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RESEARCH ARTICLE

POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECT IN SÃO PAULO: THE EXPERIENCE OF BARRA DO JACARÉ

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Abstract

This work seeks to value participatory design in the building of a housing product; and emphasizes collective learning as a means and the dissemination of knowledge as a triggering element towards individual and social transformation. It is based on the experience of a housing project of social interest resulting from popular initiative with federal resource (My House My Life Program), which took place in the West Side of the city of São Paulo, Brazil, called Barra do Jacaré. Its concerned players are individuals within a socially vulnerable position, and they are organized under a community association that involves the families.

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, PUBLIC POLICIES AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

Popular participation in public policy-making and achievement of self-management

Since the onset of the democratization process in the 1980s, the popular movements – organized under the National Forum of Urban Reform – have been working in revisiting public policies concerning urban housing, which has come to be coined as the fight for “decent housing”. Their claims bore influence on the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, which enacted specific provisions guiding urban and housing public policies. Along with that, the popular movement, inspired by the Uruguayan Housing Cooperatives, devised a singular housing policy project that came to serve as a reference for subsequent democratic governments. It was a project grounded on community work and cooperation, which is a feature of the agenda of housing movements and which serves as a model to pressure governments to accept their practice. Such self-managed process of collective home building was started in an experimental way by the Government of the City of São Paulo in 1989, during the term of popular government led by former Mayor Luiza Erundina. It was implemented through the FUNAPS Communitarian Program [Sub-Standard House Dwellers Support Fund], which brought an innovation by transferring public resources to housing movements, and thus created a partnership between the city public power, groups of politically involved professionals (architects, social assistants, engineers, etc.) called Technical Advisory Teams, and Community Associations of dwellers (Figure 1). That groundbreaking work prompted further repercussions on subsequent city and state governments, which were always pressured by popular organizations which viewed self-managed practice as the way of representing their yearnings in home building (Ronconi, 1995). The self-managed project put forward by popular action holds as a principle the transformation of the individual and the community through the practice of common good: housing. Self-management entails the formation of a

group bound by common interests, who organize themselves and take on the responsibility of planning and implementing a process of a social project¹. That encompasses the pre-formation of a group of interested parties, building up the technical and social feasibility of the future development, and building the material asset. In such practice, the Technical Advisory Teams, based on technical knowledge, perform the role of showing the ways, and that is always a multidisciplinary work engaging architects, engineers, social assistants, and others. Within the self-management process, the Association works as a social agent, and always seeks to solve issues concerning a housing development funded by the government. Some of such projects are carried out in a collective endeavor regime, relying on the labor force of the families who will be recipients of the benefit. However, the most important thing is to guarantee that the process is self-managed. Regardless of whether it has been done through collective endeavors or not, it has to ensure the political and social control by the concerned parties through their associations.

Throughout the last decades, some governments have created programs specifically devised to address the popular movement claims regarding self-managed work either done through collective endeavor initiatives or not (Figure2). However, it was not before 2004 – during the first term of former president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2006/2007-2010)– that the associations fighting for housing reaped a great victory of popular participation with the infusion of federal resources into the building of housing developments by directly partnering with Community Associations in financing programs such as the Solidarity Lending (CS); and subsequently with the My House My Life Program (PMCMV), especially the PMCMV- Entities (PMCMV- E) (Bonduck, 2008).

My House My Life Program

The My House My Life Program¹ (PMCMV 1) was created in 2009, during the second term of President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2007-2010). It was conceived to meet the social demand of families with a monthly income (total wages of all family members) of up to \$ 630.00²(Level1) by providing them with a government subsidy of 96% of the financing amount; and for families with incomes ranging from U\$630.00 and U\$ 1,289.00 (Level 2) with a subsidy of up to 13%. The program aimed at stimulating economy by pouring resources for building construction with a strong focus on private building construction, and by increasing resources for state and city-level public programs (Ferreira, 2012).

However, due to popular pressure, the federal government allocated 4% of the entire amount of the program funding to qualified non-profit entities, through the approval of the PMCMV- Entities, Level1, by granting them subsidy for building 60,000 housing units through a self-managed process either through collective endeavors or not. This specific program allows the undertaking to be carried out in two financing phases: the first apportions resources for buying the lot; and second for the execution of work. In 2011, already during the office of President Dilma Rousseff, the program went through some revisions, and the PMCMV-2 was launched. The PMCMV-Entities is still being offered, and now in 2014 we have the PMCMV-3, currently being worked on (Rolnik, 2010) (Rodrigues et al., 2012).

As of today, the program apportions U\$30,000.00 for each unit for the Level 1 - PMCMV- Entities; and the city of São Paulo accounts for most of the production under this scheme with a total of 36 developments underway, which are overseen by the group forming the Alliance of Housing Movements (UMM) of the city.

ALLIANCE OF HOUSING MOVEMENTS (UMM) AND THE WEST ASSOCIATION

The Alliance of Housing Movements (UMM) was founded in 1989, and encompasses several organized entities providing mutual help to each other in regard to political actions concerning the housing movement. It stands as a great pillar of strength for the fights for housing and urban reform around the country; and in the City of São Paulo and in Metropolitan São Paulo (RMSP) it takes an active role in events such as discussions related to the City Development Plan, Housing Councils, approvals of Urban Operations and clearance of shanty towns and slums.

The case this work intends to report is a result of the actions of one of the member associations of the UMM, the “Association of Homeless Workers of the West and Northwest Sides of São Paulo” (referred to here as WEST); a strong and well-coordinated group boasting a history of delivering over 13,000 housing units built under a self-managed system through a collective endeavor, 1,822 units with families in undertakings being developed, besides

¹ Project here does not refer to the architectural or urban project.

²The minimum salary in Brazil in April, 2014 corresponds to BRL \$724.00 or U\$ 306.00.

the unmet demand of their associates, with about 4,480 families registered for the right to take part in a development underway.³

Grounded on the experience accumulated throughout the years, the WEST has an expertise in what is referred to as participatory design and in homeownership development. Its goals are clearly defined as regards project requirements, the first of which is the size and distribution of housing units, and also the issues of developing housing and condominium- related issues concerning the management of low- income population. It has also gained experience in dealing with public authorities and institutions representing it within each government or program.

BRASIL HABITAT TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

The Technical Advisory Teams, which are usually NGOs⁴ or OSCIPs⁵, are made up of associated professionals from different knowledge fields, such as engineers, architects, social assistants, among others, who work in a collaborative way with the Housing Associations in a self-managed process. The Brasil Habitat Technical Advisory Team was founded in 2003 by professionals, Masters in Social Housing from the Institute of Technological Research of São Paulo - IPT. Since its inception, it has developed self- managed housing projects alongside associations under the UMM in different housing programs allowing for self-management (Figure3). In 2009, it was invited by the WEST leaders to develop a work with a small group who intended to make viable the construction of a housing development comprising 40 two-storied single-family dwelling units, which turned out to be the Barra do Jacaré project, catering to 592 families.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AS A METHOD

Within the WEST, the body forming the Executive, composed by senior leaders, is the one that lays out the guidelines on how the association should proceed regarding internal actions – demand, undertakings and administration – and external actions, such as standing and actions concerning government actions.

The grassrootswork developed by the Executive with the associated population is grounded on political engagement: the person or family who registers with the WEST with the goal of owning their own home ends up acquiring more than just an opportunity of taking part in a housing- related social project. When those families join the movement, they are involved critically in discussions and actions related to the country's urban and housing issues. Generally, the process leads them to join forces with the fight, and start pressuring governments regarding issues related to the matter.

All participation of the associates in the events promoted by the entity is aimed at qualifying them to take up an active role in face of their social and economic difficulties, stimulating the group to become aware of their problems and seek for solutions to their needs. Under that prerogative, the associates are invited to take part in debates and events on sundry topics such as urban reform, city development planning, urban mobility, housing programs, environment and others. This practice is viewed as a knowledge school which engages the subject in public life, seeking to make them aware of their social and political role, equipping them with resources for achieving the goals of the group they are part of, and serving as practice for attaining their individual goals. All activities undertaken under this activism secure the associate some scoring that places them in an eligibility ranking for housing developments.

The associated family or person is granted the opportunity of owning a home when a development under an existing housing program is deemed viable. Then, and according to each individual score, a specific group making up the project *demand side* is formed. From then on, the real engagement of a family takes place through effective actions towards realizing what they aspire for.

For each project underway a small group of “tutors” or leaders from the Executive is appointed to monitor and to build the capacity of the families. This group of appointed people is identified as the *Coordination*. They report both to the project families and the Executive in matters that hinge upon political action-taking and weightier decision-making.

In each project, several Working Committees are appointed in a participatory and voluntary manner. They are meant to work along with the Coordination, and are aided by the Technical Advisory Teams (TA) in carrying out the

³ Data provided by Julieta Aparecida Tolentino de Abranches, current WEST executive secretary.

⁴ NGO- Non-Governmental Organization

⁵ OSCIP- Civil Society Organization of Public Interest

intents of the project. They constitute the *body of self-management* (Figure 4 and 5) whose principle is the collective process, that is, through joint decisions the group learns how to organize themselves, plan, act, monitor, and to be held. Together with the social assistants from the TA, the Entity assesses the group of future dwellers, undertakes a diagnosis of their needs and potentials; thus identifying the social, economic, educational and cultural profile of the families. That data will serve as input for catering specifically to the social demand. For the process of participation to actually take place, members learn to work in groups; which implies respect for the other community members; patience, no haste or interruptions; learning how to listen, humbleness, among other attributes of human coexistence. By itself, this opportunity qualifies members to express themselves, share and improve their knowledge.

The work methodology is based on the process of participation as the key to group learning and growth. The project members collectively take the responsibility for conducting it, with the Coordination as a tutor and with the support of the Technical Advisory Team. The Coordination is always made up of people who have trodden the same path, and now work for keeping the cycle going. The training the group receives from the beginning to the end of the work ensures they acquire autonomy and that they are suited for eventually living in a condominium. That is the moment when the Association, represented by the Coordination, steps off the stage and once and for all hands the total responsibility over to the dwellers.

THE PROJECT : BARRA DO JACARÉ

The Barra do Jacaré Project was started with a group of 40 families who wished to build a set of single-family homes. The technical support from Brasil Habitat began with the search for a lot appropriate for that goal, an area of approximately 5,000m². The Body of Self- Management, made up with the Coordination and the Committees, looked for areas for initial surveys such as land use and occupancy, environmental liability and documentation. The surveying was followed by visits to the sites, viability and financial feasibility studies, and subsequent negotiations with the owner.

It took two years to finally choose an ideal area within the city of São Paulo whose cost could be supported by the program funding (PMCMV-E), and which would meet the demand. That is so long a time when we take into account that the families are in urgent need of housing, but that length of time was due to the booming of real estate market resulting from the housing program itself, due to the availability of resources for home building driving up land cost.

Four studies were conducted in different areas in the West Side of São Paulo, all of whom yielded negative results regarding land use potential, lack of public infrastructure, soil contamination; high cost of square meter, among others. In June, 2011, despite initial difficulties, the lot on Barra do Jacaré Street was chosen by the families.

However, new requirements were brought up, as it is a piece of land measuring 28,000 m². The land is located in the Northwest Side of São Paulo, in Pirituba neighborhood, an area provided with urban infrastructure, serviced by public transportation, and boasting commerce and institutional areas within a radius of 5 km. The surroundings are partially occupied by houses in a risky and social vulnerability condition mixed with apartment buildings for families in a better economic position. So, it is a place undergoing a process of urban transformation (Figure 6).

The choice of the site to meet the demand was made mainly because of its location, as the land cost exceeded the percentage of financing the sponsoring organ deemed as a viable investment in regard to land use and number of housing units. Then, optimizing the building potential had to be addressed as a pressing issue so as to render it financially viable with the amount advanced by the PMCMV.

The proposal for intervention was discussed in three hierarchical and participation levels: first with the WEST leaders at the Executive Board, to define the project requirements, singular features of implementation, size of housing units and of common areas, physical or financial problems the project might generate, for it to be carried out in a collective endeavor system and in a self-managed manner.

The first implementation they discussed regarded using the land to the maximum possible density as a way to optimize costs, with a total of 850 housing units with 42 m² each. That proposal was painstakingly discussed and eventually discarded because it implied downsizing the minimum size intended by the group, even if that meant a financial contribution by the families and a heavier work load at the building site.

The second proposal, for 662 housing units measuring 54m², still did not meet the group expectations; and a decision setting the number of 592 units of 55.18m² was finally made (Figure7).The last meeting of the first round of discussions with the Executive was held with the participation of the Body of Self-Management of Barra do Jacaré. After the project viability study was approved at that first level, they then proceeded to debate about the

specific features of the project, which was done only with the Body of Self-Management of Barra do Jacaré. In this group, the most discussed issues, those receiving attention and worry from the future dwellers were: the housing units, leisure areas, parking lots, the flows, and places for children and the youth. The project went through changes, and it was added with some features such as a new balcony for housing units, a barbecue grill for the community hall, a lit walking track through the woods, perimeter closing, preservation of some important trees, transplantation of other trees, implementation of individual metering of energy and water usage, power outlets for housing units, constructive system, etc. (Figures 8, 9). It is the work of this Body that gives the project its shape and singular features, and the technical architect at this moment works as a guide, describing the specific traits of each decision. Last, the project was submitted to the Assembly, and the number of 592 families was approved.

To keep the group active and to ensure the organization and participation of the families, rules for participatory work procedures are set, spelling out the rights, obligations and penalties for non-compliance. All those issues are discussed and approved collectively, and written down in a document called "Regulation on Works". The harshest penalty for non-adherence to the Regulation is the exclusion and loss of right to homeownership.

During the development of the project, the everyday work of the body of self-management consists of urgent activities such as matters regarding the status of licenses and approvals, hiring and paying, political courses of action concerning the project, planning of actions and organization of families. This body undertakes specific training provided by the Technical Advisory Team to qualify them for running the work. There is a training on purchasing, which provides them with input for understanding the services and materials needed for the work, and how to prepare requests for proposals. Also, there is a training course on how to book costs and project financing, and how the fund release from the sponsoring agency is processed, among others.

The time elapsed from identifying and purchasing the land totaled 1 year, in July, 2012. From that date until today the project has been in the phase of finalizing approvals and performing cost estimates for the second phase: execution of work. Fifteen percent of the work will be done by the participating families, and the remaining services will be sub-contracted with the group administration which has been trained to manage the work, overseen by the Technical Advisory Team. Work completion is predicted for December, 2017.

CONCLUSIONS:

This work values participatory design as a method for attaining the product. The product is always collective, and in its time and space it is representative. Being successful in this participatory way depends 100% on the profile of the Coordination of the Association: as the leading player, it plays the key role of conducting the families; and its credibility is earned as long as it demonstrates clarity and commitment throughout all procedures (Pallamin, 2008).

The work of architects is to make their knowledge count through frank dialogues in which knowledge is not used in an authoritarian way, but as a key to merge with the knowledge and potentials of the project members. Not all technical work is done in a participatory manner, as the professional is responsible for selecting issues of special interest and controversy, prepare the material and conduct the discussion, doing their best together from that event substrate for its synthesis.

Just like the Association profile is of paramount importance to lend credibility to the process, in this work architects must know how to work in an interactive way, allowing for the collective participation alongside their superior technical knowledge.

Throughout the last two decades, due to the enhancement of public housing programs promoting the self-managed mode, and to the experience acquired by the social movements of the city of São Paulo, we can say that this type of social entrepreneurship boasts an expertise and background worthy of comparison to that of small-sized building companies. However, the rationale underlying their work and the product they deliver are totally different. As they deal with public money, self-managed housing programs are becoming stricter and stricter in regards to the eligibility of applicant associations. They require registration, accountability and related processes; and that makes this work, beyond its magnitude, an act demanding a lot of transparency, administrative management and professionalism to work with public resources.

Compared to the product delivered by the market of home building targeted at the same income range, a qualitative difference is noticed between the products (Figures 10). However, there is another difference that is fundamental and that goes beyond that comparison: it is the opportunity of building collective commitment grounded on a need: homeownership. The participation of the benefit recipients throughout the whole process, from the search for land,

building, to the delivery of units, turns them into people strengthened by the experience acquired in this work context.

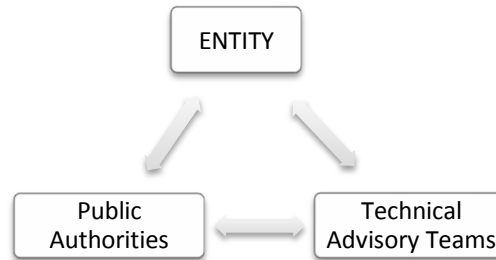


Figure 1: Flow diagram.



Figure 2: Self-help effort to build a venue for meetings in the area of the project.

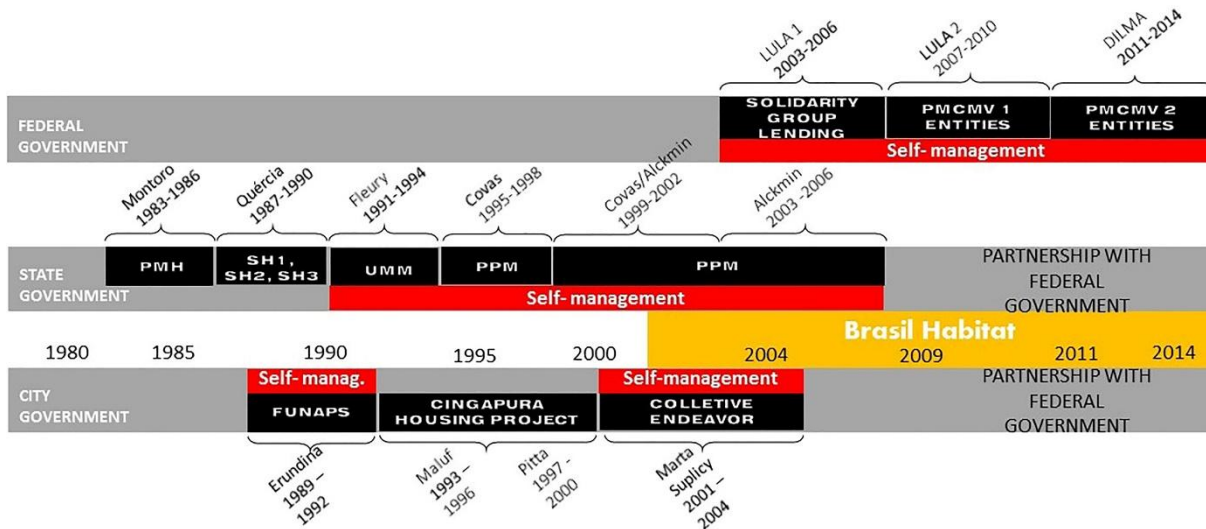


Figure 3: Timeline featuring the Housing Programs, including the place occupied by Brazil Habitat Technical Advisory Team.

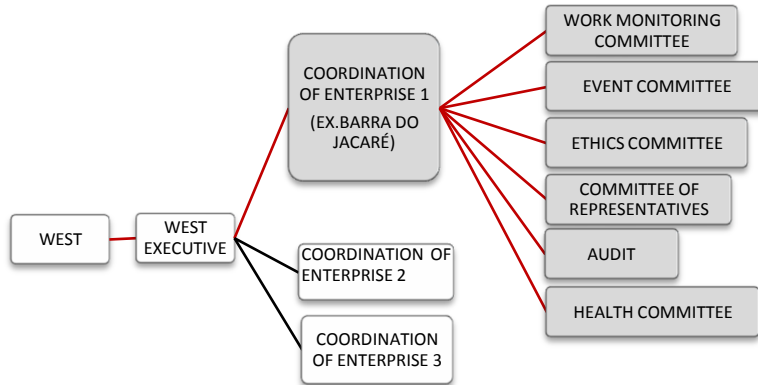


Figure 4: Organizational chart and, the Body of Self- Management of one housing development (gray).



Figure 5: Meeting of the Body of Self- Management of the project held on a dirt ground.

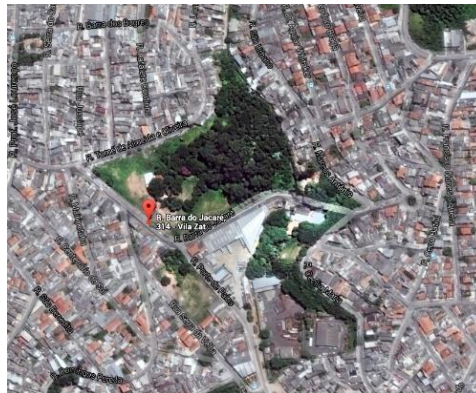


Figure 6: Location map: Urban void within the peripheral area of São Paulo.



Figure 7: Implementation.

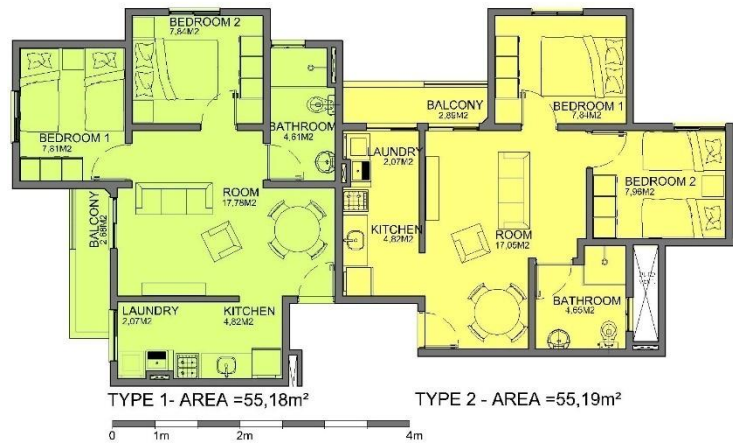


Figure 8: Floor plan of a housing unit (Type 1 and Type2).



Figure 9: Discussion on housing units with the Body of Self-Management.



Figure 10: Electronic model: Partial view of a block.

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