fire Fighter squad of the Capital District, and the workers of the Civil Protection wing to attend the civil body. Most recently, on May of this year, it was announced that the spaces would be adapted to install a cultural center after moving out the last group of inhabitants of the Tower Confinanzas, or perhaps a demolition of the building.

Since 2012, there has been a boom in the media and an international fascination with the notion of “vertical city”: the development of an informal spontaneous occupation as a model of self-management and of transgression in the so-called formal city in a tower form. However, there hasn't been as much of a fascination with the socialist city.

The study *“Ideología y ciudad en el Socialismo del siglo XXI”* by Oscar Olindo, former president of CONAVI, explains these socialist cities are created isolated from any urban planning. They are also disconnected from the city's dynamic. Therefore they are an insufficient solution, which generates big problems in the development of the city in the future. The housing programs developed in Venezuela seem to be copying the models of classic construction of known communist cities.

Because the people who inhabited the Torre David have been moved to a new model of socialist city, I wish to compare both models to understand the people's capability for adaptation, and try to understand the governmental politics from which these types of urban solutions and decisions come from.

© by the author(s)

Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The transgressive city: Comparative perspectives on governance and the possibilities of everyday life in the emerging global city” Mexico City, 21-23 July 2016. <http://rc21-mexico16.colmex.mx/index.php>