

The Museum of Modern Art

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The UDC and the Evolution of a Housing Policy

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In the years since the end of the Second World War publicly assisted housing in America has offered more by way of failure and lack of commitment to housing than it has satisfactory accommodation for low and middle income families. In Europe the experience had been different. The devastation of the Second World War, the lack of resources and the desperate need for housing, led the Europeans to experiment with a more differentiated range of housing types. Their experience over several decades and their clear commitment not only enabled them to build to far superior standards but also to establish new communities whose social viability was immediately ratified.

During the first years of UDC's existence, after its incorporation in 1968, the emphasis was on getting things built. Design quality was then to be assured through employing architects of calibre and through a process of conscientious design review. The result was the realisation of a number of relatively successful housing developments. UDC's constraints at that time were mainly the Federal Guidelines as laid down in the Minimum Property Standards. These were always in conflict with our desire to build to higher standards, both spatially and physically. The first round of UDC projects is already history and may be seen as a unique achievement in the rapid creation of housing stock that went some way towards eliminating the stigma commonly attached to public housing. Many participants in the design and development process, including community representatives, asked questions that could not be answered until occupants moved into the first generation of dwellings. "Does attractive housing mean safer housing?" "Is your housing an asset to the neighborhood and

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community in which it sits?" "Are your rooms large enough?" These, and other questions relating to livability demanded answers. As a result UDC became interested in improving its criteria for housing; a process that recently culminated in the adoption of upgraded space standards.

UDC has found that "learning from experience" is essential to the evolution of a viable housing policy. Good design for us means housing that is not only attractive in appearance, but convenient, durable, flexible and above all equipped with related facilities responsive to people's needs. It means the creation of housing which is sensitively integrated into the context in which it is situated. It means the construction of livable units that respond to cost limits while bearing in mind the overall impact on the life style of the occupant.

By now UDC has evolved a procedure and a set of criteria which are issued as general instructions to both the architect and the corporation. These internal standards help us to establish an appropriate program for each site and serve as guidelines not only in the initial design phase but also for the evaluation of the project after it has been completed. In this way it is intended to update criteria in what will amount to a cyclical process of refinement and revision. Such a procedure should help the UDC to reflect the desires and aspirations of its tenants. It should also demonstrate that housing a low to moderate income populace can create a community asset and not an additional urban problem.

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