

**MICROBRIGADAS IN CUBA:
AN UNCONVENTIONAL
RESPONSE TO THE HOUSING
PROBLEM IN A
LATIN AMERICAN STATE***

RESUMEN

El movimiento de Microbrigadas en Cuba ha demostrado ser una iniciativa innovadora y eficiente para aliviar el problema de la vivienda en un país en vías de desarrollo. Puede caracterizarse como una forma de autoconstrucción colectiva, mediante el cual un cierto número de trabajadores de una fábrica o una oficina son liberados de sus obligaciones habituales con el objeto de construir viviendas para sí mismos y sus compañeros, mientras el resto de los empleados garantiza el mantenimiento de los niveles previos de producción de la unidad, a pesar de la reducción de personal. Luego de un período de auge en la década de los setenta, en el cual las Microbrigadas construyeron más de 80 mil viviendas, sobrevino una cierta declinación después de 1979, en la medida que se formaron brigadas estatales y se introdujo métodos industrializados de construcción que se pensó eran más eficientes en la rápida erección de gran cantidad de viviendas. Sin embargo, esta expectativa no se materializó por diversas razones, y el censo reveló que la mayoría de las nuevas viviendas seguía siendo levantada a través de autoconstrucción y otros métodos informales. Este descubrimiento condujo a una revisión de la actual política de construcción, y a reconsiderar los méritos de las Microbrigadas. Luego de un discurso de Fidel Castro a mediados de 1986, en el cual sugirió la revitalización del movimiento, se formaron espontáneamente unas 75 Microbrigadas, seguidas por otras 200 en pocos meses. Existen fuertes indicaciones de que el movimiento de Microbrigadas continuará siendo un elemento de importancia en la política habitacional cubana por mucho tiempo.

Aunque los principios fundamentales son los mismos, el nuevo movimiento se diferencia del anterior en cuanto se orienta a satisfacer las necesidades generales, produciendo el 50% de las viviendas a distribuir en la comunidad

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local, y edificaciones complementarias para la infraestructura social de toda comunidad vecinal. Otra innovación la constituye la concentración de los proyectos en la trama urbana existente, lo cual involucra, muchas veces, la renovación de edificaciones de carácter histórico.

A pesar del éxito evidente del movimiento, en particular en La Habana, el modelo de las Microbrigadas está especialmente diseñado para el contexto social cubano y no puede ser transferido con facilidad a otras sociedades. En especial en países capitalistas, la presión ejercida por la competencia entre las empresas privadas prescribirá la explotación cabal de todos los trabajadores en sus puestos regulares de trabajo regulares, e impedirá el liberar recursos para producir viviendas y edificaciones sociales. Igualmente es probable que los sindicatos se opongan a la idea de utilizar la mano de obra excedente proveída por los microbrigadistas, y luchen para proteger los puestos de trabajo en la industria de la construcción. Muy pocos países socialistas podrán estimular el mismo nivel de idealismo entre sus trabajadores como el que se da en Cuba, en donde se ha educado a más de una generación en los principios socialistas. Sin embargo, existen algunos aspectos aislados, del movimiento de Microbrigadas que pueden ser atractivos hasta en los países capitalistas más avanzados, como el cambiar la actividad regular de los trabajadores a una diferente por uno o dos años.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It would be difficult to find any country in the developing world that does not have its housing problems. In the case of Cuba the situation was not much different at the time of liberation from dictatorship in 1959, when a substantial part of the urban population lived in slums or squatter settlements. Initially the revolutionary Government concentrated its efforts on industrial development, along with certain social services like health care and education. Housing as a very cost intensive and not explicitly productive investment was not given a high priority. Fidel Castro himself once said, that a developing country can choose between economic development or housing construction, but it cannot cope with both tasks at the same time.

When houses were built at all during the first decade after the "triumph", they were to improve the living conditions of the rural population. In any case, within the capital La Habana the large number of emigrants deserting the country had left a considerable number of good dwellings behind, which could be redistributed among those people with the greatest housing need, and the worst slums could

be cleared without the need for new construction. In addition, the situation remained relatively comfortable in comparison with other Third World cities, because Cuba succeeded in stopping migration into the capital by enforcing the economic development in other parts of the country.

Nevertheless, La Habana still grew due to its natural population increase, and after a number of years the problem of over crowding became evident, and it was aggravated by the effects of lack of maintenance of the existing housing stock. It was certainly no coincidence that the birth of the Microbrigada movement fell exactly into this exceptionally difficult period, and it provided a solution for a large number of citizens of La Habana.

1/ 26th July 1970. In the following months, the workers of cement factory "José Merceron", in Santiago de Cuba, organized the first Microbrigada. Later, in another speech to the National Conference of Basic Industries, in December 1970, Castro expanded further on the envisaged working modalities he proposed for the Microbrigadas.

2/ In the countryside Microbrigadas have been mentioned which were formed among friends or neighbours, and not by workers employed in the same productive unit (Ortega 86:32).

3/ In 1971 already 444 Microbrigadas had been formed by 12,715 workers. In 1972 the number had risen to 1073 brigades and 28,178 workers; and in 1975 there were 1150 Microbrigadas and more than 30,000 workers. In that year the demand for building materials by the microbrigadistas exceeded the available supply (Ortega 86:22 and 36; Segre 84:356).

4/ In Alamar the people were also involved to a certain extent in the "urban" administration, and not only in executing the works. The population had already reached 30,000 (=7,700 flats) in 1978, and social infrastructure provision started to get better. Local factory jobs were created particularly for female workers (Ortega 86:23).

5/ The preferred building methods were standard solutions using bricks and blocks (type E-14), or the semi-industrialized system SP-72. Other systems were used to a lesser extent and included the "Gran Panel IV" or the "IMS" (Ortega 86:22, 36 and 37).

2. THE BEGINNING OF THE MICROBRIGADA MOVEMENT AND ITS BASIC PRINCIPLES

The idea of the Microbrigadas was first put forward in public by Fidel Castro during one of his long and famous speeches in the year 1970:¹ The workers within an office, in a factory or any other productive unit should be given the possibility to build houses for themselves and their colleagues. For this purpose some of them were to be released from their normal work duties and integrated into building brigades, whilst their colleagues, who stayed behind, guaranteed to maintain the previous level of productivity in the unit. The microbrigadistas (= the members of a Microbrigada) continued to receive their regular income salary from their previous employer, and therefore it was sometimes given higher than the prescribed salary within the building industry. Any houses completed by a Microbrigada team were then to be distributed amongst all workers of the original work place according to need and work merits, and there was no automatic priority given to the members of a Microbrigada among them.²

Only a few months after the initial public presentation of the idea, the first construction sites were handed over to Microbrigadas on an experimental basis. The model proved to be feasible and good, and more and more Microbrigadas joined in. By the year 1978, more than 1100 teams had been formed by some 30,000 brigadistas, having completed 82,000 dwellings.³ The movement was strongest in the capital La Habana, since here the house building activity of the state sector remained minimal, for the reasons outlined above, and complete satellite cities around the capital were completed by the Microbrigadas. Typical examples are Altahabana, Reparto Eléctrico, San Agustín, Cotorro and Alamar,⁴ —the latter designed to house some 150,000 people.

Almost all the houses built by Microbrigadas at that time were 4 or 5 story walk-up flats following a standard design.⁵ Urbanistic monotony was recognized a

risk,⁶ and attempts were undertaken to avoid, or at least to minimize it by means of gaily painted façades, or carefully cultivated green areas between the blocks. However, what eventually seemed more effective in maintaining a high social status of these settlements, was the fact that the inhabitants were not social outcasts, as it is the fate of architecturally similar developments in Europe today, but honorable workers selected for these dwelling for their outstanding merits.

At the end of the 1970s the Microbrigada movement came almost to a stop as a result of the ongoing institutionalization and restructuring of the national economy. It was believed that houses could be produced much more efficiently by taking advantage of industrialized building methods and employing qualified labour, rather than laymen. Also, the brigadistas were more urgently needed again in their original jobs, once the occasional problem of shortages of primary materials and products, or technical breakdown of the machinery had been overcome (which in the early years which had sometimes prohibited in making full use of the total work force employed within the factories).

The gap let behind in the building sector by the dissolved Microbrigadas was to be filled by additional state brigades, which in turn often included some previous microbrigadistas desiring to remain in the building trade; but they were now paid directly by the Ministry of Construction.

3. THE REVIVAL OF THE MICROBRIGADAS

The expected increase in the output of houses built directly by the state did not materialize for a number of reasons. It seemed that the possible productivity gains through industrialization had been overestimated, an experience shared by most European countries, too. In addition to this structural limitation (see chapter 5), the newly formed state brigades were not primarily being used for housing construction, but for other projects which were granted a higher political priority.

New statistical data derived from the housing census were released in 1983: they revealed that between 1976 and 1980 only a number of 164,000 dwellings had been created officially either directly through the state or through the Microbrigadas, although the net increase of the housing stock accounted to 246,000.⁷ Thus, the striking difference between both figures represented "informal" constructions, most of them built by their occupants in self-help efforts. It was also noted that many of these extra houses were substandard and/or suffered from building failures due to the lack of proper professional advice and to the inaccessibility of certain building materials (i.e. like cement).

6/ Ortega 86: 37; Segre 84: 357.

7/ Hamberg 86: 603.

This discovery was discussed at large in the National Housing Conference in

8/ Several Western authors have expressed doubts about the self-help character of the Microbrigada system. Castex (1986:56), for example, denies the self-help character on the grounds that the microbrigadistas are technically and socially separated from the means of construction, and only work as labourers on job in which almost all inputs are controlled by the state. However, I cannot follow this argumentation for two reasons: firstly, the ownership of the means of production merely indicates the *mode of production* (feudalism, capitalism, socialism ... etc.), but not the *form of production* (subsistence, artisanal, manufactured or industrialized forms). It is obvious, that the subsistence form of production is almost a synonym for self-help. However, organized as a collective, the other forms are conceivable as well. Secondly, even acknowledging that the "microbrigada form of production" is not entirely and directly managed by the beneficiaries, in which respect it does not differ from conventional self-help schemes in the Western countries, there can be no doubt that the brigadistas, as a group, are both producers and consumers of the houses they build. This is an important aspect of "self-help". Different from most projects in capitalist countries, no other social group or class is extracting surplus value from them. In other words, the context in Cuba is different from other Latin American states, and we should avoid an eurocentric position by judging self-help only by the effects it has in the capitalist countries. A different view is presented by the Cuban Architect Roberto Segre (84:354 ff) in relation to the microbrigadas: In Latin America, it is the unusual self-help initiative that has a collective or communitarian character and "The availability of resources in the traditional self-help model depends entirely on individual income or on cooperative loans made to small communities. Self-help posits an economic system tied more to private initiative than to state aid, and one which severely distorts the distribution of national resources" but "the socialist spirit of the revolution, the disappearance of the private ownership of the means of production, and the search for community define the ideological underpinnings of the new habitat. Its

1984, and resulted in an almost spectacular reorientation of the Cuban housing policy eventually ratified in the "Ley general de la vivienda" (December 1984). In particular, it was recognized that it was an unrealistic expectation that all the dwellings needed for the next years could be provided by the state building sector alone. Instead self-help practices could beneficially complement the efforts already undertaken by the state, and would do so more effectively if they were given active assistance. Another almost revolutionary novelty of the law was the privatization of almost all the houses rented from the state, and —following from that— the right of the occupants to sell their dwelling freely on the market if they wanted to move.

Both newly introduced concepts of "privatization" and "self-help", frequently criticized in the west as an instrument to materialize neo-liberal policies, do not mean the same thing in Cuba. Here "privatization" will not imply higher rents, or a loss of security of tenure, as the implication tends to be in a capitalist economy. Similarly, in the Cuban context, "self-help" is not understood as a individualistic survival strategy in a climate of cuts in social services by the state, but rather a step towards political decentralization and basis democracy with the emphasis on collective forms of self help and "participation". Particularly the Microbrigadas were understood as a form of collective self-help,⁸ and therefore it was not too much of a surprise when Fidel Castro propagated to revitalize the experience of the Microbrigadas in another speech in June 1986. He said it would be absurd to let the Microbrigada movement die, and added, that the Microbrigadas would be particularly useful for productive units which suffer temporary work stoppages for one reason or another. He also stressed the idea, that the Micros should not just build housing for their own work unit's benefit, but also for the general need.⁹

Like the new housing law a year before, his call fits well into the more general reform policy, which had been introduced under the slogan "rectificar los errores" (to correct past mistakes) since the mid 1980s. The reform can be characterized by a political de-dogmatization in those areas where ideology and lived experience have evidently very little in common, and by the toleration of certain market mechanisms in order to stimulate the overall national productivity —as long as they do not jeopardize the intended basic political and social development.

Less than 4 months after Castro's speech some 75 new Microbrigadas with altogether 2,400 workers had been formed in La Habana, and most of them had started on site by the end of the year. After another four months the number of brigades had even risen 285, consisting of 6,926 workers, including 781 women. Target until the end of 1987 was 11,000 dwellings, apart from the social works described below.¹⁰

Although the old Microbrigada concept was taken up, it was not copied point by point. In la Habana, which once again was the principal arena of the program, the explicit goal was to start "a radical transformation of the capital"; —a statement hinting at the new urbanistic and architectural emphasis to be followed. Similarly as in Europe, the euphoria for large housing schemes in the urban periphery had declined. The need for urban repair and conservation, particularly of historic neighbourhoods, had been recognized, and resulted in various renovation and reconstruction projects. It is obvious that industrialized building systems, practically the domain of the Ministry of Construction in Cuba, are not the most suitable solution for these tasks. However, the Microbrigadas have an advantage in doing such a labour —intensive job with their artisan approach. Of course, urban renewal is only one of several areas where Microbrigadas are active today: apart from it, they continue to build standard design blocks of flats in the less densely populated peripheral areas of the city, or they finish off high-rise buildings of which the basic structure has previously been erected by the ministry's own construction teams.

Since the Microbrigada projects required a close-coordination with the local administration, and imply a social responsibility towards the already resident population in the neighbourhood, a new organizational set up was chosen: now the Microbrigadas are not integrated anymore into the hierarchy of the Ministry of Construction, but work as an independent institution and are subdivided in divisions according to the geographic structure of the local people's representation, the "Poder Popular". The decentralized form of organization also permits a more flexible architectural approach, the use of local materials and the recycling of salvaged building components, a closer cooperation with the neighbourhood, and —last but not least— a better support for the individual Microbrigadas through joint technical assistance, supervision, education and catering.

The biggest difference of today's Microbrigadas compared to the previous practice, is their explicit social responsibility: only 50% of all the dwellings they produce go to the brigadistas and their colleagues in the unit's place of work, the remainder is offered to the local "Poder Popular" for distribution among those members of the community who need a house but do not have access to a Microbrigada scheme (their working unit may have too few employees, or the applicants may be old or sick people). In addition to this, the Microbrigadas simultaneously provide urgently needed buildings for the social infrastructure. For example, until the end of the year 1987 they had scheduled the completion of 50 Kindergartens, 12 schools for the handicapped, 10 polyclinics, 600 doctor's surgeries, 5 hospital extensions, one theatre, 3 sports fields, and an exhibition hall. Another of their ambitious projects is the erection of all new buildings

essential components express the collective character of the built environment."

9/ Granma of June 9th., 1986.

10/ Fidel Castro before the first 400 microbrigadistas in an assembly at the Teatro Carlos Marx. See newspaper notices of Oct. 1st., 1966.

planned to serve the Panamerican Games in the year 1991. These figures show, that the Microbrigadas are not just the curious but marginal extravaganza of "real socialism" in the periphery, but will remain one of the main elements of Cuban housing and construction policy for many years to come.¹¹

4. MICROBRIGADAS IN PRACTICE

Each Microbrigada consists of not less than 33 workers, —a "historic" number which was established at the offset of the movement, and was never changed since. Out of these 33 microbrigadistas, which have been selected among a larger number of volunteers in a union meeting, normally 14 will exclusively work in "social" projects as explained above; —unless the complete brigade prefers to stay together and build first the houses, and the social works thereafter.

However, in the evenings and at weekends considerably more people can be seen working at the building site, because relatives and colleagues arrive to help. The weekly work time in a Microbrigada is quite elevated at a level of 60 hours, compared to the 40 or 44 in a regular job. This extra labour, in combination with a better work morale (i.e., less absenteeism) brings about a productivity level which is higher than that of a regular building brigade in the Ministry of Construction.

Another circumstance contributing to the high productivity of the Microbrigadas is the technical assistance offered by the original employers of the brigadistas: for example, any trucks or machinery not in use by the employer over the weekends may be borrowed by the "Micros" for free, or certain products and services which they can provide are not billed to the full amount. More savings are achieved by the Microbrigadas themselves with the repair and (consequent use) of machines or lorries already abandoned by other firms.

An interesting aspect is the low representation of only 12% women in the Microbrigada movement. Here one might assume that the Latin American culture of "machismo" has not yet been overcome completely in spite of non-sexist legislation and 25 years of education for an egalitarian society. At the occasion of various visits on Microbrigada building sites I had the impression that the women there had the role of helping hands. In any case, compared to international standards, women's representation on the average building site in Cuba is still high in relative terms. Recently, one Microbrigada has been formed with a majority of women (25:8), and their experience may perhaps lead to a higher female representation in the future.

In the first years of the Microbrigada movement, the self-help labour input was honored by the state by means of reducing the rent from normally 10% of the income to 6%. Now following the privatization policy (mortgages repayable over

11/ Nevertheless, it seems that Microbrigadas are still considered a temporary feature in Cuban housing policies. Segre (84:355) says: "In Cuba, social mobilization toward construction of this sort is considered an intermediate stage that will tend to disappear with the advances in industrialization and the utilization of prefabricated systems." Or, in relation to self-help in general, Ortega (86:47) takes the same position: "... pero a la vez el desarrollo lógico de la base material del socialismo permite incrementar progresivamente los volúmenes de viviendas construidas industrialmente por el Estado lo que redundará en un proceso natural de reducción de viviendas construidas industrialmente por el proceso natural de reducción de viviendas ejecutadas mediante el esfuerzo propio." However, both authors seem to be much preoccupied with rising productivity through industrialization, an approach of which the limitations have already been experienced in Cuba and abroad. On the other hand, there is no reason why the Cuban state should not be able to increase housing production with conventional technologies, if it decides to do so.

20 years at a 2% handling fee) the houses built by a Microbrigada are sold with a 10% discount compared to state provided houses. Thus, the price is not related anymore to the income of the user, but it is calculated from a standard list taking into account the location, quality and size of the dwelling. The absolute cost of producing a house has never entered the calculation and would be considerably higher, this is why housing in Cuba must still be considered a social service.

The space standards for houses to be built by the Microbrigadas are the same as for all other houses, amounting to 12 and 16 m² per person. However, so called "non-typical" designs —that are the ones for a reconstruction or renovation scheme in the older neighbourhoods— may allow up to 20 m² per person; an additional reason explaining the general preference shown for this type of dwelling by the applicants.

5. CAN THE CONCEPT BE TRANSFERRED INTO OTHER NATIONAL CONTEXTS?

In Cuba the introduction of Microbrigadas was an efficient and imaginative response to the housing problem, which provokes the question whether the concept could be copied by other countries displaying similar problems. After all, in most Third World states the housing crisis is much worse than in Cuba. However, in answering this question we must mention a few preconditions which are special to Cuba, and can rarely be found elsewhere.

One determining condition in Cuba is guaranteed job security, and the lack of open unemployment. Therefore, if the target was to increase housing production, the obvious measure of just hiring extra labour is not feasible. There was not idle labour force sitting in reserve. In principle, alternative strategies to achieve the goal could be either industrialization, or to make a more extensive use of the already employed labour force.

Industrialization, or the installation of extra machinery, adds more value to the existing labour input, —and was extremely effective in increasing production in many sectors of the industry. Also in building production this approach, was attempted in Cuba, but the observed limitations coincided with the experience in most European countries: given the big size and weight of houses most advantages obtained through mass production at a central factory are soon outweighed by cost and losses caused through transportation to the building site. Additional difficulties of prefabricated buildings can be their poor flexibility to respond to the irregular profile of the "natural" building ground, bad architectural compatibility with the existing neighbourhood, apart from the risk of urbanistic monotony through repetitive elements.

The other alternative to increase production would be to maintain the existing technology, but to expect more input from the existing work force, either in form of extra time, or extra energy. Exactly this is what the Microbrigada are based upon (extra hours for the microbrigadistas and extra energy from their previous work mates maintaining the same productivity level). In most Western countries (which, by the way, do have a sufficiently large reserve army of labour at their disposal) such a proposal would immediately meet the resistance not only from the labour union of the workplace where the microbrigadistas are supposed to be recruited from, but also from the competing private building industry fearing from their income profits.

Self-help housing policies have been accused for a long time for incorporating an element of double-exploitation, by extending the working day necessary for the labourers reproduction and demanding unpaid "surplus labour" in the "free time". Also the Microbrigada movement involves extra working time (or effort), and for this effort —shared between the brigadistas and their colleagues staying behind in the productive unit— the term "plus trabajo" (extra work) has been introduced. Roberto Segre explains:¹²

12/ Segre 84: 354.

13/ *"En este sentido dijo que de forma absurda ha ido muriendo el movimiento de la microbrigada, e incluso, ha habido gente que lo ignora y lo combate, deformando el principio del plustrabajo con el que fueron concebidas"* (Granma June 9th., 1986).

14/ Some observers would disagree with this interpretation, and take the enormous housing shortage and the material benefits for an explanation for the extra labour invested: Castex (86: 57), for example, interprets the (first) microbrigada movement as a material stimulation for the workers to put in voluntary labour. In return, they enjoy a double privilege: first they gain an easier access to new housing, and secondly, they pay 40% less for rent than they would do in comparable state built housing. I am inclined to agree with the first argument explaining some of the microbrigadista's enthusiasm, and would be interested to learn about the percentage of brigadistas who were eventually accommodated in the houses they had helped to build; but I doubt that the saving in rent —representing only 4% of the family income— would act as a important incentive for the workers to put in voluntary work for one year or more.

"In Cuba, a direct relationship between the production center and the worker's need for housing is created. The solution lies in ... the special effort made in the workplace and the availability of manpower that this frees up for construction. In the production center it is called plus-work, and it reflects the workers understanding of the problems inherent in the economic development of a country and the importance of direct participation in the solution of these problems. This has absolutely nothing to do with the exploitation of workers typical of an underdeveloped capitalist country. There, the workers, after selling eight hours of his labour power, must still take on the construction of his own home. This is a hidden form of appropriation by capitalists entrepreneurs, in that the building loans and materials purchases necessary to carry out the dwelling work are themselves sources of substantial profits."

In the past, the "plus trabajo" element in the Microbrigada concept has rased to a certain extent, and Fidel Castro stressed its importance when he advocated for the revival of the movement.¹³ In any case, the amount of voluntary labour invested by the microbrigadistas and their work colleagues (like the 60 hours worked instead of 40) is most remarkable, particularly when one considers that a large proportion of it is not invested in order to improve the microbrigadistas' personal living conditions. Instead, the full benefit goes to the colleagues from the work place and the community in general, and the eventual users are often still unknown at the time of construction. For me, personally, it is difficult to imagine a comparable idealism¹⁴ in a capitalist society. The difference may be that in Cuba this extra work is not transformed into "surplus value" to be appropriated by a capitalist class, but it can be easily identified as the property of the community

(because it takes the form of a real product, and everybody can see who is benefitting). But also in other "socialist" Third World states it would be difficult to find a comparably high level of social conscience among such a large proportion of the population (at least in the few countries which I have visited). However, few other countries in the Third World have had more than a generation to build a new society —the time span is an important factor when it comes to foster the confidence into the solidarity of the collective.

One crucial aspect of the Microbrigada Program is the linkage between work place and the place of residence. In the form of "tied accommodation", this linkage has been exploited as a tool to discipline the labour-force by the employer in countries with a market economy. In Cuba, however, such a risk does not exist since both the job and the flat are practically guaranteed. Thus, the positive and comfortable implications of the linkage can be fully enjoyed by the user, such as living close to neighbours you already know from the work place for a long time, and having a short journey to work (in La Habana commuting times of up to an hour and more each way are common, but the Microbrigada sites are commonly located in the vicinity of the original unit of production).

The biggest obstacle to implement the Microbrigada concept in a country with a different social order would be the pressure of competition in capitalist and mixed economies, which forces even the most benevolent employer to exploit his contracted labour force to the extreme. Releasing part of the salaried staff to produce a good that cannot be sold, but will be consumed by the workers directly, would probably ruin the enterprise. But even when one assumes that there are enterprises for which the model is economically feasible, the workers would probably prefer cash rather than houses to improve their situation, given the average Third World context with deficits in almost all basic services for the poor, so that they can individually invest it according to their own needs and priorities.

One situation where the Microbrigada concept might be imported successfully is the case of companies with seasonally changing labour requirements, helping them to maintain a more steady employment pattern.¹⁵ Attractive (and economically affordable) even for the more affluent societies in the north remains the idea to temporarily change one's habitual work place with one in a different profession (like construction or farming), without having to worry about a loss of income, or giving up the option to return to one's previous job when wanted.

^{15/} A precondition would be, of course, a legislation guaranteeing greater job security, and discouraging a "hire-and-fire" policy.