INTERVIEW OF JOHN F.C.TURNER  
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BY ROBERTO CHAVEZ with JULIE VILORIA & MELANIE ZIPPERER  
Audited by Rudolf V. Van Puymbroeck, Legal Department, and Assistant

MR. CHAVEZ: This is Roberto Chavez, and it is Monday, September 11, in Washington, D.C., and we're here to interview John F.C. Turner, whom we'll introduce in a minute, and with me is Julie Viloria from our Thematic Group on Services to the Urban Poor and Melanie Zipperer, who is a writer and an expert on content and packaging and presenting. And we have our colleagues from the legal department whom you've met and who are interested in observing how we do these tacit knowledge downloads. So the rules of the game are: please feel free to jump in and add or ask questions. This is not very formal.

MR. CHAVEZ: So John, we have just heard a fascinating and very meaningful presentation by you and a discussion at the brown bag lunch we just had, which draw from a lot of your experience and that of others some very broad principles. We'll get to that a little later, but I wanted to start out by asking you to tell us about how you got started. You mentioned in the presentation today that you came to Peru; I presume you were an architect at the time in the fifties was it or sixties? Tell us a little about it.

MR. TURNER: I qualified at the Architectural Association in London in 1954 and left for Peru in 1957, after the usual jobs as an assistant and various small ones on my own account. The original reason for going to Peru goes back to an introduction to Patrick Geddes' work, especially to what he did in India during the First World War.

MR. CHAVEZ: Perhaps if you could just say a paragraph about Geddes for our readers.

MR. TURNER: Patrick Geddes was a pupil of Thomas Huxley who, in turn, was a pupil of Darwin's, so Geddes was studying botany and biology. When he was doing fieldwork in Mexico, he caught a disease that affected his eyesight; as he could no longer work with microscopes, Geddes turned his attention to cities. His most famous book, The Evolution of Cities, which was published in 1915, is a starting point for the holistic view of cities as growing entities. By accident, I came across one of his manuscripts. That was in 1948, when I was a student at the AA. To cut a long story short, I was fascinated by his famous diagrams. He had used his approach to life, his biological understanding, and applied it to cities. That meant he looked at it in terms of place, activity and people, paralleling the way organisms function in their environment, making it and being made by it—an essentially ecological understanding. Geddes' developed his diagrams, an early general systems model, when he was recovering from temporary blindness in Mexico in the 1870s.

MR. CHAVEZ: Right.

MR. TURNER: That was 130 years ago, very advanced thinking which we are still struggling to catch up with!

MR. CHAVEZ: But this is very relevant.
MR. TURNER: My first publication, worked out with the help of Bruce Martin’s familiarity with Chinese culture, was written together with Paffard Keating-Clay, another fellow student at the AA. It was an interpretation of Geddes’ diagrams published as an appendix to the second edition of Cities in Evolution in 1949. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, an influential teacher of mine, was the editor. It was a long time before I contributed to any other publication! That article led directly to my move to Peru. At a CIAM meeting—of the Congrès Internationales des Architectes Modernes—in Venice in 1950, I think it was, I met Eduardo Neira, an architect-planner from Peru. He astonished me by saying that he had translated the appendix on Geddes’ diagrams for his students at the University in Lima! And that led to an invitation to work with him in Peru where I went with my first wife and small son six years later.

MR. CHAVEZ: Fascinating.

MR. TURNER: Another influence was William Morris, one of the Victorian pre-raphaelite instigators or generators of the arts and crafts movement of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries in the UK. My grandfather worked with Morris as a young man, and May Morris, his eldest daughter, is my mother's godmother. So I have quite a strong connection with the hands-on, arts and crafts world—a bottom-up orientation to the importance of regenerating and maintaining control over production at the local level, the vernacular roots of genuine culture.

MR. CHAVEZ: Yes.

MR. TURNER: The next time I saw Eduardo was in England while he was studying for a planning degree at Liverpool University. He was enthusiastic about Acción Popular, the new political party he and his friends had set up in Peru with architect Fernando Belaúnde Terry as the leader. They were all optimistic about winning the 1956 Presidential election.

MR. TURNER: Eduardo, together with his cousin, the anthropologist José Matos Mar and, I suppose, many of the others, understood ‘popular’ or community action in the way that Morris would have understood it—as a support for genuine, community-based social action. Later, it turned out, Fernando did not understand it that way at all.

MR. CHAVEZ: That's true.

MR. TURNER: Nice chap but a terrible president. Rather fortunately in retrospect, he lost. Prado, a very ordinary conservative politician and banker turned out to be a more practical, pragmatic president under whom it was probably much easier to work than it would have been under Belaúnde. The opportunity to do some practical work came with a major earthquake in Arequipa, not long after I was settled in Peru.

MR. CHAVEZ: But it did do a good deal of damage.

MR. TURNER: Yes, it destroyed or damaged some 10,000 houses in the region; rural areas suffered most—but it was daytime and casualties were low. It was on January 15, 1958—a date I am unlikely to forget! I was nearly a casualty myself as I was on the loo at the time.

[Laughter.]
But I couldn’t move for the violent shaking! I was terrified expecting the stone roof was going to fall on me as there was so much movement and the construction above my head was made out of old railway lines with stone blocks in between!

MR. CHAVEZ: But you're in a good position to answer the question that was raised at the brown bag meeting today. How does this apply to earthquake and disaster reconstruction?

MR. TURNER: Fortunately, I haven't experienced any other earthquakes, but I've observed quite a few of the consequences. From what I have seen for myself, I have the same view as my more knowledgeable friends Ian Davis, of Oxford, UK, and Andrew Maskrey now of Lima and Chepi his partner. The single most important thing is that the victims have the opportunity to do all they are able to do themselves—by far the best way of overcoming personal trauma and almost always the quickest way of rebuilding small structures—anyway when the tools and materials are to hand. One of the saddest sights I have ever seen are of supposedly temporary camp sites full of people able and desperately wanting to rebuild but being prevented from doing so by authorities determined to impose their own unsuitable plans which, of course, take years to prepare and for which funds and managerial capacity are generally inadequate.

In fact I was largely responsible for a post-earthquake project in Arequipa along what proved to be the right lines: a simple self-build rehousing project. Money poured in to help the earthquake victims, mainly from abroad. In those days, there weren't so many disasters as there are now, or they're not so widely publicised.

MR. CHAVEZ: And Arequipa at the time was the second largest city of Peru.

MR. TURNER: Yes, but about a tenth of the size of Lima, at that time it had a population of about 100,000. It was a good manageable size with a beautiful colonial city centre. I had been working there for some months, sent by the then Peruvian ministry of public works as an assistant to the director of the Oficina de Asistencia Técnica a las Urbanizaciones Populares de Arequipa, OATA, which had been set up by Eduardo Neira in 1955. Now, that is remarkable, right? I don't know of any national government that had taken official action to assist the development of squatter settlements before the sixties, or even later. I don't say that this action of Eduardo’s reflected the majority view in the administration; far from it. So there I was, in a pioneering situation, still learning to speak Spanish. By the time the earthquake hit, I had been asked to take over from the interim director who had replaced the first, dismissed for incompetence.

MR. CHAVEZ: I see. Were the aerial photographs you showed us today taken before or after the earthquake?

MR. TURNER: Soon afterwards.

MR. CHAVEZ: The chart you made in 1959 showing the areas being built up as Urbanizaciones Populares, by the people themselves—they actually covered a larger area than that of the city itself?

MR. TURNER: Yes, over a thousand hectares while the legally incorporated city area was less than a thousand.
MR. CHAVEZ: Were Neira and his team aware of this as well? Did they really know what was going on?

MR. TURNER: Yes, they were very well informed. Eduardo’s cousin, José Matos Mar, an anthropologist and John P. Cole, a British geographer who had left Peru before I arrived, had carried out excellent surveys of the barriadas—the urban squatter settlements—in Peru for a government report published in 1956. So many leading professionals were quite aware.

MR. CHAVEZ: What did they have in common? Were they from a school? Were they associated with the Acción Popular party?

MR. TURNER: I don’t know about their schools but Acción Popular, which I mentioned before, was a liberal, left leaning party with what we would now call a ‘third sector’ bias. Very remarkable, really, some 30 years ahead of the rest of the world.

As I was saying, as a result of the earthquakes, money was available for post-earthquake reconstruction. The city mayor was a bright young man, and he listened very carefully, not so much to what I was saying but to my friend and colleague Hernán Bedoya Forga, director of the local planning office. We knew the Mayor wanted to spend some of the money on housing the earthquake victims—not a good idea as so few would be helped. So we suggested a self-build scheme for those who lost their inner-city homes but who had vacant plots in the Urbanizaciones Populares. At least, we could double the number that way.

The Mayor said okay, go ahead. And that was my first really useful experience of working at the grass roots. Once we got the project going, we soon realised that our professional assumptions of design, construction and managerial superiority were exaggerated, to say the least. We soon learned that we needed our supposed clients’ own knowledge and the skills of local builders—and how badly our own bright ideas ignored their realities.

[Laughter]

MR. CHAVEZ: But you also found that there was some services and support that professionals could provide.

MR. TURNER: Oh, yes—but we burdened ourselves with an unnecessary amount of administrative and overhead work, and so if you take the overhead work into consideration, which was voluntary and not paid, it wouldn't have been so economically successful as it seemed to be.

MS. VILORIA: Just to expand a little on that, how do you define the relationships with these people? Are they contractual or informal relationships just bound by a common goal?

MR. TURNER: Oh, they're pretty formal. First of all, in order to meet the requirements, naturally, of the money you're spending. So it had to be fairly rigidly allocated to people who really were able to use it and were genuine victims of the earthquake. The participants also took their responsibilities seriously—progress of the work depended on fairly well disciplined contributions of their labour—and at the regular evening meetings with each group.
MR. CHAVEZ: But this is the usual sort of thing today, but this was the first time for these people.

MR. TURNER: Well, I wouldn't say so. Faenas, days of communal work for the community’s benefit is or was traditional and common at that time. The great majority were first and second generation migrants from rural areas where mutual help with house building, roofing especially, was the norm. Relationships were honest. There was no corruption that I was aware of. Agreements were open and verbal and, although there was probably more resistance to the over-organisation my associates and I proposed, voiced no strong objection. But we did talk them into the ‘aided and mutual self-help’ model from Puerto Rican manual that Eduardo had given me. All seven groups of the 140 participants accepted the idea that it would be quicker if they worked in groups to schedule. When it came to our designs for the houses, however, they said little. We come to know better, on both counts, as the project progressed.

Changes came rapidly—the first approach we had really was inappropriate and as we got working and talking together. So gradually, the relationship changed from being a passive one, where the participants said little and followed our instructions, to working things out together—with critically important help from the local builder we had contracted as an overseer, buyer and distributor of building materials.

MR. CHAVEZ: Right.

MR. TURNER: In hindsight we could have done a great deal more with far less effort by allocating tranches of cash by stage: once you have your foundations in, you can get the next tranche for the walls and so until the work is complete. How you get your materials and how you organise the work is your business. A few years later that's just what Luis Marcial and I did in Lima, very successfully.

Did you ever know Luis Marcial? We were working together with INVI, the Instituto Nacional de Vivienda, a political creation designed to counteract the rather better organised and more professional Corporación Nacional de la Vivienda over which the politicians had little control. Some of the best examples that I was showing on the slides, the early sites and services and sites without services programmes, were planned and supervised by Ricardo Valega of the Corporacion Nacional. Ricardo and his brother Manuel, who was Director of the Corporación, were really important innovators and pioneers. Of course, it was a minority effort. I doubt if the board as a whole fully approved.

MR. CHAVEZ: Let me interrupt you here for a minute, John. Do you know of any other countries where they were already experimenting with these types of things besides Peru at the time in the fifties?

MR. TURNER: Well, some projects along sites-and-services and assisted self-build lines were carried out in colonial Africa in the nineteen thirties. But I don't have more than second-hand references. Apart from the few somewhat paternalistic aided self-help housing projects in the USA during the New Deal era, and a larger programme under Tugwell in Puerto Rico in the forties, I know of no other comparable innovations until the sixties and seventies.
MR. CHAVEZ: But the Peruvian model that then evolved into SINAMOS for the Pueblos Jóvenes, during the Velasco Alvarado regime, that seems to have come, well, in part from yourself, through Eduardo Neira, but where were its roots as far as you know?

MR. TURNER: I believe the Velasco regime’s constructive policies toward the barriadas, under which they were renamed ‘pueblos jóvenes’, are due in large part to the courses on development at the Escuela Militar given by people like Neira and Matos Mar at the invitation of the then young colonels, the ‘young turks’ of the 1950s. It would have been in General Odría’s administration during which the dictator himself, impatient with the housing professionals’ insistence on building to high modern standards the vast majority could not afford, actually supported the take over of San Martín de Porres—that huge barriada, or pueblo jóven I showed on one of the aerial photos of Lima. An interesting character, Odría, promoted from the ranks, I believe, and from a lower or lower-middle class background, his main constituency.

MR. CHAVEZ: Being military, they really went through their studies very systematically.

MR. TURNER: Oh, yes, and they really took the idea of social as well as economic development on board. They got a good education in the social realities of the country. Those I came across, especially the senior officers in Arequipa, had an intelligent attitude, seeing army service as one of the few opportunities many young conscripts had to get some education. It may not be a politically correct thing to say, but the few contacts I had with the Peruvian Army—not the navy or the air force but the army—were quite a good bunch. Many of the senior officers had come through the ranks, unlike those from the Air Force and Navy—as in Chile.

MR. CHAVEZ: The élite.

MR. TURNER: The élite, yes, most of who are really intolerable, you know. But these guys weren't that bad. And so, it wasn't altogether surprising that they took development seriously. I remember the garrison commander in Arequipa was genuinely concerned about education of the young people and how the army could be used constructively. I had some respect for them. They weren't bad at all, and they did some very interesting things in 1968.

MR. CHAVEZ: Right. We had an interview just one week ago with Tony Pellegrini. He told us how the urban department in the Bank was created and how the first urban projects came about, and essentially, the link to your work is direct, is immediate. That's where the Bank got the idea that this is how we were going to start our urban development projects. So it's interesting to trace those roots back.

MS. VILORIA: And Tony admitted right away that Turner influenced the Bank’s early program.

MR. TURNER: Yes; but I get much too much publicity out of this, there are so many other people before me and behind what I am credited with. I think the key event leading to the Bank’s policy innovation was the Pittsburgh Seminar on urban development policies and planning in October, 1966. The paper on ‘uncontrolled urban settlements’ I prepared at the Harvard-MIT Joint Centre with Rolf Goetze’s help created quite a stir. It wouldn’t have been written if Ernest Weissman had not been at a meeting in Lima, back in 1958. Ensie Weissman
was the director of the U.N. Centre for Housing, Building and Planning the UN’s HQ in New York, Habitat Nairobi’s precursor. Somehow or other Weissman heard about the self-build project in Arequipa and came down to see it. He was enormously enthusiastic and supportive—to much so as it turned out. When he heard that the authorities were going to shut the office down instead of building on what we were doing, he spoke to President Prado about it—having gone over the head of those in central government, threatened by the publicity given to the self-build project, I was out on my ass in no time!

[Laughter.]

MR. CHAVEZ: So you lost your job.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: I should have mentioned the national press coverage of the self-build project. La Prensa gave it a centre-page spread in its Sunday Supplement. Naïvely, I did not realise that publicity coming from La Prensa instead of El Comercio, the conservative banker’s paper, would get up the administration’s noses. All I got out of it, at first, was a commission from Weissman to write up the project.

MR. CHAVEZ: On your experience in Arequipa?

MR. TURNER: Yes. Interestingly, Richard Harris, a professor at MacMaster University, who’s writing up the history of self-help housing projects, just recently asked me for a copy of that report. Looking through it after so many years, the diagnosis of Arequipa’s housing situation stands up well, although the project evaluation is amateurish. What is really interesting is the set of photographs and the commentaries.

The next significant development, it must have been in 1962, was an article in the British Sunday Times supplement magazine by then James Morris, now Jan Morris; a very fine writer who, nevertheless, wrote an appallingly misleading, bleeding heart view of the barriadas. It not only got up my nose but also those of the British ambassador, Sir Berkley Gage and his first secretary, George Hall. They called me and said, look, you've got to do something about this. Coincidentally, Monica Pidgeon, the editor of Architectural Design magazine, was about to visit Peru. After touring the Lima barriadas with her, an immensely impressed Monica said she must do a piece and asked me to be the guest editor. So, with Pat Crooke’s essential help in London, the special issue on Dwelling Resources in Latin America was published in August 1963. It was the first illustrated publication that presented what the majority of city builders in urbanising countries were doing in a positive light. It was picked up by Weissman, Wilson Garcés and company at the U.N. They interested George Movshon, the UNTV commissioner and, in 1964, “A Home of Their Own” was filmed, mainly in Lima. Alastair Cook contributed a commentary.

MS. ZIPPERER: What made this Peruvian experience special? Were there special conditions? Or do you think it would have been possible to repeat it in another region?

MR. TURNER: That's an important question, actually the last question at the brown-bag lunch meeting just now. It is important to put some geographic and historic factors on record: in the first place there was plenty of accessible vacant land of no commercial value surrounding all
Peruvian cities on the desert coast—in the 1950s and 60s. No longer where the cities have grown so much that empty land is too far, or too steep for low-income settlement. Next, in Peruvian law desert land can only be owned privately if it's cultivated. It belongs to the state that can lease it only for mining. In effect, empty desert land is the people’s commons. Opposition to the settlement of that technically illegal, unauthorised development of the land was politically counter-productive. It upset the planners and middle classes but politicians could make good use of the opportunities to build constituencies based on the great majority. Quite often there was a show of police force opposing initial settlement but, after a usually nominal battle with a few stones thrown and, perhaps, a little tear gas, the settlers would be left to get on with it, especially after a bad press and politician’s interventions—however, there have been a few martyrs. A third factor is widely shared with other newly urbanising societies—the majority can only dream of buying a house or of getting one from the state on affordable terms. The choice is to put up with appalling conditions in overcrowded slums or build your own.

MR. CHAVEZ: So those conditions made for a particularly favourable environment.

MR. TURNER: Yes, but the élite and the newspapers would have regarded this view as rubbish. In the late 1950s the barriadas weren’t even on the official planning maps. They weren't recognised. They didn't have any official identity. In the élite’s view the settlers didn't have any rights to settle in the cities—they were seen as interlopers which should be sent back to the countryside where they came from and belonged, or, at least, to populate and develop uninhabited rainforests! I discovered the truth of rumours I had heard that that was Fernando Belaúnde’s view as well. I wanted Belaúnde to make a little speech on film that could be tacked onto the end of the UNTV film—one that would praise the tremendous efforts of the barriada settlers and builders. Not one to miss an opportunity, Belaúnde agreed as I told him that the film celebrated the capacity of the Peruvian people.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: He did it very well; it was a very nice presentation with the suggested rhetoric on the capacities of the Peruvian people, for which he dressed up with his Presidential sash. But, when he saw the film, he was shocked to find that he was complimenting the barriada builders—law-breaking shanty-towners who should be resettled in the virgin forests! If it had been a couple hundred years earlier, my head would have been off at once. Belaúnde really did have the élitist view of the barriadas. It seems he really believed that the barriada builders wanted to go back to the country or populate the jungles. As you may know, in his second term as President, Belaúnde was responsible for spending millions on subsidised housing for the middle and upper middle classes.

MR. CHAVEZ: Right, right.

MR. TURNER: Then, not long after, we found ourselves running into each other, he lecturing at Harvard and I at MIT. Quite a few of his students cross-registered to my own course on housing in development!

[Laughter.]

MR. CHAVEZ: So you actually developed a relationship with him in the later years.
MR. TURNER: A distant but not unfriendly one.

[Laughter.]

MS. ZIPPERER: How many years had you been in Peru?

MR. TURNER: I'd been there seven years by then. For the last two years before I left in the Autumn of 1965, I was taken on by the British government’s Department of Technical Cooperation. For most of the time beforehand, I had been working as a Peruvian civil servant—with a gap during which I worked for a US corporation with anthropologist Eduardo Soler—on a rather futile effort to reduce an over-population problem on a large industrial sugar estate with a self-build housing scheme. Re-employed by the government in order to help get and spend Inter-American Development Bank funds for a national housing programme, my illegal status as a foreigner in the bureaucracy became more visible. Hence my change of employer but, with it, I lost whatever influence I had. I was no longer part of the team.

MR. CHAVEZ: Of the process.

MR. TURNER: Exactly. You know, although I had my first wife and child with me in Peru, we had a very marginal relationship with the British community. With the important exception of Bill Mangin, the US anthropologist, his late wife and other American friends involved with the Peace Corps, my work community was wholly Peruvian except for the times Pat Crooke and Hans Harms were working on their Peruvian government projects. Lots of other stories there! And so a lot of my last two years in Peru was taken up with research—most importantly a study of three barriadas with sociologist Marcia Koth de Paredes, the North American wife of my close friend Ernesto, a planner and, in recent years, a government minister of tourism. I owe most of what I have come to understand about housing and human settlement in general, as well as the Peruvian barriadas, to that disciplined work which I could never have done on my own.

MR. CHAVEZ: And that was the basis for your first book was it, originally?

MR. TURNER: Yes, of the seminal chapter of Freedom to Build in the first place: Housing as a Verb, published in 1972. Co-edited and co-authored with Robert Fichter, Freedom to Build was mainly about ‘dweller control of the housing process’, as the sub-title puts it. The only book I have authored on my own—always with help, of course—is Housing By People published in 1976, but that drew on Toamsz Sudra’s work in Mexico, although that in turn was based on the work Marcia and I did in Peru.

MS. ZIPPERER: Can you explain a little more, the concept of freedom? How much freedom for the community? How much—let's say, not control but regulation is needed to have a successful result?

MR. TURNER: A lot more thought and work has to be done before I could justify the answers I have in mind. The answer that my friends and I stated in our basic proposition, begs further questions. By saying that economic and socially successful outcomes in housing depends on people’s freedom to make key decisions begs the question of which decisions—and that was not fully answered, let alone how the freedom to make them could be created. Freedom was
defined as the freedom to make choices but within limits and those were implied rather than explained. Limits to housing action, which need to be properly regulated, must be those that allow people to make the choices that benefit them without cost to others. Freedom, in other words, to make use of one’s own knowledge and skills, to do what one is able and willing to do for oneself, family, neighbours, even life as a whole. Without sufficient freedom of that real kind, in some areas of life at least, one cannot be fulfilled as a person. This is the nub of the argument: personal and locally particular activities, like housing, are potential vehicles for growth, not just things we need. So the greatest evils are actions and tools that frustrate people’s abilities and will to do things in and for themselves and their own communities. You must be free to find your own way within limits that don't hurt other people or the environment, and are not counterproductive in some other way.

So I think the short answer to your key question, as you suggest Melanie, is really the nature of the law, the way in which the law is regulated and administered. Years ago, Illich scolded me for being unaware of the vital difference between liberating proscriptive and imprisoning prescriptive law: between being free to do what one will within proper limits and being told what to do. I am often surprised to find that I’m far from exceptional in having lived so long in ignorance.

I know there have been advances over the past few generations; we know enough about the nature of materials of construction to write performance standards for building design and construction—in other words, set the standards in terms of performance to make sure a building doesn’t collapse or that it doesn’t freeze, boil or blind its occupants. So long as I can prove it’s stability and performance the law can't stop me from building in my own way—in principle, at least.

But when it comes to the use—when it comes to place and people’s relationships—it's very much more complicated. We don't know enough to predict or what we do know hasn’t been adequately assembled. An awful lot of work has been done on behaviour and the way it affects people, but we don't really have the depth or precision of information; maybe we never will. However, I do believe enough is already known for drawing up proscriptive rules that generate self-ordering forms. If you've got the right rules right, you can leave most if not all the things that really matter and that can and should be done locally to people in their own place—they'll do it, and it will be okay.

MR. CHAVEZ: It tells you what you can't do, not what you have to do.

MR. TURNER: Absolutely critical; and it's very difficult, because we don't know enough for planning, and therefore, we abuse the places we build and their inhabitants.

MR. CHAVEZ: So they aren’t followed by the barriada builders, interestingly enough.

MR. TURNER. On the whole, in Peru anyway, the barriada builders followed traditional layout patterns and often prohibited permanent building in low status materials such as adobe. In general, when the settlers are free to plan and build themselves, their developments work far better than projects built for them. I have even published an article on them I called Architecture That Works. However, they do abuse what I call the necessary Order of Development: Government should authorise siting; then those who are going to live, work and invest there
should organise, and then development should take place. That was Edward the First’s rule for town plantation in the 13th Century—he founded well over 100 in England and France. Squatters have to reverse the first two if they are to house themselves. But equally damaging or even worse is the modern reversal of the last two: development precedes the organisation of the residents, eliminating them from the initial development process.

MS. ZIPPERER: What do you need to have active community participation? What helps to activate community, to motivate them to work with governments?

MR. TURNER: Well, first of all, people want to do what they're able to do, and in Peru, most people know very well what they want to do and know pretty well what they're able to do—and when they're free to do it, they will. So where there is an active community base, it’s not a question of how to get people to work with governments but the other way around—how to get government to work with people! How to get out of their way on the one hand and how to support and extend what people do in their own places by increasing the public or commercial provision and maintenance of what cannot be done at the local levels—mainly institutional and service infrastructures.

It’s a very different story in my own back yard. My neighbours in Hastings, England, have no conception of how much they're able to do because they've never had to do very much for themselves or their neighbours. They are either wealthy enough to buy what they need, or they're poor enough to be subsidised and be given what they need by a wealthy government. I suppose one could say that in Hastings, for instance, it is as much a question of getting people to work with government as the other way around. But in the low-income world with very low-per capita budgets, there is a much stronger community base on which to build.

MR. CHAVEZ: But globally, everywhere, we find communities like this. There is that tendency of people wanting to improve their environment and to improve their lot and to improve—well, I found a very powerful organising principle is the children.

MS. VILORIA: That's true.

MR. CHAVEZ: They're always thinking of building the house for the children, and what about the school for the children. So it's an organising principle in low-income communities, and if they're free to do it, they do it.

MR. TURNER: What you say reminds me of what my friends and I found from the evaluation of self-help housing throughout the USA in the 1960s. During that decade 20 percent of all new first homes were ‘owner-built’, self-built or self-managed—over 100,000 a year—and I have no doubt at all that the US self-builders’ concern for their children’s future was as strong as anywhere. Everywhere we saw how much stronger self-building families tended to be. And the latest news on the British self-build scene is that there are 25,000 self-build housing starts every year—that must be between 10 to 15 of the total. Now, I would like to see a breakdown of income levels, but I would suspect that most are well or above the median.

MR. CHAVEZ: Let’s go back to the point where you had completed your work in Peru.
MR. TURNER: Some time before I left Peru, Lloyd Rodwin, from MIT, came to visit and we had a look at some of the barriadas. He was impressed. Later I heard that it was Charles Abrams who had told him about my work in Peru. In any case, Lloyd’s visit led to a Fellowship at the Harvard-MIT Joint Center on Urban Studies and funded by the Olivetti Foundation. The idea was that I should write a book. I did tell James Q. Wilson, then the Director, that I would certainly write some papers but that I didn’t feel ready to write a book on such a narrow base. Although I had travelled quite a lot in Latin America I knew little about the field in the rest of the world.

MR. CHAVEZ: So when did you start at the joint center?

MR. TURNER: In September 1965. Two years later I still hadn’t written the hoped for book so I was given a job teaching at MIT in the hope that I would still write one. I did finally write a book, Housing By People, published ten years later!

[Laughter.]

While living in the States I learned more from the evaluation of self-help housing programmes and owner-built housing carried out by Don Schön’s Organisation for Social and Technical Innovation, OSTI, for the US Congress. That was in 1969 and 1970. It was extremely interesting, not only because it covered the Continental USA, Alaska and Puerto Rico on both technical and social dimensions in depth, but also because it bore down on worldwide prejudices and misconceptions. In the first place it highlighted the diseconomies and social disfunctionalities of bureaucratically managed self-help housing programmes. I think it was the Farmers Home Administration that built standard designs for Florida and Alaska. They were essentially the same box with minor variations.

[Laughter.]

MR. CHAVEZ: That reminds me of that song by Pete Seeger, little boxes on the hillside, and they're all made out of ticky-tacky. He's talking exactly about that kind of public housing.

MR. TURNER: Even more importantly, the studies revealed the far greater significance of traditional, individual owner-building—home-builders acting primarily as their own general contractors with percentages of self-construction varying between zero and a hundred percent. The median being around half, about the same as for the far poorer Peruvian barriada builders. We were free to broaden the scope of the studies from the evaluation of federally assisted programmes required by the US Congress as a result of a sample comparison with a typical suburban owner-builder in Beverley Mass, an ex-school mate of Beth’s who was also a team member. These key findings were published in Freedom to Build.

MR. CHAVEZ: Now, at about this time—I want to interject a theme here—you came to Cuernavaca, Mexico and established a relationship, a friendship that goes on to these days with Ivan Illich at CIDOC. This Centro de Inter-cultural de Documentación is where I met you and where I attended a course that you gave there in 1970.

MR. TURNER: Yes, it was just after we had finished the OSTI self-build reports.
MR. CHAVEZ: How did you come to be at CIDOC?

MR. TURNER Somebody had suggested I give him a copy of my Housing is a Verb paper and now I remember him reading and enthusing about it as we were driving in a car, I don’t remember where. I think he invited me to CIDOC then and there.

MR. CHAVEZ: And what do you remember of your visit there? That’s where I met you, when you started doing some work for AURIS, of the State of Mexico.

MR. TURNER: Yes, I forget exactly how that arose, but we formed a little team, Tomasz Sudra, Bob Ledogar, Clint Bourdon and myself to work out a development strategy for the State of Mexico.

MR. CHAVEZ: Tomasz Sudra, and I joined you there; we made a little film, a Super-8 film of Ciudad. Nezahualcoyotl, on the periphery of Mexico City; you remember.

MR. TURNER: That's right.

MR. CHAVEZ: And that introduced me into your whole world.

MR. TURNER: Tomasz carried on with the work in Mexico that he used as the starting-point for his PhD dissertation. What Tomasz did was essentially to give a really coherent description of the housing systems for low-income people in Mexico City, with a population of 11 or 12 million by then, on the basis of 32 cases in depth—longitudinal cases, each with many pages of information, tracing the families' history and their residential and economic trajectories often through several generations. Weren’t you working on some of those, Roberto?

MR. CHAVEZ: Yes, and I recall that prior to the work that Tomasz did, you established that pattern of the people coming from outside of the city to the downtown area and living in the tenements; yes, that theory was well-established.

MR. TURNER: The key to that theory, the one that I think was the single most interesting idea that occurred to me, was written up in a paper for a conference organised by Charles Frankenhoff in 1966 in Puerto Rico. It identifies the key variable external functions of a dwelling as location, shelter and tenure. The great variations of priority between them make nonsense of the conventional, material and quantitative definition of housing ‘problems’. Even more so when the key variable internal functions are also recognised: security, opportunity and personal identity or status. I think you are familiar with the chapter in Housing By People, using cases from Tomasz’ work in Mexico, describing life-supporting shack near the inner city, an official housing problem, and the life-threatening housing ‘solution’—a modern minimum standard housing unit on the city periphery?

MR. CHAVEZ: Exactly.

MR. TURNER: Location is by far the most important factor for very low-income people—they must be within affordable distance of opportunities for income-earning work and cheap food.

MR. CHAVEZ: There was the highest priority.
MR. TURNER: Yes, the highest priority, because your future depended on opportunities for acquiring skills and having enough to eat. If you came to the city as a young chap from the countryside, or you were born into dire poverty, the right kind of inner city location can be a matter of life or death. But the same location can be intolerable for a middle class professional, an architect, for instance, whose career could be destroyed by living or working from an inner city slum. For those with low incomes but still in danger of destitution, security of tenure is usually the top priority—but irrelevant for the very poor as long as they have expectations of economic betterment.

MR. CHAVEZ: Exactly.

MR. TURNER: However, it is dangerous to generalise and work from formulae. With just six key variables, there is an immense range of needs that highlights the necessity of a rich variety and fine housing grain for a successful city.

MR. CHAVEZ: Those are the observations that Tomasz built on when he did his work in Mexico City. I was thinking, Oscar Lewis, another writer and researcher describing in his Children of Sanchez; the same sort of analysis from an anthropological point of view. So, coming back to the milestones, then, while you were at MIT—where I went myself after working with you in Mexico. You went back to the UK not long after the work in Mexico?

MR. TURNER: Yes; in 1973. I did one job for the Bank. It was a project appraisal mission in Tanzania. I went with Beth, my wife, and we did some good work together. On arrival we were sent to the pretentious, tacky and barely functioning Dar-es-Salaam Hilton. Looking down from our allocated room we saw a most attractive building below. It was an old German colonial hotel—where the Tanzanians stayed. So we promptly decamped and were welcomed there, shocking and greatly annoying our team members.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: Of course, we immediately gained the friendship of our Tanzanian colleagues and got the information we needed in order to understand how the local housing system worked for the great low-income majority. Not, apparently, of much interest to the team leader. We prepared what I still think was an excellent report, rubbished by the Bank’s officials. Years later our friend Anna Sant’Anna, now working for on the Bank’s files—and said to Beth and myself, God, that was a good report!

[Laughter.]

MR. CHAVEZ: Touching on that mission you did for the World Bank, when did you have the conversation with Bob Sadov that you mentioned in the meeting today?

MR. TURNER: That was well before the Tanzania mission, in 1971 at a conference in Israel.

MR. CHAVEZ: And that was before the urban department was formed.
MR. TURNER: Yes; it was just being set up, I believe Bob Sadov made the first public announcement of the Bank’s urban department at the Rehovot conference on Urbanization and Development in Developing Countries, in August 1971. I contributed a paper on Housing Issues and the Standards Problem, an expanded version of the paper for Frankenhoff’s workshop in San Juan in ’66. Shortly after the meeting in Israel I sent Sadov a memo setting out my view of the path that an effective housing policy has to follow moving away from direct housing construction to sites-and-services as already intended but ensuring a momentum that would increase investment in infrastructure and beyond that to the most politically challenging but by far the most cost effective level of institutional change.

I remember a round table meeting with Bank people in 1976, chaired, I think, by Harold Dunkerly, at which I repeated that message. Harold just said, “What else is new?” Satisfying in a way, but he was only very partially correct at that time. However, it does seem that the path I traced is the one that is being followed.

MR. CHAVEZ: A point I wanted to make, however, was about that sites and services project that we were working on Lima at the time that was visited by Robert McNamara, then the World Bank president. He wanted to see the Pueblos Jóvenes and was quite impressed; he was the last Bank president that was very, very big on the urban land project and on urban poverty. In fact, it was he who drove the creation of the Urban Department. And here we are 25 years later and we now have another surge of interest in urban poverty issues.

MS. ZIPPERER: Your thoughts and your concepts and your vision; how have they changed over the years? You started by talking about Peru as it was 30 years or 40 years ago. Has there been a significant evolution?

MR. TURNER: Well, I like to think that understanding and policies have broadened and deepened and, as I was trying to explain in the talk, I really believe that the common ground between all the different disciplines is becoming clearer. I think the various things that have to be done, too often separated in professionals’ and administrators’ minds, are coming to be seen as complementary vehicles for the common end of sustainable development. And housing is a very good paradigm and vehicle because it's an activity that everybody experiences in one way or another and so obviously involves all sectors and essential activities. More obvious to us as householders, perhaps, than as specialists.

Housing, or homes and neighbourhoods encapsulate everything we depend on. I wish I knew more about agriculture and nutrition, or some other field of essential activity, as they are bound to reflect the same paradigm. In fact, the project I'm working on now, Tools for Community Regeneration, TCR for short, is the reason I am here now. The tools my associates and I include in our database and website (in development) are those needed for the key tasks that have to be carried out for any community-led initiative, whatever the field of action.

MS. ZIPPERER: Maybe you can explain those tools a little bit more for our future readers.

MR. TURNER: I’ll quote from the TCR website which we are now developing: “The Tools selected for TCR are technical and managerial methods that people and their own local organisations can use for the Tasks that they must carry out if their projects are to succeed.
Among other tasks, no project will succeed without a clear idea of what is to be done, without the human and natural resources needed, or adequate organisation and management, space and a practical plan. TCR provides information on alternative and available tools for the key tasks. This service enables TCR users to make their own choice of tools for carrying out their project in a way that makes best use of their own resources. With sufficient knowledge of available tools, no one has to accept someone else’s package deal.” At present we are piloting a prototype database in and for Hastings—a coastal town of some 80,000 people with a disproportionate share of the socially deprived and dysfunctional.

The tools idea really came out of the next landmark—Habitat I in Vancouver, 1976. I gave the keynote address for the NGO Forum and my book, Housing By People, was launched there. It was a very moving experience. So many people working in isolation; not a feeling that they had any support from anybody whatsoever; suddenly found other people in the same situation. Habitat II in Istanbul 20 years later was a bit of an anti-climax but not really disappointing as the far bigger NGO event showed how much the ‘third sector’ has grown politically.

MR. CHAVEZ: Right.

MR. TURNER: In between the two, there was the United Nations International year of Shelter for the Homeless, IYSH 1987, which gave us—that is my wife Beth and our associates—an opportunity to research recent and current experience of community-based housing and local development action around the world—with our ambition to set up a ‘tools exchange’ the idea for which took shape at the Chamarande get together in 1983. This meeting, at a youth hotel near Paris, with friends from Africa, Asia and Latin America, all committed to and working with NGOs supporting community groups, was piggybacked on a UNESCO meeting on AT—Appropriate Technology as it was called—and co-funded by Misereor.

We discussed what we could do to get people more in touch with each other and to create a more effective network supporting local communities—how could we reinforce our enabling role? Out of that came a clearer articulation of the importance of tools.

A short time before, Beth and I had visited the tools library, the first of its kind, I think, at the New University in Amsterdam. While we liked the concept we weren't very impressed when we asked for information, on some particular topic which I don't remember, and we were presented with an enormous list of documents, some of which were in Russian and only available in Russian in Russia! Not very useful. Following the Chamarande meeting, we attempted a rather primitive edge-sort card system but didn't get anywhere with it. It was far too time consuming and communications were far too expensive for those we intended to serve. Now we have the technology needed that is increasingly affordable worldwide.

MR. CHAVEZ: Exactly, exactly.

MR. TURNER: At the UNESCO meeting, in a very much posher Chateau than Chamarande, Beth and I had a conversation with Hugo Houben of Craterr, the leading European centre for building with earth. On being told of his library of some 3000 books and reports on earth building we were impressed and interested. But having seen the limitations of the Tool Library in Amsterdam, we asked how many of the 300 he would he be willing to
recommend without reservation? About 10 percent, he said. We then asked if there would be a lot of duplication among them? Of course, Hugo said—so we asked, if it were possible to make a selection of the best that would cover practically all that people would need to know, how many would there be then? Oh, he said, not more than 10 percent of the 10 percent—perhaps 30. On our way back to our office in central London, we saw and I photographed a graffiti which we adopted as our informal motto: 99 percent is shit! An exaggeration, of course, maybe its only 90 percent we could bin! And, of course, there will be good bits and pieces in that lot too.

A year or two later, Habitat International Council negotiated a fund for a project celebrating community-based housing action for IYSH’87. AHAS, our very small and very non-profit consultancy, was invited to co-ordinate the preparation of a selection of case studies from around the world. From a preliminary survey of well over 400 candidates, we and our associates selected 32 altogether that had a history of 5 years or more. They were funded to prepare their own case materials according to a pretty strict and detailed specification. Our Habitat Forum Berlin associates designed and produced a magnificent set of A1 posters for the Berlin Forum at the Reichstag. The following year the Third World cases were published in book form, edited by Beth and assisted by Andrew and Chepi Maskrey from Peru.

MR. CHAVEZ: Right. All this was grist for your ‘tools’ mill, no?

MR. TURNER: Yes, and I would like to add something more: a very important aspect of TCR, introduced by my associate Renate Ruether-Greaves, is its potential for cultivating the common ground shared by all disciplines, professionals and specialised agencies committed to sustainable development. We’re all involved to greater and lesser extents, whether we’re lawyers or architects or whatever. TCR’s database is a core of tools needed in all fields of action. If there is a common field or sphere of action, it must surely be the regeneration of local community with its economic and environmental foundations?

The bottom line of community-based development must be: can you live off of it? If you can't in an emergency, or if it won't make a significant contribution to your economic needs in normal times, then, it's not going to be sustainable, anyway in the longer run. I am convinced that there is usually a negative balance of local payments. We had a distinguished economist, Owen Nankivell, formerly Chief Statistician to the British Treasury—and an ex-executive of a major industrial corporation—take a good look at Hastings’ own economy. He estimated an annual imbalance of £370 million—far more than could ever be made up by ‘inward investment’ that most concerned locals still assume to be the only way forward—along with the notion that we all depend on increased consumption. However, more and more do realise that we have to consume less, plug the drain and recirculate a far higher proportion of money earned and spent locally—and that that means rebuilding local markets which have been swamped by the supermarkets. Local farmers lost control of their marketing system so the proportion that they get from what we pay for their produce has fallen from 50 to 60 percent to about 10 to 15 percent—in the UK as in the States. And so, of course, they can't make a living, and many are going out of business—or committing suicide—and the big ones, of course, continue to take over, right? Wal-Mart has already bought up one supermarket chain.

This is a major question in housing too. There are just half a dozen volume house builders in England—they've taken over about 60 or 70 percent of housing. Interestingly, a lot of the rest is being done by self-build. Now, that's significant. It’s much more locally based, even
though virtually all of the materials come from outside. But at least the labour is local, because it
does demand a lot of labour. In self-build, it's not just the owner who does the building by any
means. They contract out a lot of the work, and it's to local contractors. So we need to rebuild the
local building industry; it's been polarised to the big ones at the one end and the cowboys at the
other. We have to rebuild the missing middle and that depends on rebuilding the local
economy—getting it in balance with what has to be national and global.

MR. CHAVEZ: But, John, what you're seeing at the level of the community is true for a
very different context. In Mozambique, we had the same set of issues at the national level as well
as at the community level. There they've moved away from their socialist regime to a more open
market, and as they've made the transition to democracy, they find that they're all of a sudden
becoming part of the global system. And we've been very successful at growing the Mozambican
economy, but we haven't grown the local contractors or the local suppliers or the local industry.
It's been the outsiders, the multinationals that are coming in and eating it up. So the local people
feel more disempowered now that there's more wealth and the shops are full. Then the cupboards
were bare. But then people really felt that they controlled their destinies. And this is something
that we struggle with in the Bank and that our clients struggle with.

MR. TURNER: Yes, that was the lesson I expected. I was in Cuba. I was there twice,
one on my way down to Peru in 1957 and then in 1963. After the revolution, when they were
much poorer materially, they didn't give a damn about their relative poverty. They were in
charge—and even the old ladies I was asked to visit by exiled relatives in Mexico, admitted great
respect for the honest young men in charge—after complaining about the scarcity of things I
brought them—toothpaste was one, I remember. Yes, the feeling of being in control must be a
condition for responsible citizenship.

MR. CHAVEZ: How do you maintain and sustain that, I guess, is the question, and under
normal circumstances?

MR. TURNER: Local responsibility surely has to be institutionally established; local
self-management of local affairs and local resources has to be normal. But I don't know how this
is going to happen. We're going to get some nasty shocks in the future, perhaps quite soon and
perhaps it will be crises and dangers that will be the opportunities we need.

MR. CHAVEZ: Where do you see those shocks coming from? We're talking about
disruptions, catastrophes—

MR. TURNER: We are doing enormous damage to each other as well as to the
environment. In 1988 I met the Brazilian ecologist, Jose Lutzenberger at the Right Livelihood
Awards meeting. It seems that his prognosis of the consequences of rainforest depletion is being
borne out. His understanding of the role of the rain forests in the world is that it works
essentially as a heat pump. It maintains the weather system. And if an unknown threshold is
passed it will break down and quite suddenly. It stops working properly because you need that
enormous amount of evaporation from the forests to keep the weather system going. He said that
the weather in the temperate zones will get more and more violent while the world between the
tropics will become uninhabitably hot. It worryingly like actual trends. And the loss has been
accelerated by so many forest fires on top of the logging and clearances.
MR. CHAVEZ: There are some big time risks down the road, as you can see.

MR. TURNER: And how do we survive catastrophes?

MR. CHAVEZ: This being a man-made catastrophe, in fact.

MR. TURNER: Yes; but when the effects are on the catastrophic scale of changes in natures we're much more vulnerable, and modern societies are extremely vulnerable in ways that ancient or earlier civilizations were not or on a much, much smaller scale in absolute terms—but there are parallels according to what I have read about collapses of earlier civilizations due to catastrophic regional changes triggered by abuses of the environment.

MR. CHAVEZ: Absolutely; because of these very long supply lines for one. Where's the food and the fuel and everything comes—

MR. TURNER: The Economist, which I read regularly, has really been tough on this. Sometimes, maybe every 100 years or so, there are very violent sunstorms which could upset electronic communication. And we're losing wires to microwaves. So we could be in serious trouble. What happens to world trade? That could trigger financial collapse. It could trigger all sorts of disasters. What if a meteor hits us? What if another mountain falls into the Pacific or Atlantic? What if, what if? There are so many things; there are so many ways that disasters could be exaggerated by our excessive dependence on vulnerable systems, electronic, financial or political ones. We have a very fragile civilization.

MS. ZIPPERER: In this connection, what would be your advice for young professionals, young urban planners joining the Bank? What should be their approach?

MR. TURNER: First of all, everyone but especially younger people must realise the necessity of rebuilding community where it has been so heavily absorbed by the state or the market or now by both together—by strengthening the community base where it has survived and regenerating community where it has not. And that, of course, means strengthening and rebuilding the local economies.

The first time I remember trying to articulate something that leads to this line of thinking was in Cuernavaca when at CIDOC in 1971. I was invited to talk to students at the Morelos School of Architecture in Morelos.

MR. CHAVEZ: Yes; I was there. I believe I set up the meeting for you.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: Well, you remember this! Let's see if your memory coincides with mine.

MR. TURNER: My memory of it that I started by asking a question: How many of you, students at UAEH, expect to be living as architects, earning your living as architects in five years' time or five years after qualifying? Please raise your hands if you do. No one did, out of what—15 or 20 people?

MR. CHAVEZ: Yes, including the teachers.
MR. TURNER: What do you think you're going to be doing? I asked. One said, well, maybe I've got a degree; that will make it easier to get a job selling paint.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: That's exactly what somebody said. It's tragic, especially in a country where most building takes place without any professional assistance. Some years before I had heard a lecture by Doxiadis, the Greek tycoon planner, in which he said that less than 6 percent of all urban and industrial building in the world is or was then designed by qualified architects. It would be a much smaller percentage if third world rural and urban housing were included. If the kind of knowledge the architect ought to have were available to all local builders in Mexico, for instance, costs could be reduced or values increased for the same investment by at least 20 or 30 percent—and much more in the longer run as a building costs far more during its lifetime than it costs to build it in the first place. So, if those and so many other young professionals are to hope for useful employment, ways and means must be found for them to serve the pent-up demand—which also means, of course, that they must have the knowledge and skills for meeting it.

Some years later, in 1984, I was encouraged to find that there are moves in this direction. I was invited by the International Union of Architects to prepare the brief for that year's international competition for students of architecture. I was actually in Wolf Tochtermann’s UNESCO office in Paris when the UIA’s secretary called him to find out where I was! So Wolf handed me the phone.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: I was told that it had been decided that the competition brief should be about designing houses for the urban poor. Housing BY people, not FOR them I blurted out, without thinking, that the a students should be required to design and develop the tools that enable people to do their own designing. And he said wonderful; let's do that.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: And I nearly had a heart attack: how the hell, I thought, am I going to explain the brief and make it acceptable to the majority of faculties?

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: But to cut a long story short the competition was quite successful. There were 230-odd entries—usually around 300. It was really interesting. About a third of the students had no idea of what they were supposed to do—mainly from Middle-Eastern countries. In some cases we know of, they were prohibited from following the brief—some universities actually prohibited entry. Another third interpreted the brief in technical terms by designing a building design kit of some sort that has its points although it wasn't the intention. And one third got it right. We got such good entries, all from Third World countries. Nothing of any value at all from Europe except for East Germany, Russia proper and Georgia. The students there loved it, because it was subversive. It was a way of protesting. The very best stuff from Argentina, China, Thailand, Brazil and Mexico. The jury shared the prize between the Argentinean students from Córdoba and the Chinese students from Xian University. And as the Chairman of the jury, I was
very pleased to be able to award the Argentineans particularly because I strongly opposed the war Britain was having with Argentina at the time.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: So, a part of the answer is that there are more jobs to be done than most are aware of. You can and you must work with the manufacturers, with the authorities; with the planners; and most importantly, perhaps, with the legislators, right?

MR. CHAVEZ: To let people help themselves.

MR. TURNER: Of course, by working with the people themselves. Press your government politically I say to the young professionals especially, so that they can be funded to work with people or, better, subsidise those who need but cannot afford professional services and so that the people can employ you, okay? It should be a principle that whenever a group of local people get together to do work that will serve the community, directly or by reducing public costs, they have a right to public assistance—including access to professional expertise that they need. Right?

MR. CHAVEZ: I want to press you a little on that. Is there a core competency, as we call it here in the Bank, that young professionals should have? I'm tempted to say that they should all have a good knowledge of biology or evolution or something.

MR. TURNER: Well, if that's a leading question, that's a good one. I’m glad you asked it. [Laughter.] Yes. First of all it's a question of knowledge of knowledge, of knowing what is known and where and how to get it—not only by the students but by the teachers and professionals as well. Given the fact that in order to get a building built, as I mentioned before, here are a number of tasks that have to be carried out, from getting a clear and practical idea to start with, through managing and maintaining what is built.

MR. CHAVEZ: This is what we do with every Bank project—the basic tasks.

MR. TURNER: Yes, the generic tasks common to all complex productive processes. I found in teaching at MIT, at the AA Graduate School and the DPU in London, that there is or was a disturbingly low level of awareness of alternative ways of carrying out those common tasks. Students were not disaggregating processes into component tasks or, when they were, that their knowledge of alternative ways, methods or tools was poor. I too was brought up to look for standard packages, not to assemble sets tools and procedures to match unique situations. For example, in the sixties and seventies I rarely heard a student name a version of the oldest form of land tenure when asked to list generic forms of property tenure—those where the land is held in common by the local community while investments on the land are individually owned.

I pick this example out because it highlights the issue of the loss of commons as well as the necessary shift in thinking, planning and community-led development that really does seem to be gaining momentum. There is a growing interest in community land trusts and land banks,
particularly in the States and, I think, in Canada and Australia. I would really love to see much more work being done on these forms of tenure, because it could do so much for communities and their local economies. I’m not an expert in this area and the only case I’ve visited is one in western Massachusetts. I saw how well it worked, how the integrity of a mixed community of owners and tenants could be maintained and how a sufficiently large neighbourhood could earn surpluses to reinvest rather than pay rates!

Come to think of it, I do remember a moment in an MIT class when a Nigerian participant interrupted my reference to Bob Swann’s work on community land trusts to say that this is just how it works in my village in northern Nigeria.

MR. CHAVEZ: I was going to say that this is exactly the issue that we have in Mozambique and in Africa in general. We have a lot of issues of communal lands. Let me give you a one-minute story on the case in Mozambique. After the war one third of the population, 5 million people, were either refugees or displaced. Most of them went back to their villages under their own power. The donor community was focused on the soldiers: what are we going to do? How are we going to demobilise and how to prevent the peace agreement from falling apart? And we were talking about 60,000 troops. In the meantime, 5 million people were coming back and resettling, and I started to ask myself, well, who is actually carrying out this resettlement process? I went to see UNHCR; they were dealing with a few tens of thousands but this was a process that was taking place massively and spontaneously. I estimate that in a period of two years, there were 500,000 land transactions that took place in a very decentralised way throughout the entire country. And it was all on the basis of the local authorities—not the Government authorities. Not the Frelimo but the traditional village authorities.

MR. TURNER: Yes; the real local authorities.

MR. CHAVEZ: The elders. In some cases, it was the government, but not because he was from the government, but because he or she was a respected figure.

MR. TURNER: Among other issues, your experience and observations bring us back to the importance of overcoming the reductionist divisions our ways of thinking and organising impose—before, you mentioned the importance of a holistic approach. Its difficult to explain what it means to those who have no idea what it means—or who do have one but can’t see how it applies in practice. My associate Renate Ruether-Greaves and I claim that our Tools for Community Regeneration project is a ‘holistic’ method for several reasons: first of all, it focuses on relationships between things, between people, what they do and where they do it. TCR, as we call it for short, starts from the premise that real values lie in relationships, not in things or subjects and objects. Secondly, because TCR recognises the fact that relationships change in the world of human activity; so TCR also focuses on process, we try to keep products embedded in the process. And thirdly TCR will also recognise patterns or paradigms. It has to so that different experiences, different examples of good practice especially, can be usefully compared. That can only be done by identifying the common denominators of different processes in a way that reveals the significant differences—whether they are differences between applications of certain tools in different projects, between different ways of managing the same kinds of organisation or between any sets of related elements in action. TCR therefore starts from common ground, focusing on tasks that have to be carried out, whatever the object and field of activity—and on the types of tool that can be effectively used to carry them out. So we are more concerned with
knowledge of generic types and forms that anyone can recognise than with the details. Those who have to use the tools and need the details can follow up from the signposts to sources of help and information that TCR provides. That’s what I mean by ‘knowledge of knowledge’

MR. CHAVEZ: So that's the intersection of your discipline with other disciplines.

MR. TURNER: Exactly. For instance, we are now very much aware of the interdependence between building and law. I think architects on the whole have a broader view because they have to deal with the legal aspects of people’s physical as well as their social and economic situations.

MR. CHAVEZ: And in the urban environment, we deal with health and education and roads and water.

MR. TURNER: So you have to have a holistic view.

MR. CHAVEZ: It's a messier view. The engineers, I find, are much more focused. They can get the job done. The transport engineers in our institution are very organised. They're always very organised, but the urban is much messier, you know. It's a broader view and understanding.

MR. TURNER: Yes, and the narrower view which so often ignores key relationships and processes creates unviable and counter-productive patterns!

MR. CHAVEZ: We've talked about some of the tragedies that could befall our species. What is your preferred scenario?

MR. TURNER: I think utopias are almost always ridiculous in hindsight. I'm not sure that I can have a clear answer, but what goes through my mind is the importance of knowing what the right principles are. One of which I'm pretty well convinced—I think it would be very difficult to shift me from the view that—is that the principle of subsidiarity, properly understood, is absolutely critical.

MR. CHAVEZ: And can you say one sentence about that? You explained that in the brown bag presentation. Could you expand on that just a little bit, on subsidiarity, what you mean by that?

MR. TURNER: It means that decisions should be made at the lowest practical level. So people must not be prevented from making decisions that they are capable of making by a higher level which would not, in fact, have the same competence because they don't have access to local knowledge and know-how. So, if you're at the wrong level, too high or too low, you act in ignorance.

MR. CHAVEZ: That's very clear. So that's the first and others?

MR. TURNER: Subsidiarity is the key principle but it arises from the nature of relationships between persons. I take a perhaps conventional view; that it is the way people relate to one another which is really the generator of what happens. Vertical relationships of authority, which are necessary in large organisations, impose proportionately larger scales and
higher degrees of standardisation. Fine and necessary for large infrastructures but terrible for matching people with their local environments. That job has to be based on horizontal relationships and the networks of communicating and negotiating persons they generate. So what really works depends on a proper match and balance of different types of organisations with different functions, scales and degrees of complexity—or requisite variety. Subsidiarity has to be understood in terms of the range that I suggest between the extremes of what is necessarily vernacular; that is, necessarily under the control of people directly; and the opposite end at which personal and local control is impossible or highly undesirable. Passengers do not want to be in control of the aircraft unless they are hijackers. The rest of us respect the captain and crew; and want to do exactly what we are told in order to avoid falling out of the air.

[Laughter.]

MR. TURNER: Going back a little bit; I see a very strong linkage between subsidiarity, diversity and Ashby’s principle of requisite variety which I have just alluded to. It states that the complexity of the decision and control system must be equal to or greater than the complexity of the system controlled. So that when something like housing, which is an extraordinarily complex system—although a relatively simple thing—the control system needs to be highly devolved. With a multiplicity of decision making; the fine grain and mix needed is created for people to find their own niche. Only if it’s a reasonably comfortable match with one’s own needs and priorities will we make the effort to get it and take care of it. It’s a dreadful mistake to think of a house as a machine—machines are complex things but with simple, often singular purposes.

So, an economy, a real economy—a resource economy of space, time and energy—I’m not talking about money; I’m talking what money buys—the proper, economic use of real resources, living-space, lifetime energy and matter, surely depend on a combination of subsidiarity and diversity? Only then can there be responsible populations who will make good use of them—their own personal; and local resources. In the aggregate that is most of what the world has to live on and from. So it's people in the workplace and on their own homes and neighbourhoods who can and must have sufficient responsibility and control over their tools, and the ways in which they are used—within proper limits, of course—if a sustainable economy and society are to be achieved.

MR. CHAVEZ: We have learned that there is no such thing as one size fits all. Everything turns on the context, and the use of it is how it applies within that context. And, as you've said, if you can find several cases that show how you can use the same tool in different contexts then something useful can really be learned. That's what we try to find, you know, case-based experiences from which people can really learn.

MR. TURNER: Exactly. But I’m not claiming to have provided comparative uses of the same tool in different contexts. In Building Community, a Third World Case Book, the one I mentioned before that Beth edited, we gave special attention to the ‘bottom line’—a statement of each case’s relevance. But, without the clear focus on transferable tools which we must now attempt, it has less value than it could have—a second and enlarged edition, maybe?!

MS. ZIPPERER: Can I ask you a last question? In previous interviews, the question of maintenance in squatter settlements was always raised. The interviewees always said it was a
really big problem, even with community participation. They build new structures, then they are not cared for, they deteriorate. What are your thoughts on this?

MR. TURNER: Well, first of all, I'm a little bit suspicious of the generalisation. I immediately think of what I’ve seen in the Peruvian barriadas, 25 years after infrastructures were installed. As I showed in the slides, they seem to be doing tolerably well. And they went on building to remarkably high standards considering their modest income levels. The houses and streets weren’t that beautiful, they are all too typical of the modern, urban scene and urban Peruvians, not unlike the Brits, aren't the tidiest of people. But in those areas, at least, locally self-managed development, supported by complementary government action, has maintained development.

Then again, remembering the upgrading projects I have seen in Surabaya. Banyu Urip, for example that is illustrated in our Case Book, was in perfect order well after major works that transformed the former slum. You could eat off the pavements they were so clean. And the drainage channels were properly maintained and water was flowing. In the other one I visited the channels were full of rubbish and there was a totally different atmosphere. It was immediately obvious which was a community-led project by the people and the other that was done for them by an authority. You know when the residents are in charge, when they feel they own it.

MR. CHAVEZ: It comes back to the public housing projects that John was talking about in the sixties that they had to dynamite. They were not maintainable.

MR. TURNER: Yes, I know. But when the same kinds of project are taken over by residents, they can be transformed, right? But there are also cases where the transformation has not held up. I know the ones that the Ford Foundation supported in St. Louis, Missouri. They went downhill after having a very successful take-over. It doesn’t always last, but I don’t know of any affordable alternative. There’s no clear answer to your question, as yet, Melanie. You have pointed out the urgent necessity of clarifying and testing the propositions I have been quoting.

MR. CHAVEZ: Well, thank you very much, and I'm sure we're going to continue this over the next several days or longer than that. So let's conclude. Thank you very much.