

THE PROBLEM

During the 1970s, the world population experienced one of the most rapid processes of migration and urbanization in history, and governments around the world began to express their concern about “the extremely serious condition of human settlements.” In response to these concerns, the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat I, was held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976. According to data presented at the conference and quoted in the first pages of Christopher Alexander’s book *The Production of Houses*, over the next 35 years, it would be necessary to build 600 million homes to end the crisis. Despite this growing global awareness, national leaders were unable to find satisfactory qualitative or quantitative solutions, and once again, the answers were left in the hands of the people. For example, although the Mexican government created two institutions in 1972 to address the needs of the working class in this area—the Institute of the National Workers’ Fund for Housing (Infonavit) and the Housing Fund of the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (Fovissste)—a study coordinated by Gustavo Garza and Martha Schteingart in 1978 revealed that between six and seven out of every ten Mexican families built their homes without support from the government or financial institutions.