If housing, is the backdrop to the quality of our cities, how should we define housing within the context of the livelihoods it supports?

The Academy of Urbanism (AoU) is a not for profit organisation with a membership drawn from a wide range of backgrounds embracing planning and design, community and cultural development, engineering and property, policy and politics, media and the arts. The Academicians are nominated by their peers, and selected on the basis of their contribution to the making and shaping of successful urban places. The Academy is committed to working collaboratively with other organisations in improving the quality of cities through the evaluation and understanding of place.

The AoU in addition to its network of over 500 Academicians has an annual awards programme with over 120 places that have been visited and assessed, and an annual Congress focussed on furthering the understanding of what makes great urban places.

Urbanism is more than the different disciplines of planning and urban design. It is concerned with the continuous husbanding of the city as an open, organic system, to allow for all manner of lifestyles through the design and organisation of physical life and urban space.

Within Learning from Place the AoU has developed a number of different programmes:

- UniverCities; where towns or cities have recognised the power of bringing together communities of learning, invariably led by the university sector, living, the city authority and practice, the professionals and business, to collaboratively work together to share experience, learn from place and improve livelihoods. These three communities work at the formal (City administration) and informal (community civic society) level

- City X-Rays, where a cross section of different interests, no more than 8, from both within and outside the community walk through the area looking listening and exchanging their perceptions. The process combines the collection of data, with the initiation of ideas for action, and often the changing of perceptions to bring greater understanding when agreeing to act.

- Awards; for place, street, neighbourhood, town and city assessed by a team of Academicians who visit the location and are given a presentations by the different stakeholders. The initial assessment criteria were: Governance; Local character and distinctiveness; User friendliness; Commercial success and viability; Environmental and social sustainability; Functionality. More recently learning and improving and effectively using the assets from previous generations have been added.

- Place Partnering; building networks between places short listed for awards, to share knowledge and peer review others. AoU/INTA Learning Cities Platform (Utrecht 2012)

The following questions are suggested for discussion:

1. How can positive lessons be learnt from the Favelas (informal sector) which could help in creating more diverse and vibrant housing neighbourhoods in the formal market?

2. What are the current ways of sharing experience and evaluating completed schemes between communities and housing providers?

3. What are the current approaches of the universities (Communities of Learning) in working with cities, developers and local communities in developing vibrant living areas integrated within the wider city?

4. Which new housing area in your city would you nominate to be given an award as a great urban neighbourhood and what would be the lessons others could learn? (Bring photos and plans of places you would nominate)

We are grateful for the participation and support of the following institutions: