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The City of Barrios in Caracas. A Compact City and Sustainable Urban Form?

ABSTRACT

The compact city is often conceived as having a specific urban form with important dimensions of compactness being high densities of buildings and other uses. The informal city of Caracas, which is called "La Ciudad-Barrio" shows an unexpectedly compact urban form and a specific urban pattern. It is both densifying and consolidating as a result of the countless individual activities of its inhabitants, who are involved in a constant process of producing homes, urban space and the city.

Based on empirical material, which is a results of a research project and intense field work, the paper discusses the process of consolidation and densification of two informal settlements, La Montañita and Julián Blanco, in Petare-Norte. Both are the result of three decades of building and development mainly by their inhabitants. The building strategies of the original settlers and their families are examined to illustrate how this dense urban pattern and the compact urban form of clustered building structures have evolved. The positive and negative impact of the compact neighbourhood form on people's lives is explored. The paper questions how the future urban development of the consolidated parts of the so-called Ciudad de Barrios (City of the Barrios) could be supported, and if the concept of a compact city is a viable option for attaining sustainable urban development.

The paper is based on the following article:

Zillmann, Kerstin (2000): Rethinking the Compact City: Informal Urban Development in Caracas. In: Jenks, M, Burgess, R (eds.): Compact Cities: Sustainable Urban Forms for Developing Countries. London, New York, pp. 193-206

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