RECENT REQUALIFICATION PROJECTS FOR PUBLIC SPACES IN SÃO PAULO DOWNTOWN AREA

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INTRODUCTION

Brazilian process of re-democratization, which occurred during the 1980’s, after over two decades of military rule (1964-1985), gave rise to a new Constitution (1988) which, among other improvements, empowered governments at the municipal and state level, providing them with more efficient instruments for the development of public policies of social interest. New amendments have been made to that Constitution so as to incorporate the theme of social housing within an inclusive vision, integrating other issues such as public transportation and services, collective facilities and open spaces.

Such an effort meant an outstanding progress if compared to previous housing policies, mainly those which were implemented since the military regimen. From 1964 to 1986, masses of social housing developments were built supported by the BNH - Banco Nacional da Habitação (National Bank for Housing Development). Many of them turned out to be true disasters both socially and environmentally. These enterprises consisted in the construction of hundreds of precarious dwellings that comprised the same building design and were established uniformly altogether on huge sites, that usually were located in the outskirts of the cities, therefore lacking infra-structure and services, eventually turning into true urban ghettos. For such a housing policy, quantity and not quality, was the main goal. The landscape of the chosen sites was totally ignored in terms of its biophysical features; vegetation was removed, the hydrographic basis was canalized and rich topographic surfaces were reduced to tabula rasa. The result of
this approach was an urban and flat square grid that kept no relationship with the historical landscape nor related to the existing city.

The problems that arise from such an incisive disruption between the social settlements and the urban fabric were aggravated by the increase in urban population that occurred in the country, in the midst of a situation of economic crisis, inflation and depression.2 From the 1970's on, the majority of Brazilian population gradually started migrating to the urban areas; today it comprises 90% of the whole country population,3 60% of which can be found in metropolitan areas, São Paulo being the greatest of them all with its 17.9 million inhabitants.

In this process, São Paulo’s urban surface expanded with the increase in the number of shantytowns – favelas – and the binomials “illegal lots and self-built residences”, that is, houses that are erected by its own dwellers, in sites that are not legalized, with no infra-structure and thus out of the so-called formal real state business (the illegal city). Today this metropolis is characterized by an aggressive environmental pattern presenting the biggest concentration of low-income people in the country. The majority of this population live in the outskirts, although smaller groups occupy some areas in its “extended downtown” – a space that comprises the Historical Center and surrounding neighborhoods – living in sub-normal houses and cortiços (degraded houses that are shared by large number of poor families under precarious conditions).

In São Paulo, these changes took place in the middle of a process of deindustrialization followed by an outstanding development of the non-profit sector, from the 1970’s on. The Historical Center however had already suffered a serious process of environmental degradation, being emptied out of fancy office space and financial headquarters of important corporations, and lose of urban prestige; this occurred along with real state valorization of other city vectors, to where those offices were moved. Besides losing several of its residents (11% in the 1980’s), many downtown buildings became either vacant or with only few inhabitants, situation that reached its peak at the end of 1990’s when 30% of this area was showing theses signs of low occupation.

This period stresses, for the metropolis, an aggravation of social differences, spatial segregation and urban violence. Parks, piazzas and other open spaces gradually exhibit safety measures adopting several types of enclosure and watching devices; many streets are closed for the sake of protection; enclosed condominiums proliferate and so do other kinds of restricted entrance residential areas. Facing a historic process in which the access to the housing market is very limited and with no credit lines for low-income people, parts of the population have no other option but to seek for illegal alternatives. In São Paulo half of the dwellings of the last two decades were illegally built.4

On the other hand, in the beginning of the seventies social movements started to advocate for better urban life conditions in the metropolis, fighting for housing, water and health. Those movements grew stronger in the following years in consonance with the political atmosphere of the time, where society was searching to re-establish democracy and put an end to military dictatorship. At that time, technical advisors started to work together with the housing movements, enriching the discussion of the problems and experiencing other forms of participatory design. This approach was incorporated by the municipal government of São Paulo, in the beginning of the 1990’s, opening spaces for political action and implementing new paradigms for the housing problem such as self-management of self-built dwellings and local responsibility.

These concepts at that moment were aligned with the new terms of the recently ratified Federal Constitution, which represented an important step towards the implementation of social interest policies. This Constitution incorporated the principle of the urban property social function, which was regulated in 2000 by a federal law named Estatuto da Cidade (Statute of the City). The passing of this law occurred at the same time when local governments were committed to urban social

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1 That mass house production was implanted in a traditional way (and not an industrialized one which would be less labor-intensive). The purpose was to use the civil construction sector as a driver of financial and economic activity as well as a job-generating action.
2 The economic depression that hit Brazil in the 1970’s – which had the international oil crisis as one of its causes – was further aggravated in the 1980’s, this period being considered “the lost decade” by Brazilian analysts. A slow and unstable recovery emerged as the new century started. Economic indicators still presented signs of inflation.
3 This is equivalent to approximately 15 million people.
issues, giving rise to intervention policies for areas populated by the poor, in
consonance with the social movements call for housing.

In comparison to the 60's and 70's, one of the changes of the political
approach to low-income housing refers to "favelas" urbanization programs,
replacing the old construction model of huge housing developments apart from
the city. With the creation of the Ministério das Cidades (State Ministry for the
Cities), in 2003, new directions are being taken in relation to the national
housing policy, which broadens the access of the poorest to the financing of
dwellings, with scheduled subsidies, incentive schemes and several other legal
measures concerning the ownership of the land. This new policy upholds the idea
of the housing settlements in an integrated way which encompasses urban services,
transportation and open spaces.

In São Paulo, the municipal program called Morar no Centro (Living
Downtown)5 follow those guidelines, aiming at the requalification of the metropolis
downtown region.6 This program's objective (active since 2001) is to improve the
life conditions of downtown dwellers, as well as to attract new inhabitants for the
area. It is a wide range intervention that covers 13 districts with results expected
in the mid-term. The program works with social interest housing and comprises five
kinds of action: social renting (implemented in governmental utilities for previously
enlisted families); social leasing (financing people who have a monthly income of
3 to 6 minimum wages); letter of credit (it can be either individual or collective, for
families that make up to 10 minimum wages, so as to sustain small business
ventures that are managed by associations); temporary housing (for families that
come from risky areas or those who await social renting or leasing); and the
corticos sub-program (new houses for families who live in crowded degraded
buildings).7

The implementation of those programs can either encompass lots or
individual buildings – to be recycled for housing purposes – or focus on certain
areas that are delimited with specific criteria, named Habitat's Integrated
Rehabilitation Perimeters (PRIHs). The word habitat, defined as the "place of
life", involves the existence and the need of a space that goes far beyond the
individual or the familiar level, extending to associative life, to the public sphere.
Therefore, the meaning of habitat is closely related to the notion of a place where
people live in an integrated way.

Each PRIH comprises a specific group of blocks whose main features are
the high concentration of precarious dwellings, the scarceness or even total
absence of open spaces and little collective equipment. During the first phase of
the program's implantation, the Municipal Government created six intervention
perimeters, which were called 'Special Zones of Social Interest' (ZEIS) in the
Strategic Master Plan of the City of São Paulo. The so-called ZEIS focuses mainly
in urban renewal, land regulation, the construction of social interest housing, the
recovery of deteriorated real state, the implantation of social and cultural
facilities, open spaces, local services and business.8

URBAN INTERVENTION PROJECTS / LABPARC

The basic proposal of the work accomplished by LABPARC, in association
with the Municipal Government, for the Perimeters in the neighborhoods of Luz and
Glicério, was that the interventions on public spaces should be substantial and not
palliative nor superficial. In fact, the proposed interventions are deliberately limited
to spatial situations in which there were proper conditions for the immediate
implantation of the projects in the short term. However, rather than being a limiting
factor this is actually a very important condition to achieve the main goal of the
project, which is to facilitate the connections of the people who live and work there
with the collective space and with its dimension. as a public asset. Therefore, for
this purpose, it is not necessary that the action be physically great; it is important to

5 Programa Morar no Centro (Living Downtown Program), Municipal Office of Housing and Urban
6 In spite of being an easily accessible region, equipped with infrastructure and featuring districts
that contain around 23,8% of the formal jobs in the county, a sizable part of the population is made
out of low-income people, living under precarious conditions: in those areas one finds around 20%
of the cortico dwellers in the metropolis, along with the homeless.
7 Programa Morar no Centro, 2002.
8 Plano Diretor Estratégico de São Paulo, ART. 51, 2002.
be meaningful in the place, that is, it should be able to promote the identification of the persons with the space of intervention and that its effects are enduring due to the collective experience, even though this collective dimension is full of contradictions and conflicts.

One of the main purposes of LABPARC is to work for the quality and meaning of the open spaces it designs. Thus, the Laboratory seeks to stimulate the participation not only of the dwellers but also of the people who develop other activities in the Perimeters, in the decisions to be made, from the program to the formal concept of the projects. This approach is developed on an unstable basis, demanding a continuous revision and proposition of methodological procedures, so that it can be a balance between people’s needs, desires and perceptions and the professional’s point of view.

To work close to the persons who live in those Perimeters is a guiding principle of LABPARC’s projects. Nevertheless, the feasible places for interventions are not always evident because, on one hand, public spaces are exiguous in those areas and, in the other hand, although it is expected that people understand the importance of public areas, sometimes they express no interest in those spaces, nor recognize the opportunities that are opened to their effective appropriation.

Since then urbanization spread out rapidly. Because of the straight links between industrialization and the railway, several housing developments were built for the working class, besides warehouses and other industrial premises. The neighborhood progressively attracted popular and specialized types of business – ironware, agribusiness products and also wedding custom’s shops – which gave the region the physiognomy it has today.

Due to the proximity of the downtown area, the PRIH – LUZ can count on good infra-structure network, especially in terms of public transportation. However the very presence of the train station, the large streets with intense and heavy traffic, the existence of industrial functions, the concentration of low-income population and the characteristics of the predominant kind of business didn’t make the region attractive to real state investors. As a result of all these factors, the area hasn’t received, for a long time, neither private nor public investments (except for the building of a subway line). Thus it has turned out to be a poor neighborhood in the downtown area, where a great number of houses became crowded cantos that hold precarious living conditions. Additionally, it lacks equipment utilities to fulfill daily needs of its inhabitants and public open spaces for leisure, recreation and social gathering.

In the Perimeter with 28 ha., there is only one small area – #8 in the map - of circa 1,000 m², which can be used for those activities, that means only 0.35% of the whole. Besides its insignificant size, this small area is enclosed within a group of houses for the labour class built in the beginning of the XX century, named Villa Economizadora, which can be considered a space with certain autonomy from the rest of the Perimeter. In fact, “it belongs” to the dwellers of the Villa, which inhibits its appropriation by other users of the neighborhood.
Thus in the referred Perimeter, except for the case related above, one doesn’t find a single plaza. Since this is a low-income neighborhood, the lots are very small and in general they have their area totally built, which means that even in their private properties people lack free spaces. Due to the changes in the land use which, among other things, transformed the industrial facilities into “low vitality” spaces (parking lots that are used by business operations not directly connected to the inhabitants’ needs), the expressions of collective life are seldom found in the neighborhood.

Therefore, the use of the public space for recreation or social meeting are not explicit in the landscape. It demands a special attention in order to find proper spots where these uses could take place. The spaces which appeared to be the most promising ones were sections of dead-end streets; these streets exist due to the presence of the railway in the boundaries of the Perimeter, which blocks them. If this fact creates a special quiet atmosphere, with barely any traffic in the area, on the other hand they turned out to be streets that are forgotten and rejected. Nevertheless, if they are properly designed, they can become special places to be appropriated by the people who live there.

There are three streets that meet these conditions: #5, #6 and #7. In one of them – #5 – the project proposed a playground specially designed for children, and tables and seats for people of all ages. The idea of its transformation into an area for leisure and recreation was carefully discussed with the population, through workshops and other kinds of meetings, where a great number of people were invited to participate, so as to identify their needs and desires. After the design proposal was elaborated, it was presented in an open meeting where not only the dwellers who were already fully involved in the process attended but also other people who had never showed up in the workshops. At that time an open conflict took place between those two parts: on one side, people committed to the project requiring only few adaptations; on the other side a small group that denied the proposal and were not open for the dialogue. The architects from LABPARC together with the ones from the municipality, tried to establish a process of mediation between the antagonist parts, seeking to point out aspects that could be negotiated, with the purpose of conciliating the different interests. It was not possible to reach consensus, once the small group systematically refused to negotiate its convictions; for these people the proposed improvements would “attract the homeless and the people from the cortiços who could cause problems”. Such an assumption reveals strong prejudices against people who already share the spaces in the same neighborhood (there is one shelter and also a “house of prayers” for the homeless and several cortiços on the same street).

Because of those new circumstances, a popular inquiry was made with all of the people living on that street. In short – based on the design propositions – people were stimulated to decide which elements should remain and which should be left aside. The results were very optimistic and suggested a few changes in the project. This negotiation culminated with the presentation of the results of the popular consultation to the dwellers of that street. The population, then, demonstrated satisfaction with the conduction of the participatory process and
during this meeting, that was held outdoors in the middle of the street, people were so motivated with the possibilities of transformation of the place that they decided to elect a mini-council (that included children and adults) to deal with the management of the street.

Another experience that was relevant in the neighborhood refers to the small playground at Vila Economizadora - #8. In the first place, a workshop was accomplished with the residents of the Vila, with the purpose of identifying the specific problems and potentialities of that place according to the people who lived in the surroundings, so that the municipality could have the necessary data for an immediate local action. Along this workshop, each participant received a sheet of paper with a drawing of the playground area; then they were asked to express their expectations through sketches. After that, small groups (of children and adults) were organized and at first, each participant would manifest his individual proposals. Once the personal contributions were made they would conceive (again through drawings) a collective activities program for the area. At this very moment objective problems emerged related to several issues such as the administration of the place, different program perceptions of the residents and also different attitudes concerning the municipality. The social organizations involved in the process\(^8\) (8) participated then as mediators between people and government, willing to conciliate the different demands, adjusting them with budget constrains and discussing alternatives that could be feasible.

Concerning the management of that space, antagonist perceptions arose: the residents wanted controlled access to the playground (with fences and gates) for alleged safety reasons. Representatives of the public administration responsible for the construction (and perhaps the management) of the area, argued that it wouldn’t be licit to use public funds to build and manage an enclosed space that would be used by a restricted number of citizens (the Vila Economizadora residents). The argumentation that in São Paulo public parks are enclosed and subject to restricted access subject to time and are eventually closed but still remain public ran against another argument of the municipality: there were no financial resources to maintain an employee in the place responsible for opening and closing the gate and also for watching the playground. The solution presented was that the residents should be responsible for the administration of the area, which gave rise to several other questions: who would do that? Who would be available and willing to perform such a task? Could the municipal government consider the playground a public space, in order to do the maintenance of it, once the area would have a restricted use? Is an ongoing process but what has already occurred can be considered extremely positive for it motivated people to participate on the destinies of a public space in their neighborhood, discussing the forms of organization for its administration.

Another significant example involving local businessmen refers to a commercial street named São Caetano – #3 known as the “Brides’ Street”, because of the high concentration of stores that sell wedding garments and paraphernalia. For this project funds were made available by means of an IDB (Interamerican Development Bank) loan; the idea then, was to design the first block because of its high visibility. At that time there was not an organized businessman association, so in the beginning the participatory process could not take place. In spite of that the design concept for this street was presented to the community at PRIH-Luz along with the other projects. The idea was simple: the sidewalks would be widened after the desatification of parking zones, in an extension of about 60 meters. Although simple this would give the area a formal and functional quality it lacks today, for this would allow the planting of trees, the placement of seats, waste baskets, public telephone booths, among others.

The very presentation of this proposal made the businessmen aware of their street. Afterwards they re-activated their association and started to lead a process aiming at the rehabilitation of the whole street. In order to develop a preliminary design, the LABPARC team attended several meetings with the retailers. The first step was to gather information about their aspirations for the street. In general, they wanted to add value to buildings of architectonic interest, improve the paving conditions of the sidewalks, plant trees and provide comfortable conditions for the pedestrians with some urban equipment. The problem was that the sidewalks were

\(^8\) LABPARC, Escritório Antenna e Centro Gaspar Garcia de Direitos Humanos.
narrow and crowded, with the presence of several "objects" placed without criteria. To meet their expectations, it was necessary to "open" space using the street, eliminating some parking areas and repeating, in a determined rhythm, the proposed solution for the beginning of the street. At each 60 or 70m, approximately, there would be a shortening of the street and consequently an opportunity for widening the sidewalks, allowing the implantation of these "green nuclei" and attending the required demands.

The whole majority of the businessmen joined this process of urban renewal; this was a necessary condition for the retailers to take part in another municipal program, called "Commercial Streets", in which the government contracts and manages the projects, and the cost of construction is partially divided among the businessmen. Afterwards, there were meetings with government technicians in order to match the proposals with the demands of the infrastructure systems, of the universal design (special needs of disabled people), and the traffic and parking of vehicles. Finally, in the beginning of this year, the contract was signed between the businessmen association and the municipal government for the implantation of the project.

B. Habitat's Integrated Rehabilitation Perimeters in the Neighborhood of Glicério (PRIH-Glicério).

The PRIH-Glicério is located in a region where the urbanization process took place in the beginning of the XX century. Its occupancy was avoided until then because it is situated in the flood plain of the Tamanduateí river. Because of this singularity it has always been a poverty-stricken area, with houses for the labour class, although that was no industries around because of the lack of the railway. During the first half of the century the region — specially the sector that was closer to downtown — experienced a period of growth when many buildings started to be constructed. Thus the landscape of the region today is a mix between small groups of low-income houses and tall apartment buildings, many of them transformed into cortiços. Because it is an old neighborhood, like Luz, Glicério lacks public open spaces — parks and plazas — for people's leisure and social interaction. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that the region was teared up by freeway overpasses, that had an enormous impact in the landscape, deteriorating the living conditions of the neighborhood to a higher extent. Several homeless people live beneath these overpasses, which makes these places even more segregated. Being located in the vicinity of the downtown area thus next to offices and stores they present a great concentration of street collectors of paper, cardboard and others kinds of recyclable materials, who do the separation and storage of those materials usually under the freeways or even in degraded houses.

For all those reasons it was even more difficult to find signs of public life in Glicério than in the Luz neighborhood. In order to be able to work with this population the LABPARC team decided that the first step would be to find out about the perceptions and values of the population towards the public space and also to observe the "spatial practices" that already occur there. In order to achieve these goals a qualitative research was developed along four workshops with only a few number of participants (six, at the most); this format was chosen so as to let people express themselves freely and comfortably; then they were encouraged to speak, draw or build models within a cozy atmosphere that was specially created for the occasion. All the participants were residents of the neighborhood; some of them lived in "normal" houses, others in cortiços, cheap hotels and shelter homes for the poor.

The oral reports were the richest ones in terms of information. They pointed out the problems people have in their relationship with the public space, which in this Perimeter is basically restricted to the streets. In the beginning of the workshops, people expressed their fear in using these spaces, for they were considered unsafe and violent. But as the workshops went on in a progressively relaxed atmosphere with people exchanging their experiences and other connections to the place, the predominance of negative feelings about the neighborhood increasingly weakened — which in this particular case revealed not only the rough reality of daily life but also some misconceptions about the general
idea of unsafeness at public places in São Paulo, strongly enforced by television and other media; this was an important moment in the process, which reinforced the role of the methodological approach of qualitative research, in this case responsible for revealing a rich universe of people’s experiences, sometimes covered up by “roles” that they tend to represent in front of others.

In short, all the information gathered in the workshops were extremely valuable for understanding the limitations and potentialities of action on the public open space. They allowed for instance a better understanding not only of how the residents of Glicério suffer from the total absence of areas for meeting, leisure and recreation but also of how to identify their interest in seeing their neighborhood filled with such spaces.

Based on the information collected in the workshops and the several in loco visits the LABPAREC team accomplished around the neighborhood some possibilities of intervention arose for the PRH – Glicério. In general, they would refer to actions that demand a small investment, situated in areas that although intended to be public are not used as such, or other places that are sub-used because of present conditions.

Some of the proposals for Glicério cover the sector situated in the north of the freeways that linked the regions apart in two disjuncted areas. They are:

- #15: landscape valorization of the existing stairway which connects two streets that have a 4m. difference in level;
- #18 and #13: requalification of small leisure areas;
- #19: rehabilitation of a “green area” which separates the local streets from the heavy traffic near the freeway. This area, although of narrow dimensions, turns out to be a strategic spot for the delimitation as well as the improvement of the visual aspects in the neighborhood space. Another important aspect is that the area is already (although incipiently) used by people.

In the southern part, some of the areas are:

- #11: the annexation of one sub-used lane, to the sidewalks, improving the integration with the space already used by people near an existing bar;
- #4: implantation of a recreation area in a section of a dead end;
- #5: enlargement and arborization of a sidewalk next to the “Pólo da Terceira Idade” (Elderly social center), an important reference in the neighborhood;
- renewal of the existing squares named José Luis de Mello Malheiros and Nina Rodrigues, that nowadays are practically unaccessible to the residents because of their insular condition in the middle of vehicle traffic.

A possible spatial integration between the northern and southern sectors was considered, working along the streets that separate them today, using the very elements responsible for this aggressive disconnection as key parts of their reintegration. Nowadays, the empty spaces underneath the freeway named Radial Leste-Oeste and its sequence, the Glicério’s overpass, form together a segregated and unsafe space with bad maintenance that is usually avoided by the residents of...
PRIH – Gilcério and also by the people who happen to pass by. Such a space – #18 – presents however a potential for rehabilitation through design that could encompass paving recuperation, urban graffiti (including painted walls) and other artistic outpourings besides public lighting, etc. thus becoming a pedestrian link between those two sectors.

Thus the proposed interventions at José Luís de Mello Malheiros e Nina Rodrigues squares referred above could help the creation of a "connected network" suitable to pedestrian use, integrating the northern and southern parts of Radial Leste-Oeste Avenue. Here’s the possibility of establishing a quality landscaped track that ends at the stairway on Anita Ferraz St., goes through the rehabilitated open space along Dr. Lund St., passes through the voids of Radial Leste-Oeste and Gilcério’s overpass, which would be livable areas until it reaches José Luís de Mello Malheiros and Nina Rodrigues squares.

COMMENTS ON THE EXPERIENCE

The experience of research and design developed for the public spaces of the mentioned ‘Perimeters’ threw the lack of collective open spaces into clear perception, from a quantitative as well as from a qualitative point of view, in the downtown area of the metropolis of São Paulo. On the other hand, it brought up unusual opportunities related to the creation of places that transcended the more traditional spatial categories destined to the communities’ recreation, leisure and the social gathering. Considering the public space as a great and pervasive factor in the social urban fabric that takes into account the diversity of daily life’s activities and functions, it was possible to identify several opportunities, imperceptible at first sight, even in degraded and heavily urbanized areas. All the experience pointed out to the need for conceptual and methodological deepening in order to properly address these new approaches.

As for the participatory process itself, one noted the importance of working with democratic approaches that give the engaged population a sense of having influenced the decisions that affect their daily life; besides, for pragmatic reasons there is a chance of making less mistakes, thus favoring a better user’s appropriation.

A preliminary evaluation of this experience allowed for the identification of a number of aspects capable of stimulating further research:

... The area of community participatory design is usually one full of contradictions (i.e. the case of Djalma Dutra Street, at PRIH-Luz). It is extremely important to seek alternatives that can deal with conflicts as they emerge, so as to guarantee a balanced participation of all the citizens involved, promoting the mediation of differing conditions. In this process it is necessary not to surrender to easy and convenient "way-outs", legitimating the opinions of the majority, but to search for more inclusive practices, where the minorities can express their ideas and have their needs fulfilled in the same way the others do. On the other hand it is equally important to be very keen to precisely detect where the minority group is not that one with only a different view of the on-going processes, being capable of giving a good contribution with special perceptions of the issues, but it is actually a group that wishes to create turmoil in the process, or expresses an extremely personal position that has nothing to do with the collective benefits that are being constructed;

...The so-called local leadership is not always made up of true leaders; sometimes they are merely more eloquent individuals that in group activities are able to express themselves easily. It is important to allow that not only the representatives speak in the name of the community, but that the constituency does the same. In other cases it is important to identify the "relevant" ones, persons who are symbolical of the perceptions of some specific groups that share similar values and demands;

... In some situations where the participatory process is established, it is possible to count with the community from the start. But some other times when a previous level of organization does not exist it is necessary to motivate the community
towards collective goals. In the case of São Caetano St. (at PRIH-Luz) it was the existence of a preliminary (but yet very flexible to adjustments) conceptual plan that made people aware of the problems (and also potentials) of their neighborhood environment and even helped the reorganization of an extinct businessmen association:

In what concerns the relationship between the community and the professionals involved in participatory projects, it is important to establish a good level of communication, avoiding excesses of technical or sophisticated vocabulary. The opposite (technicians trying to speak in an extremely “popular” way) sounds fake and could lead people into feeling that their capacity of understanding is being underestimated. Besides it is important, for them, to improve their knowledge about urban issues, increasing their vocabulary and comprehension of technical approaches. It is nonetheless fundamental that the architects exercise a careful listening of the senses that are brought up and accuracy in apprehending their meanings, once frequently such local groups are weak in defending their positions in public. In this political arena, while the professionals keep an important role in problem detection, suggestions and proposition of responses, they must avoid the exercise of “competent speech”\(^{11}\), which specifics could be otherwise utilized as a silencing means of other reported narratives.

The debate on management of public spaces has sought solutions for problems linked to its sustainability. Until recently such an enterprise was almost exclusively attributed to public administration (involving maintenance, inspections and design adjustments). The population was left with the role of expressing desires, setting forth demands, assuming a somewhat comfortable mode, sometimes acting as “a client”. Nowadays one can identify changes in this behavior pattern: local groups seek active participation. This motivating trend has been stimulated partially by the fact that public sector cannot alone tackle this issue and the existence of new legal instruments such as the Statute of the City which better define the conditions for effective citizens participation in their destinies. In the case of Djaima Dutra St., the participatory process motivated the creation of a small managing council, with local representatives of various age groups. However, this question also presents its particularities. An effective engagement of local groups is not always attainable: the Vila Economizada playground, for example, counted on active participation through workshops but failed to produce consensus in the subject of its maintenance scheme. It is important to study the means through which this relation usage-responsibility may consolidate.

The issue of landscape collective creation is a fertile and complex field of study still to be further explored, with many open questions. It is evident that the support of various areas is paramount if we actually aim at an advanced understanding of those problems and propositions and its resolutions. In what concerns free public spaces one cannot ignore its participatory potential in the construction of better socio-environmental urban conditions, implying aspects that range from microclimatic regulation and soil permeability (among many functions in the urban ecosystem) to the acceptance of day-to-day social practices associated to the stimulation of gregarious scale and the consolidation of a more equal and therefore democratic approach of the city.

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