

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CREATING INCLUSIVE CITIES

O PAPEL DA SOCIEDADE CIVIL NA CONSTRUÇÃO DE CIDADES INCLUSIVAS

EL PAPEL DE LA SOCIEDAD CIVIL EN LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE CIUDADES INCLUSIVAS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between the right to the city and housing policies in São Paulo, focusing on occupations promoted by housing movements in central areas. An interdisciplinary approach was adopted, combining normative analysis of urban and housing legislation with a bibliographical review of academic studies and official documents on social mobilization and participatory governance. The results showed occupations respond to a structural housing deficit resulting from historical processes of marginalization; that instruments of participatory democracy play a decisive role in the formulation and continuity of inclusive policies; and that the reuse of empty urban spaces for social housing strengthens the dialogue between civil society, public authorities and private initiative. In the end, we highlight the need to institutionalize participatory channels to ensure the continuity of these policies and propose investigating their applicability in other Brazilian metropolises.

Keywords: Right to the City. Housing Policies. Participatory Democracy. Social Housing.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar a relação entre o direito à cidade e as políticas habitacionais em São Paulo, com foco nas ocupações promovidas por movimentos de moradia nas áreas centrais. Adotou-se abordagem interdisciplinar, combinando análise normativa da legislação urbanística e habitacional com revisão bibliográfica de estudos acadêmicos e documentos oficiais sobre mobilização social e governança participativa. Como resultados, constatou-se que as ocupações respondem a um déficit estrutural de moradia decorrente de processos históricos de marginalização; que instrumentos de democracia participativa exercem papel decisivo na formulação e continuidade de políticas inclusivas; e que o reaproveitamento de espaços urbanos ociosos para habitação de interesse social fortalece a interlocução entre sociedade civil, poder público e iniciativa privada. Ao final, destaca-se a urgência de institucionalizar canais participativos para garantir a perenidade dessas políticas e propõe-se investigar sua aplicabilidade em outras metrópoles brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Direito à Cidade. Políticas Habitacionais. Democracia Participativa. Habitação de Interesse Social.

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la relación entre el derecho a la ciudad y las políticas de vivienda en São Paulo, centrándose en las ocupaciones promovidas por los movimientos de vivienda en las zonas céntricas. Se adoptó un enfoque interdisciplinario, combinando el análisis normativo de la legislación urbanística y de vivienda con una revisión bibliográfica de estudios académicos y documentos oficiales sobre movilización social y gobernanza participativa. Como resultados, se constató que las ocupaciones responden a un déficit estructural de vivienda derivado de procesos históricos de marginación; que los instrumentos de democracia participativa desempeñan un papel decisivo en la formulación y continuidad de políticas inclusivas; y que la reutilización de espacios urbanos ociosos para viviendas de interés social fortalece el diálogo entre la sociedad civil, el poder público y la iniciativa privada. Por último, se destaca la urgencia de institucionalizar canales participativos para garantizar la continuidad de estas políticas y se propone investigar su aplicabilidad en otras metrópolis brasileñas.

Palabras clave: Derecho a la Ciudad. Políticas de Vivienda. Democracia Participativa. Vivienda Social.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article will investigate how the dialogue between organized civil society and municipal administration can boost housing policies in large urban centers, taking the center of São Paulo as a case study, with the purpose of building more inclusive and sustainable cities. To ensure the effectiveness of these policies, they must be formulated in line with a vision of a modern and progressive city, which goes beyond the right to housing and the use of urban space, with a view to universalizing access to culture, leisure and sports.

From this analytical perspective, the present study proposes to address five fundamental issues: urban occupations are understood as forms of reaction to the socio-spatial segregation of peripheral populations; the institutional and social configuration of the municipalities contributes to the strengthening – or weakening – of the debate and the implementation of articulated housing policies; the articulation between different institutions has a direct impact on the reconfiguration of large urban centers; the institutionalization of democratic governance practices interferes with the representativeness and legitimacy of local governments; An integrative city-project acts as a potential tool in mitigating the urban deficit in a structuring way.

To this end, it will consolidate bibliographic research of normative documents - international treaties, Federal Constitution of 1988, infra-constitutional legislation, in comparison with quantitative data and vast specialized literature to demonstrate to what extent the reinforcement of local associative links and representative organizations influences the mobilized social capital and the consolidation of democratic practices.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The construction of inclusive cities requires an in-depth analysis of the theories that relate the right to the city, participatory democracy and housing policies. The concept of the right to the city, initially formulated by Henri Lefebvre (1968), has been expanded by contemporary authors such as Rolnik (2016) and Saule Júnior (2016), who understand it as a diffuse and collective right, capable of guaranteeing not only access to housing, but also to culture, leisure, transportation, and public services.

In this sense, the City Statute (Law No. 10,257/2001) represents, to this day, a fundamental legal framework by establishing guidelines for sustainable and inclusive urban development based on instruments such as the Special Zones of Social Interest (ZEIS) and the special urban adverse possession demonstrate how the legislation seeks to reconcile the

right to housing with the social function of property (Cafrune, 2016).

The literature also highlights the role of organized civil society in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Social housing movements, participatory councils, urban committees and conferences are examples of democratic governance practices that expand the representativeness and legitimacy of municipal decisions (Rubin, 1996; Amanajás; Klug, 2018).

These are mechanisms that reinforce the idea that the city must be built collectively, ensuring the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, such as homeless populations, women, the elderly, and LGBTQIAPN+ communities.

At the international level, documents such as the World Charter for the Right to the City (2005) and the Gwangju Principles (2015) consolidate the right to the city as an emerging human right, in line with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, especially Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 11, which provides for inclusive, safe and sustainable cities.

Despite normative and institutional advances, authors such as Rolnik (2024) point out the persistent gap between legislation and urban reality, marked by real estate speculation, gentrification, and housing deficit. This contradiction highlights the need to seek ways to strengthen the channels of participation and to institutionalize democratic practices that ensure the continuity of social policies aimed at broad access to housing.

3 METHODOLOGY

This article proposes an integrative review of the literature aimed at understanding the relationship between organized civil society, housing policies and the right to the city, taking the city of São Paulo as a case study. The choice for this cut is justified by the leading role of the capital of São Paulo in the processes of urban occupation and the relevance of social mobilizations around decent housing.

The research is exploratory and descriptive to identify how normative instruments and participatory practices have been applied in the construction of inclusive cities, as well as to analyze the impacts of urban occupations in the center of São Paulo.

The sample comprises normative instruments, notably the Federal Constitution of 1988, the Statute of the City (Law No. 10,257/2001), complementary legislation and international treaties on the right to the city and housing; works by authors such as Lefebvre (1968), Rolnik (2016, 2024), Saule Júnior (1997, 2016), Cafrune (2016), among others that

discuss urbanization, housing policies, and participatory democracy; data collected from the repositories of the Institute of Applied Economic Research, João Pinheiro Foundation and international organizations such as UN-Habitat; case studies, such as programs and initiatives aimed at the rehabilitation of idle spaces and urban occupations in the center of São Paulo.

Despite the geographical restriction to the city of São Paulo and the use of secondary data, the analysis sought to highlight convergences and divergences between theory, legislation and social practice in the management of the housing deficit in the capital of São Paulo.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE EXERCISE OF DEMOCRACY

The housing deficit in one of the largest metropolises in the world, marked by miscegenation and multiculturalism, has long been discussed. Even so, the city is home to a growing number of homeless people, a trend that intensifies over the years and mandates. The challenges related to housing go beyond housing policies, as there is a structural factor that makes it impossible to continue public policies aimed at the socially vulnerable population: the city deficit, a term coined by Raquel Rolnik (2016).

As it is understood as a diffuse and collective right, the right to the city must be exercised in each metropolis, town or city institutionally organized as a district, municipal or metropolitan administrative local unit, covering the urban space, as well as the rural or semi-rural surroundings that are part of its territory (Saule Júnior, 2016, p. 75).

The definitions of this right were extended to encompass not only the mere exercise of a faculty, but the duty – also of the population itself – to think about fair, inclusive and sustainable cities. To this end, the right to the city began to reveal socioeconomic nuances, considered an essential common good for the quality of life, and which requires a positive conduct of the State.

The right to the city is free of any form of discrimination, strives for an inclusive citizenship, with greater political participation, which fulfills its social functions and is composed of founding elements for its conformation as a diffuse and collective good, namely, the presence of quality public spaces, with gender equality, cultural diversity, inclusive economies and a common ecosystem that respects rural-urban links (Ibid., p. 75).

The relevance of this theme is so significant that, at the international level, the right to the city is recognized in several documents essential for its understanding as an emerging human right within the new urban agenda. Among them, the World Charter on the Right to the City (2005), the European Charter of Human Rights in Cities (Saint-Denis, 2000), Human Rights in Cities – Global Agenda (United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG, 2009), the City Charter on the Right to the City (Mexico, 2009) and the Rio de Janeiro Charter on the Right to the City, of the World Urban Forum (2010).

In addition, documents such as For a World of Inclusive Cities, the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (2013) and Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy and the Gwangju Principles for a City of Human Rights (2015) reinforce this debate and its growing importance.

In Brazil it was no different, as the provisions on the subject gained space during the redemocratization of the country, when the right to the city was improved in the legal and institutional spheres. In the provisions relating to the right to housing, the right to the city is guaranteed, as a logical antecedent of the former.

In the Urban Policy Chapter, which aims to order the full development of the city's social functions and ensure the well-being of its inhabitants, arts. 182 and 183 served as inspiration for the formulation and implementation of urban policy.

This policy, consolidated in Law No. 10,257/2001 (City Statute), has as its fundamental principle the promotion of the dignity of the human person, guiding guidelines and actions aimed at sustainable and inclusive urban development, considered to this day as a legal framework in the face of urban ills, especially those related to irregular housing and the absence of basic sanitation. land regularization actions and urbanization of informal settlements.

The Statute begins with the discipline of the use of urban property of the artificial environment and lists as main guidelines to guarantee the right to sustainable cities, which today are a new role model for the achievement of plural, democratic and progressive cities, the right to urban land, housing, basic sanitation, urban infrastructure, to transport and public services, to work and leisure.

In order to achieve its desideratum, over the years, Law No. 10,257/2001 gave rise to the creation of tools aimed at favoring possession for housing purposes, for the sake of the permanent permanence of the occupants, through mechanisms for the regularization of real estate, legal and political institutes, among which the Special Zones of Social Interest (ZEIS)

stand out, the concession of the real right of use, the concession of special use, the special adverse possession and the right of surface (Cafrune, 2016, p. 192).

The ZEIS are a clear example of how the right to housing and the right to the city are umbilically intertwined, as they fulfill a double function: in addition to establishing special conditions for the land regularization of low-income settlements, they also boost the production of new social housing units by public and private agents.

The extravagant legislation was not restricted to the Statute. Eight years later, came the urban demarcation and the legitimization of administrative possession, with Federal Law No. 11,977/2009, which provides for the Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program (MCMV) and the land regularization of settlements located in urban areas. This law sought to streamline the procedure for recognizing the factual situation of urban settlements, as occurs with the acquisitive prescription by extrajudicial means and with concessions and surface rights.

All this normative framework allowed the instrumentalization of a better management of urban space, especially from the edition of the aforementioned master plan, a procedure that was accompanied by popular participation throughout the process of elaboration of urban policy, from the conception of urban policy management, to its implementation, through specific municipal legislation.

Over time, other valuable instruments have emerged to ensure the social management and strategy of urban spaces, aimed at the democratic administration of the territory, among which conferences, councils and public hearings stand out to promote dialogue between local governments and civil society and provide "the appropriation and institutional recognition of the local social and cultural reality for the constitution of the rules, procedures and instruments aimed at making the right to the city effective" (Saule Júnior, 1997, p. 42).

For these two poles to interact effectively, it is essential to strengthen communication channels, always the first step in this process. As Rubim (1996, p. 75) points out, living in large urban centers necessarily means being inserted in multiple communicative dynamics.

Thus, it is not enough just to give voice to local populations, it is essential to listen to them. The importance of interpersonal relationships within organized groups lies exactly in this, as they expand and strengthen territorialized coexistence in different spaces of the city, each with its own demands and specificities.

4.2 HOUSING POLICY COMBINED WITH URBAN MANAGEMENT

Chronologically, the Brazilian urbanization process accelerated from the second half of the twentieth century, anchored in an expressive population growth. According to studies carried out by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), for the Brazilian Habitat III Report, between 1960 and 2010, urbanization grew 402%, from 32 million to 160 million people living in cities. Percentage-wise, in 1970, the urban population was 56%; in 1996, 78.4%; in 2010, 84.4% (IPEA, 2016).

But the rising urbanization, combined with the disorderly growth of cities, especially in developing countries, has generated consequences and challenges, especially in large centers, where segregation, informality and marginalization of some social strata have been observed, making the city a practically private environment for a very restricted layer of the population.

The rapid unplanned expansion of municipalities and cities means an increasing number of poor and vulnerable people living in precarious conditions, without adequate housing space or access to basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity and health services.

This means that the periphery accesses spaces of culture, leisure and sports, mostly, as service providers, or they cross these means on their way to work and from there to home. There is, therefore, no integration, belonging and participation for those who do not live in the city, but only work to keep it functioning for the benefit of a portion of society that effectively occupies and enjoys these spaces.

In an attempt to shorten the distances between the peripheral regions and the large centers, where the city actually takes place, during the 2000s, there was a reflection on the edition and execution of public policies for urban infrastructure in the country, especially to enable the exercise of the right to decent housing.

Large cities usually face different types of challenges to insert themselves in global economic spaces, to guarantee the population the minimum well-being, necessary for the consolidation of competitive democratic coexistence, as Borja (1996, p. 82) points out, namely, infrastructure, quality of life, social integration and governability.

This awareness leads economic agents to set objectives and carry out acts compatible with local government and of a collective nature. To be up to date with this requirement, it is necessary to have a city project, which can be designed from the transformation of urban infrastructure, which would facilitate the transition from the traditional industrial model to that

of a qualified tertiary center, so that local leadership, whether political or not, must be present and contribute to the construction of joint leadership.

4.3 HOUSING FOR THOSE WHO BUILD THE CITY

In the international sphere, the precursor document dealing with this matter appeared in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which enunciates the right to housing, enunciated in paragraph 1 of article 25, according to which everyone has the right to a standard of living sufficient to ensure health and well-being for him and his family, especially with regard to food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and has the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other cases of loss of means of subsistence due to circumstances beyond their control (United Nations, 1948).

In 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was adopted, whose article 11, § 1 enshrines the right to housing by recognizing the right of all people to an adequate standard of living and to the continuous improvement of their living conditions. Brazil internalized this commitment on July 6, 1992, through Decree No. 591.

Nationally, housing policy in the country was developed between the 1940s and 1960s, based on the Retirement and Pension Institutes, the Popular House Foundation and the creation of the National Housing Bank (Rubin; Bolfe, 2014).

The treatment of the housing issue, at the constitutional level, according to the 1988 Charter, is specifically provided for in article 6, specifically addressed, under the terms of article 23, item IX, which attributes to the Union, the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities, common competence for the promotion of housing construction programs and improvement of housing conditions and basic sanitation.

The importance of the right to housing, especially decent housing, has been among the social rights since Constitutional Amendment No. 26/2000, which added this subjective right to the category of social prerogative. Like the right to the city, the right to housing demands a positive attitude from the public entity as it appears as a prerogative of the private individual.

The enactment of the City Statute represented one of the great milestones in the consolidation of the right to the city, reaffirming its commitment to the right to housing as well. To implement the constitutional commandments, the Ministry of Cities was created in 2003,

with the mission of centralizing the financing and execution of essential policies for urban development. Among its main areas of activity, housing, land regularization, urban planning, transportation, mobility and sanitation, integrated city management and the promotion of decent living conditions for the population stand out.

In the same year that the Conferences of Cities and the Council of Cities were created, instruments for the strategic and democratic management of federal urban policies that also began to discuss the issue of housing, a process of strengthening social participation in the design of housing policies began.

This participatory framework was reinforced in 2005, with Law No. 11,124 (popular initiative), which established the National Social Interest Housing System (SNHIS) and the corresponding Fund (FNHIS), establishing guidelines and resources to guarantee decent housing and access to urbanized land for the low-income population.

Through this law, the National Housing Secretariat of the Ministry of Cities was established and coordinated the preparation of the National Housing Plan (PLANHAB), as an instrument for the implementation of the new National Housing Policy (PNH).

Regional and sectoral debates were also organized, including for direct monitoring by representatives of the Council of Cities and the Management Council of the National Fund for Social Interest Housing (CGFNHIS). PLANHAB represented not only a watershed in housing policy, but represented, for the time, a true exercise of social and political cooperation, structured with the contribution of various participatory bodies.

This process of institutional participation strengthened political dialogue and triggered structural changes in the Brazilian macroeconomic panorama: it raised average incomes, motivated federal actions to mitigate the effects of the global financial crisis, and leveraged the growth of credit and investments in the housing sector. These factors ensured the success of a long-term housing policy, aimed especially at low-income families through periodic reviews and articulation with the government's budgetary and financial planning instruments.

In 2007, it was the turn of Law No. 11,445/2007 to create the national guidelines for basic sanitation. In the same year, the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) was launched, which included projects aimed at social and urban infrastructure, covering areas such as housing, sanitation, mobility, risk reduction and water resources.

In 2009, the Minha Casa, Minha Vida (MCMV) Program was implemented, reestablished by Law No. 14,620/2023, to expand the housing stock to meet housing needs, especially for low-income families; improve the conditions of existing housing, correcting

inadequacies related to property ownership, structure, sanitation, infrastructure and public services; encourage the modernization of civil construction and technological innovation, promoting cost reduction, environmental sustainability and the qualification of housing production to expand the reach of the Program; strengthen the institutions involved and train public and private agents; and encourage the participation of micro and small companies, individual microentrepreneurs in civil construction and private non-profit entities in the program's actions.

The following year, Law No. 12,305/2010 came into force, which instituted the National Solid Waste Policy, followed by Law No. 12,587/2012, responsible for the National Urban Mobility Policy. Together, these legislations made two important financing programs possible, allocating significant resources to the development of cities and the implementation of strategic actions for urban sustainability.

Despite the extensive legislative and operational apparatus, the urban reality remains far from meeting the needs of the population (Rolnik, 2016). Thus, this disconnection highlights the fragility of public policies and opens space for the rise of social organizations and housing movements, which demand structural changes in the way of living and occupying the city.

Cafrune (2016) points out that the appropriation of urban spaces by all inhabitants is not only a right, but an urgent need. These territories should be recognized as spaces of diversity, strengthening of community relations, leisure and full exercise of citizenship, not as mere scenarios of systematic exclusion.

It is in these spaces that those excluded from the process of planning and construction of cities, such as migrants and refugees, women, young people, the elderly and people with disabilities, homeless populations, indigenous people and the LGBTQIAPN+ population, exercise their citizenship and claim the right to the city (Amanajás; Klug, 2018).

The expectation is that by 2030 the design of socially inclusive and safe public spaces will contribute to the reduction of urban inequalities and crime. SDG No. 11 has precisely this desideratum, that is, the construction of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements. However, with only five years to go, this timeline sounds more programmatic than feasible, especially because there is still a lack of practical answers on how to convert the excluded and invisible into full-fledged citizens.

At the same time that we agree on global goals, the challenge remains to translate these guidelines into concrete policies and projects that, in the city's daily life, promote the



effective participation and recognition of those who to this day live on the margins of the urban space.

4.4 LIVES ON THE MARGINS AND IDLE SPACES

The right to housing is much more than a simple shelter: it is the home where our dreams sprout, where we feel seen, safe and fully human. For methodological purposes, this article will be restricted to the municipality of São Paulo, which still faces severe and secular difficulties in the implementation of perennial housing policies, which is why it still concentrates a significant housing deficit.

For no other reason, it is one of the municipalities that has one of the highest coefficients of homeless people, very motivated by some factors in particular: gentrification, the criminalization of peripheral populations, real estate speculation, and still quite marked by a history of social exclusion whose factors already identified point to obstacles of the most diverse orders, associated with neoliberal macroeconomic policies and budget reserves, for example.

Faced with this scenario of social exclusion and structural challenges that profoundly mark the city of São Paulo, it has become urgent to adopt measures capable of reversing this situation and promoting more inclusive urban development.

It was in this context that, in November 2003, the Forum for Social and Economic Development of the Center of São Paulo and the Executive Coordination of Ação Centro were established, in partnership with the Municipal Urbanization Company (EMURB), which aimed at the general coordination of the actions of all sectors of the government, as well as the opening for a shared management with civil society in a broader way, and the Development Agency of the Center of São Paulo was created, linked to the Development Board of EMURB.

The structuring of the Ação Centro Rehabilitation Program started from the reading of the main axes of confrontation in terms of housing deficit in the city of São Paulo. In a study carried out in the early 2000s, when the Program was published, the first was the displacement of the elites and the popularization of the center, processes concomitant with the degradation of the constructed framework and the loss of the affective identity of the memory and history of São Paulo.

Over time, the inability of the center to offer tertiary spaces of the quality required by the market was verified, the disqualification of the public space and the deterioration of

historic properties reinforced the existence of empty buildings on the upper floors and occupied only on the ground floor.

For the time (2002), the agreement signed by the Ministry of Cities, Caixa Econômica Federal, Sinduscon (Union of the Civil Construction Industry of the State of São Paulo), Secovi (Union of Companies for the Purchase, Sale, Lease and Management of Residential and Commercial Properties of São Paulo), ASBEA (Brazilian Association of Architecture Offices), the IAB (Institute of Architects of Brazil), to produce social housing, as well as the use of resources from the Guarantee Fund for Length of Service (FGTS) intended to finance the renovation of buildings in the center for the production of apartments (Somekh, 2006, p. 268).

Subsequently, the Morar no Centro Program and the Integrated Habitat Recovery Perimeters (PRIH), developed by the Municipal Housing Secretariat, promoted the recovery of historic buildings and areas in the area. As a result, the socioeconomic profile of the population was transformed, which gave rise to the discussion between the public and private sectors about the guidelines for an economic strategy of the center.

Important legal institutions remained in the region, as well as popular commerce centers and specialized streets, and the seat of the Municipal Power was installed there, which gave impetus to the offer of leisure, culture and tourism services. Even so, in terms of habitability, there is a very significant shortage.

The most recent data from the João Pinheiro Foundation (FJP), from 2022, show that more than half of the housing deficit in the country, which totals 6,205,314 households, that is, 52% or 3,242,780 households, is directly related to the cost of rent. In the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP), especially in the central region, this percentage reaches almost 70%, according to data released this year by the FJP.

Historically, housing policy in Brazil has focused on the construction of own homes, with subsidized interest, as in the case of Minha Casa, Minha Vida. However, even with subsidies that reach 95%, as in the case of Track 1 of the program, many social groups, living on the edge, are unable to pay the installments. These groups earn enough to survive on a day-to-day basis, but not to cover the costs of financed housing, which means that the programs end up benefiting higher income brackets (Rolnik, 2024).

This difficulty in paying rent is also reflected in the ability of families to keep paying the installments of financed properties. Among those included in the MCMV program, Track 1,

aimed at the population with a gross monthly income of up to R\$ 2,640.00 (two thousand six hundred and forty reais), many face major obstacles to honor financial commitments.

This shows that the housing problem is not limited to the scarcity of available units, but rather to the lack of conditions for these houses, whether produced by public policies or by the market, to be effectively accessible to the portion of the population that needs it most.

We understand that the market should be responsible for meeting the solvable demand, just as the low-income population should be served by the Government (Somekh, 2006, p. 268). Based on the understanding that urban legislation is disjointed, becoming a non-effective instrument of regulation.

In this context, social interest housing emerges, with the purpose of guaranteeing the right to housing for families living in urban areas and having a monthly income of up to R\$ 8,000.00 (eight thousand reais). In addition to meeting this fundamental need, housing is directly linked to economic development, job and income generation, and improved living conditions of the urban population (Brasil, 2023).

It should be recalled that the precursors of the initiatives for HIS programs, in addition to the MCMV Program, the Morar no Centro Program, aimed at guaranteeing social housing in the central area and attracting new middle-class residents to the place, was conceived in conjunction with the Ação Centro Program for the rehabilitation of downtown São Paulo, reorganizing the previous PROCENTRO, reformulated in 2001, which provided for defining general guidelines for the central area and which had been obtaining limited intervention results (Somekh, 2006, p. 266).

To ensure its objectives, the Morar no Centro program was divided into the following actions and subprograms: housing provision; renovation and recycling of buildings for housing; social leasing; improvements in tenements; the PRIH; special project Parque do Gato and application of new urban instruments.

The demand for housing provision was met through a partnership with the Municipal Housing Secretariat (SEHAB) in conjunction with the Metropolitan Housing Company of São Paulo (COHAB), Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) and social movements active in the center. Considering, on the one hand, the small supply of land and, on the other hand, the large number of empty and abandoned buildings existing in the region, it was decided to renovate these buildings, preferably the construction of new ones.

The social movements had already been operating the CEF's Residential Lease Program (PAR) aimed at serving families with an income of up to six minimum wages, through



lease for 15 years, at the end of which the resident has the option to buy the property. To be able to serve lower-income families, SEHAB negotiated specific federal resources for subsidy, created fee exemptions and incentives to reduce costs.

SEHAB's actions in the center, organized by the PRIH, were not limited to the production of housing: they also promoted improvements in tenements, recovery of historical heritage and public spaces, and the provision of cultural, health, education, and income generation programs. This integrated model aimed to raise the quality of life and work of the poorest residents.

Joint action gives effectiveness to good ideas in terms of housing policies, most of which have already been thought of and already put into practice. On the other hand, what taints the effectiveness of these programs is precisely the discontinuity, the lack of commitment to the continuity and maintenance of urban policy, because it is known that many of these actions end up being used for the personal promotion of rulers who, at the end of their terms, only show that everything was a government project, not municipal. This factor contributes to the maintenance of the high rates of homeless people.

4.5 URBAN HOUSING POLICIES: BEING, BEING AND REMAINING

The value of the use of spaces, of the encounter, of and through simultaneities, of oneself and of the other, of living together (Oliveira; Neto, op. cit., p. 7). Recognized by several nations, this right is elevated to the universal category of the right of individuals, an innate characteristic of fundamental rights. Cities and homes shape our identity, being essential for access to education, employment opportunities, healthy living, and strengthening community engagement.

For this reason, adequate housing, as a universal human right, must be at the center of urban policy and be considered an integral part of the right to a decent standard of living, something that goes far beyond simply having four walls and a roof. For a house to be suitable, many factors need to be taken into account: where it is located, its accessibility, and the availability of basic services such as water, sanitation, and drainage.

There are countless obstacles to be overcome by the Administration, among which the need to find integrated and non-sectoral responses to housing problems stand out; the configuration of new spaces and mechanisms that stimulate political participation, facilitate the relationship between administrations and those administered, and promote the organization of social groups.



According to UN-Habitat's Global Urban Observatory, public housing accounts for less than 15% of total housing units, in both developed and developing countries. At the same time, over the past two decades, housing values have skyrocketed, pushing low-income families farther and farther to the peripheries in search of financially viable options. These indicators clearly demonstrate that the current real estate market model has not been able to offer affordable housing to the poorest.

In addition, accessing and securing well-located land, especially in large cities such as São Paulo, where vast urban areas have been systematically excluded from infrastructure development opportunities, also takes on special relevance from an environmental point of view as well.

Debates on decarbonization have highlighted the paramount need to move away from development patterns that promote carbon-intensive urban sprawl and generate dependence on fossil fuels (Frediani; Cociña, 2024). Urban sprawl can lead to increased emissions due to transportation and infrastructure construction, and can lead to water contamination and deforestation.

A study by the Inter-American Development Bank shows that, in Brazil, the average spending of families on items such as transportation and other services can be up to 45% higher for families living on the outskirts of cities than for those living in central areas. Housing relocation tends to be less sustainable than on-the-spot improvement programs, as well as worsening the social and economic conditions of displaced people (Duren, 2017).

In recent years, housing groups have developed projects to improve, regularize and guarantee the lease of occupied buildings in downtown São Paulo through modernization initiatives. These projects were conceived under the aegis of the MCMV program, which supported the development of self-managed housing projects led by social movements in collaboration with technical consultants.

In addition to modernization projects and new housing, to promote on-site improvement programs as a way to prioritize location, another collective strategy of social movements is the optimization of resources to promote clean energy and the more sustainable use of materials, in addition to reducing the cost of living and expenses for residents of social housing.

Research in low-income settlements shows that implementing healthy, low-cost energy efficiency initiatives (WHO, 2014) has not only reduced electricity consumption and



carbon dioxide emissions, but has also resulted in substantial annual savings for communities.

It is these experiences that contribute to broader efforts led by social housing movements and the technical consultants who work with them, who are constantly looking for ways to innovate with building materials and resources to make housing more affordable and sustainable.

5 CONCLUSION

Adequate housing is a universal human right, and should be at the center of urban and urban policies. Currently, more than half of the global population lives in urban areas, and it is estimated that approximately a quarter of these inhabitants reside in slums or informal settlements, regions marked by poor housing conditions.

In general, these people have not had access to decent work opportunities that would allow them to obtain an income compatible with the high costs of living in the center, where their respective workplaces are concentrated. As a result, this portion of the population becomes more vulnerable to forced removals, which can lead them to face homelessness.

One of the greatest challenges of our democracy may be related exactly to the institutional and social reality of the municipalities, either due to the fragility of local mechanisms for guaranteeing citizenship rights and the high degree of social inequalities, or due to the existing civic culture pattern, which blocks the conformation of public spheres and the participation of society. focusing, therefore, on the possibilities of interaction between government and society.

Democratic governance, the patterns of interaction between government institutions, market agents and social actors that coordinate and simultaneously promote social inclusion agendas expand social participation in decision-making processes in urban and housing policies, which require coherence and continuity to pursue accessibility, regardless of the price of land.

The transformation of urban centers emerges from the convergence of essential factors: the alignment and cooperation between public and private actors, the configuration of effective political and civic leadership, and the consensus among citizens to drive the socio-cultural progress of the city. In this way, the project not only presents itself as a response to social and humanitarian challenges, but also as a powerful instrument for local development.

It is likely that decisive issues that must be faced today by Latin American cities will be addressed and resolved with urban actors, i.e., articulation of public and private agents; creation of qualified public spaces; reconstruction of civic culture; political-administrative reform to make local governments more efficient and more participatory and, above all, modernization of urban infrastructure.

The institutionalization of democratic governance practices and the success of local experiences in the formulation of responsive public policies depend directly on the way in which institutional arrangements are structured, which should: (i) stop clientelism and the capture of public spheres by corporate and particularist interests, through transparent procedures and the propagation of a democratic culture capable of overriding non-democratic politics; (ii) foster horizontal participation structures, capable of generating social capital; (iii) empower groups in situations of vulnerability, reducing the impact of asymmetric power relations; (iv) strengthen associative links, mobilizations and local representative organizations, encouraging interaction between the various actors in the public sphere.

The definition of a strategic plan must build and/or modify the image that the city has of itself and that which is held of it abroad. To the extent that it is a response to a sense of crisis, which is the result of the desire to enter new global economic and cultural spaces and which intends to integrate a population that often feels excluded or little considered, the city-project is a project of communication and mobilization in the city and of internal and external promotion of the city.

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