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POLICIES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF SLUM DWELLERS – FROM INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS TO LOCAL CONTEXTS. THE BRAZILIAN CASE-STUDY

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Abstract

Last decades economic development induced massive international and regional migration flows directed to the urban spaces. The magnitude and swiftness of these processes determined that several cities' authorities would fail to respond to the increasing demands of many social services. The right to an "adequate housing" emerged as a political concern, leading governments and institutions to develop housing programmes directed to improve the lives of slum dwellers. This paper presents a diachronic evolution of these specific housing policies in the paradigmatic case-study of Brazil, critically analysing the evolving roles played by the multiple levels of decision (from international institutions to local communities) in the development and implementation of such measures.

Keywords: Housing Policies, Clandestine Urbanization, Migration Flows, Local Development, Community-based Development, Brazil.
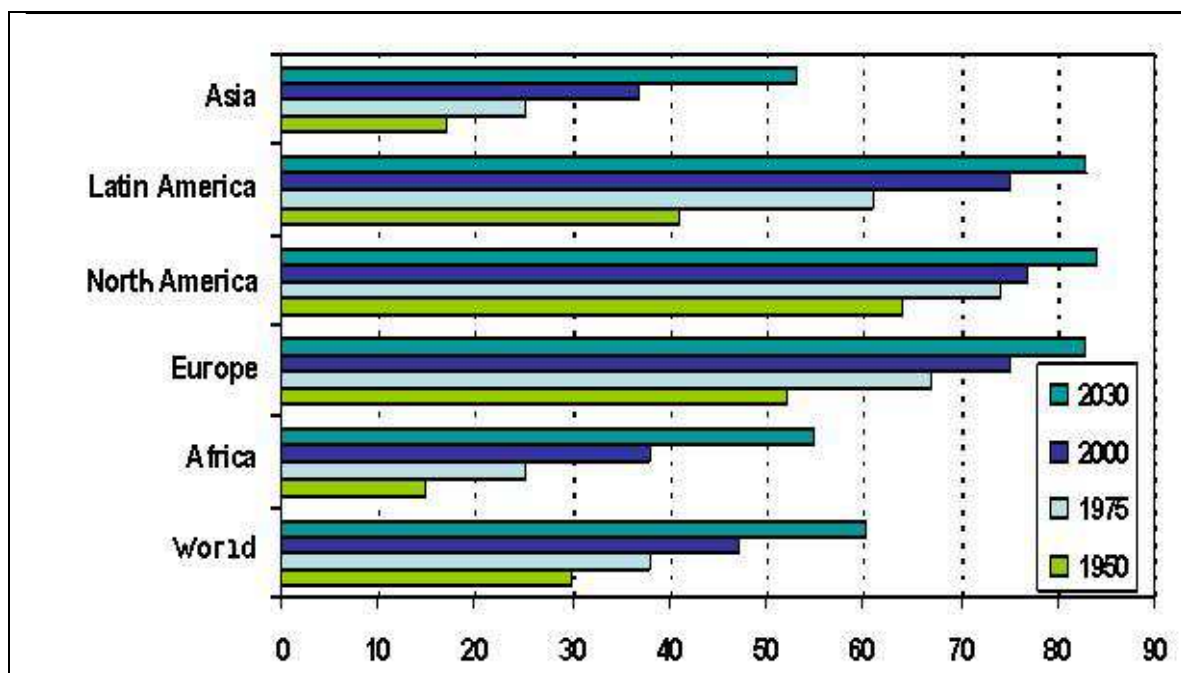
1. Introduction: The Causes and Consequences of the Urban "Slums"

The "urban explosion" felt through the second half of the twentieth century was one of the most important changes within population geography and social demography in the last decades. About 3 billion people (approximately 50% of the world's total population) are now living in cities and the prospects of urban population growth tend

to remain in the future. Estimates admit that in 2050, some 6.2 billion people will live in urban areas, representing a value greater than the current world population. Most of this increase (about 93%) tends to occur in the so-called Least Developed Countries (LDC's) (Clark, 2003; Potter *et al.*, 1999).

The majority of these (least developed) countries are currently facing a major urbanization process. South America – the most urbanized macro-region of the developing world – and Asia (especially Indochina and East Asia) are the two territories where this process has been occurring more prominently. The African continent is urbanizing at a slower pace, but the future prospects of growth are extremely strong (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Urban population growth rates for the world's macro-regions (1950-2030)

Source: Clark (2003)

In the developed countries, the urbanization phenomenon is undergoing another phase. The process of rural-urban migration has occurred much earlier and is now a consolidated tendency. In these countries, urban growth in now taking place especially due to international migration flows, primarily nurtured by the arrival of immigrants coming from the LDC's.

The rural-urban migration process – which can be considered as the primary cause of explanation of the present urban growth happening in the LDC's – is due to a simultaneous and dynamic two-factor process, based on bipolar attraction and repulsion (or "push" and "pull") mechanism. According to the pioneer studies of Ravenstein[1] (*apud* Rocha-Trindade, 1995) migrants are "attracted" to the cities, for example, by the greater employment availability and the higher wage prospects. Simultaneously, rural spaces are "repulsive", since they are normally considered as areas of poverty and hunger, in which agriculture is no longer able to occupy the whole population and where arable land is increasingly limited.

For the following years, it is expected that these mechanisms will continue to promote the world's urban population growth, especially in the LDC's. It is estimated that this increase will be of about 50 million people per year, equivalent to approximately one million new "urbanites" every week, meaning a total of 155 thousand new urban inhabitants per day (Clark, 2003; Potter *et al.*, 1999).

Another interesting trend – also motivated by the above-mentioned "rural exodus" process – concerns the creation of macro-cephalous mega-cities[2]. According to Potter *et al.*, (1999) in the year 1900, there were approximately 233 million urban citizens – representing circa 14% of the global population – and 20 mega-cities. Fifty years later, in the year 1950, the number of mega-cities had increased to a total of 83, 34 of which located in the LDC's. Clark (2003) assumed that in the year 2000, there were 433 mega-cities and of the top-15 most populous cities of the world, 11 were located in those least developed.

The mega-cities located in the developing countries have, in general, some common features. Besides the already mentioned massive population quantitative – precedent

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[1] German geographer, researcher in the United Kingdom, E.G. Ravenstein (1852-1913) explained – through an 1885 article named: "*The Laws of Migration*" published in the "*Journal of the Statistical Society*" – that all the migrations flows were conditioned by a series of articulated variables which we nowadays call the attraction-repulsion or "push" and "pull" factors.

[2] In the present work, the terminology "mega-city" will be applied to all the cities with more that 1 million inhabitants, following the indications presented in Potter *et al.* (1999). Given the large spectrum of terminologies associated to the last decades' urbanization process it is important to advise that this term must not be confused with "world city" (Hall, 1996; Friedmann and Wolff, 1982, *apud* Scott *et al.*, 2002), "global city" (Sassen, 1991, *apud* Scott *et al.*, 2002) or "city region" (Scott *et al.*, 2002). Other common terms like "conurbation", "metropolis" and "metroplex" have also different significances, being usually applied to the convergence of two or more metropolitan areas.

mainly from these countries rural areas – these cities tend to be located in coastal territories, phenomenon that can be explained by the former colonial past of most of these countries. These cities also tend to operate according to a pre-industrial economic base, in many cases, maintaining a strong presence of agricultural activities in the "urban" spaces. The inexistence of a clearly identifiable *Central Business District* (CBD) – meaning, as noticed for example by Bradford and Kent (1987), a retail, finance and service economy-based activities urban centre, is also another important feature.

In environmental terms, these tend to be cities characterized by a visible and strong environmental degradation. Their uncontrolled growth, forced by the integration of a number of people well above their ecological capabilities has caused both serious social problems – which will be later on referred to and where the illegal urbanization presents itself as an reflection – and important environmental imbalances, which also have impacts at the social level, since, as referred to by Salvador (2004) tends to exist an intimate causality between poverty and environment.

At a socio-economic scope, the high levels of unemployment and poverty characteristic of the mega-cities located in the LDC's are also very important and, in many cases, coexistent with illegal housing construction and the proliferation of "slums". The informal sector is highly significant and constitutes, in many of these cities, the primary occupation of over than 50% of their population (Salvador, 2004). As stated by Yazigi (2000) – referring to the Brazilian case – it is also important to assume that, even though informality and clandestinity have always characterized the urban (and rural) forms of labour and housing "production", the explosion of these practices in the last years has undermined the feasibility of any present and future statistical study pertaining to the explanation of this problem.
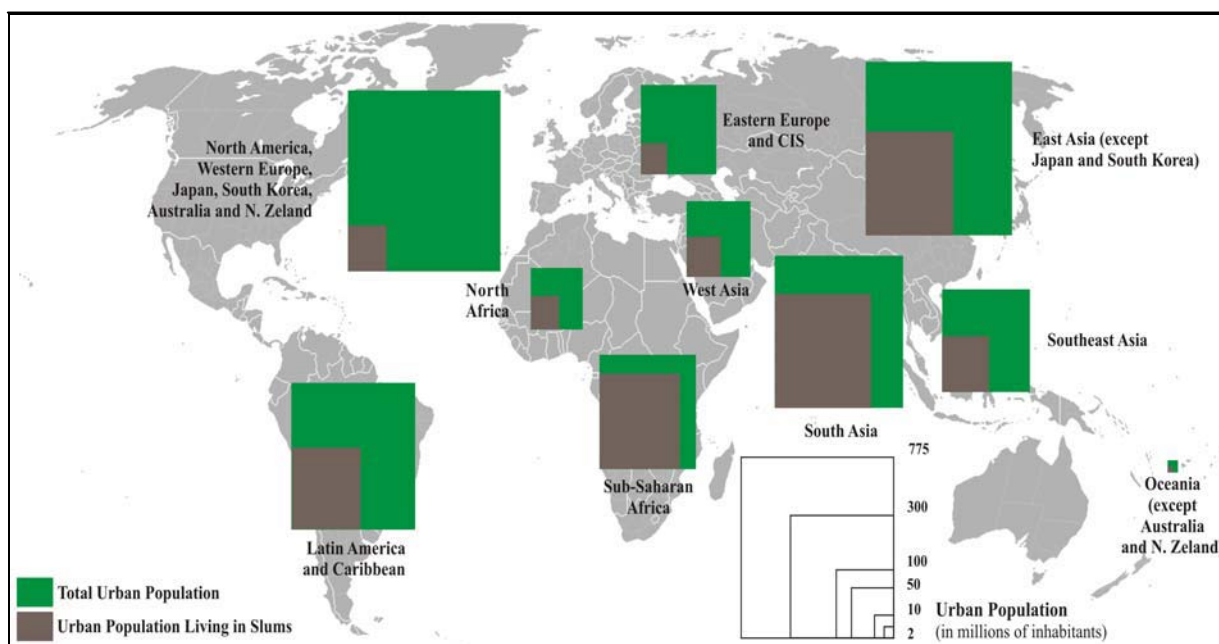
At this point, it is now possible to understand that the joint action of the rural areas' repulsive aspects – like the demographic pressure associated with the increasingly scarce agricultural resources, these areas' economic instability and low employment rates, and the gaps in the social and demographic structures of those spaces – and the seductive features of the urban areas, like the promising labour and education opportunities and the prospect of social modernization has been leading, more or less since the Industrial Revolution and with wider importance in the last decades

(especially in LDC's), to massive migration flows, sometimes happening in a truly messianic way, from rural to urban areas.

This phenomenon has naturally lead to important population excesses in urban areas, originating a demographic surplus to the urban infrastructures capacity, the employment opportunities and the housing availability. The creation and proliferation of illegal neighbourhoods – mostly appearing in the form of "slums" or "shanty towns", branded by poverty, discrimination and sanitarian/epidemiologic problems – improvised communities reflection of both the ingenuity and perseverance of the human race are one of the most visible aspects of such an urban population excess.

Clandestine urbanization is not exclusive to the least developed countries. Nevertheless, it is in these countries that they this phenomenon is most visible and concerning (Figure 2). The United Nations (UN) says that about one third of the urban dwellers worldwide are now living in "slums" or in degraded accommodations, in most cases without access to clean water, sanitation or other infrastructure. This means an estimated total of 1.000 million people – roughly twice the European population –currently living in "slums", with exponential growth prospects if this situation is not politically accounted for (Garau and Sclar, 2005).

Figure 2 – Urban Population living in shanty towns in 2005

Source: http://cartographie.dessciences-po.fr/cartotheque/12C_villes_1975-2003.jpg

The term "slum" was primarily brought up by the UN in the attempt to create a standard definition for urban critical and degraded area. According to the UN-HABITAT program, a slum refers to an urban area comprising some main characteristics: i) generalized insecurity in the legal vinculum to a proper dwelling or even to the land occupancy; ii) inadequate access to clean drinking water and to basic urban infra-structures, for example, sanitation, which are two major factors for diseases and epidemics spreading in these areas; iii) improvised and insecure accommodation with excessive population and dwelling's density; iv) the urban sites occupied are usually the least desirable or valued ones; and v) high ecological vulnerability, noticeable by the fact that, for example, almost half (49%) of these areas are sited in river banks, of which 32% are highly suitable for floods; also 30% of the shanty towns worldwide are located in high hill's slopes; approximately 25% are located in areas extremely suitable for erosion; and 9% are in landfills (UN-HABITAT, 2002, *apud* Garau and Sclar, 2005).

Given all the above mentioned characteristics it is relevant to state that the urban slum areas' problems go well beyond their mere housing concerns. This sense has promoted the recent emergence of a greater awareness about the need to initiate multi-thematic policy approaches to fight and mitigate the effects of this deviant urban phenomenon.

Illegal urbanization is, as noticed by all the previously stated, a daily reality of urban life (almost) worldwide being the prevalent reality in the urban centres of Latin America, South (and southeast) Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where this type of urbanization has increased massively in recent years. Even though in a lesser extent, it also occurs in some (considered) developed countries, especially those from Southern Europe. It has therefore a relatively worldwide nature, reflecting both global trends and local specificities that appear as result of each context's cyclical or structural (socioeconomic, environmental and political) aspects.

The policy measures applied to improve the lives of slum dwellers must consequently acknowledge these regional and local specificities, placing them in the larger spectrum of the general characteristics of these areas.

Laying a more detailed attention to the Brazilian case – which will be next characterized and where the urbanization process and the proliferation of urban critical and degraded

areas has undergone an enormous growth in the last decades, determining the need to develop well (and creatively) organized social, urban and housing policies – the purpose of the present paper is to illustrate and debate the current state-of-the-art and the future trends of the policies developed – at multiple levels of political decision and/or advisory – to improve the lives of (Brazil's) slum dwellers.

2. The Spatial Context: The "Slums" in South America's and Brazil's Urban Spaces

As mentioned earlier South America is in terms of relative population distribution the most urbanized macro-region of the underdeveloped world. This factor, coupled with the high numbers of population in most of this sub-continent's countries and their specific socioeconomic and political conditions, makes South America one of the major "producers" of illegal and inadequate urban dwellings worldwide. Quantitatively, and despite the last years' slowing trends in the annual growth rates, about one third of the South American population is nowadays living in "slums" (Clark, 2003; Garau and Sclar, 2005).

In terms of countries, Brazil – which will be more thoroughly discussed ahead – and Venezuela face the most problematic realities. Regarding the latter, the situation has taken increasing proportions in recent years. The largest South American slum is currently located in the city of Petare (in the first suburban crown of the Venezuelan capital, Caracas), already bigger than the (almost) mythic slum of "*Rocinha*", in Rio de Janeiro. This "*barrio*" (this is the vernacular Venezuelan name attributed to "slums") is home to a population of more than 370 thousand inhabitants, comprised mainly of people precedent from the country's rural areas. Generally, the Venezuelan "*barrios*" are characterized by an anarchic social hierarchy, which ultimately tends to generate high levels of violence due to regular clashes between local gangs and "guerrillas".

However, the clandestine urban forms are also common in other South-American countries. In Peru, it is possible to find the so-called "*pueblos jovenes*", composed mainly of "Blacks" and Amerindians that have migrated (in dense waves) from the country's rural areas to its major cities (with a clear emphasis on the capital city of Lima), since the 1940's. Also in Argentina there are neighbourhoods of illegal origin, the so-called "*villas miseria*", found near the main cities (Buenos Aires, Rosario,

Córdoba and Mendoza) and comprised of poor migrants arrived here from the Argentinean rural areas and, more recently, from neighbouring countries such as Paraguay or Bolivia, where illegal urbanization is also relevant. As synthetically observed by Milton Santos (1965) the nomenclatures tend to change for one country to another (or even inside a country)[3] but the reality is roughly the same.

In resume, it is possible to identify the existence of some common factors that regard to illegal urbanization in just about all of the South American countries. This critical urban areas growth seems to work as a widespread phenomenon in major cities of all the countries of this sub-continent. The general characteristics identified in the introductory note (poverty, over-population, crime, urban and social chaos, environmental pressure, among others) seem to be all present in this macro-region's main cities.

The population quantitative component – usually deriving from rural-urban internal migration or from international immigrants coming from neighbouring countries – works as one of the most conditioning aspects of illegal neighbourhoods in South American cities. Casas (1986) and Parra (1986) that developed works directed to illegal urbanization respectively in Colombia and Chile identified exactly this aspect, relating it to the inputs and outputs associated to illegal urbanization already identified.

Both previous authors claim that the illegal constructions work in the two referenced countries as a social outlet, a way to overcome both countries national housing crisis without undermining the public social order and the reproduction of the capitalist system that, otherwise, would be condemned by the enormous dimensions that the contradictions in the work force reproduction might take. «*En cualquier caso, el Estado, en países de capitalismo desarrollado y/o subdesarrollado, no tiene opción distinta a restringir el gasto público en esta época de profunda crisis económica y financiera, so pena de provocar procesos estacionario-inflacionarios de difícil manejo político. En estos días, se tolera mejor la existencia de formas de autogestión en la producción (de vivienda), pues significa válvulas de escape a la presión social, si bien, se trata de*

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[3] The author presents as examples the *"villas miseria"* of Buenos Aires, the *"quebradas"* or *"barrios"* of Caracas, the *"barreadas"* or *"pueblos jovenes"* of Lima, the *"muceques"* of São Paulo de Luanda, the *"kampongs"* of Jakarta, the *"medinas"* of Dakar, the *"bairros clandestinos"* of Bogotá, the *"callampas"* of Santiago, the *"jacales"* of México, and in Brazil, the *"favelas"* of Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte, the *"malocas"* of Porto Alegre, the *"mocambos"* of Recife, or the *"invasões"* and *"alagados"* of Salvador.

movimientos y actividades preocupantes e inconvenientes tanto para el capital como el mismo Estado, en la medida que refuerzan tendencias desconcentradoras y descentralizadoras de los procesos productivos y de las relaciones de autoridad y gobierno» (Casas, 1986: 54).

Assuming the veracity of the previous statement – and generalizing it to the remaining countries of this spatial context – it seems that in the Latin American countries the clandestine urbanization phenomenon is fully inserted into the economic mechanisms of the capitalist structure. This is noticeable by several features. First, the urbanization and illegal construction are an important market for equipment and building materials produced in the legal sector. Second, the illegal construction is subject to the payment of contributions and other fees and taxes which are a source of revenue for the state, hardly replaceable. Third, because illegal housing has provided, in most of the countries where it occurs (including the South-American ones), huge quantities of population settlement and the reproduction of labour force in urban-industrial areas, without need to government or private sector intervention. Thus, the workforce reproduction costs are supported by the population itself, rather than being by the state institutions, contributing to maintain the ambitions of the housing market and state power formal mechanisms, perpetuating the regulatory capitalist system.

Inside the South American context, Brazil presents itself as one of the most paradigmatic cases of massive urbanization in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1950 two thirds of Brazil's population was rural. Thirty years later (1980) this situation had been reversed, once about two thirds of the population was already urban. This means that in just thirty years, there was a radical transformation from a largely rural society to a situation of wide urban predominance (Sachs, 1999). These thirty years of industrialization have also changed the economic structure of the country. Employment in primary sector fell to less than half the initial value. In opposition, employment in industry and construction rose.

If this transition had notable positive effects in terms of Brazil's economic growth – which, according to Sachs (1999) occurred at an average of 7% per year during that period –, in terms of employment and labour market development the situation was not that encouraging. In 1983 approximately 13 million "Brazilians" were unemployed or

underemployed. So it is of clear understanding that, contiguous to the economic growth of the country, this thirty year period produced a large amount of social inequalities in what concerned to wealth distribution in Brazil, through a phenomenon adequately named by Sachs (1999) as "impoverishing growth".

Some of the main policies that lead to this outcome were taken under the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek (1902-1976), which ranged from 1956-1961, applied through "his" so-called "*Programa de Metas*" which *«was aimed at eliminating structural bottlenecks in the economy and had a much greater significance. It covered five areas (…). Not all targets were met on time but by the early sixties Brazil had doubled its installed capacity of electric energy, trebled its mileage of paved roads, become self-sufficient in cement, increased its production of steel ingots (…), and transformed its motor vehicle industry (…) of which 90 per cent of the total weight was provided by Brazilian-made components»* (Henshall and Momsen Jr., 1976: 156)

As expected, these economic changes "forced" a notorious territorial transformation, since *«spatial transformation must be understood in the broader context of social transformation: space does not reflect society, it expresses it»* (Castells, 2002: 10-11). A real urban "explosion" took its place. Population living in cities (urban population) quadruplicated during these thirty years. Industrialization – associated to the advantages of the urban economies of scale, meaning the cost advantages obtained by a business due to expansion, or the factors that cause a producer's average cost per unit to fall as scale is increased –, anachronistic agrarian structures, rural spaces' unemployment and harsh living conditions, were all key factors for this rural exodus, determining that in 1980, approximately 17% of the urban population of Brazil was made up of recent rural migrants (Sachs, 1999).

However, this urban growth was never fully compensated by job creation. Santos and Silveira (2001) identify this as a general pattern of Brazil's urban growth noticing that the country's most important cities were only able to "occupy" and not "employ" the incoming rural population. This enabled the ascension of urban poverty and the corresponding depressions of the worker's incomes and of the labour market itself, which was made an even acuter problem by the collapse of the (previously interventive) welfare-state.

It is now understandable that these thirty years launched the conditions for a heavy social debt caused by economic growth, with notorious spatial effects in the Brazilian territory. The combination of an "impoverishing" economic growth with the exponential urbanization process, has led to the creation and establishment of social exclusion and spatial segregation powerful mechanisms visible both at a regional (on inter-regional) – meaning the urban-rural dialectics – and at a local (or intra-urban) level. This last tendency is approached by Bogus (1988: 47) who claiming the existence of a tendency to urban segregation caused by the intra-metropolitan housing trajectories of the poorer population to the so-called *"bolsões de pobreza"*, peripheral urban areas where severe social and housing problems started to rise.

The proliferation of "slums" in Brazil is one of the most visible aspects of this "impoverishing growth" process, since poorer urban population groups (continuously fed by the new migrant flows) started to be "pushed" to the greater cities peripheries. Excluded from the regular housing market due to the lack of sufficient purchasing power – Bogus (1988) acknowledges the existence of notorious cause-effect relationships between formal labour market insertion (and the consequent income revenues) and housing (in)stability – this ever-growing population started to be forced to solve their housing issues throw "illegal" or clandestine means (Sachs, 1999).

These mechanisms – which started in the 1950's responding to the intense flows of rural-urban migration – are still responsible for Brazil's present housing situation. In the last fifty years, in consequence of the changes in the technological patterns of the country's agriculture and the massive migration flows and demographic growth trends, Brazilian cities faced one of the most massive processes of rural exodus of the world's history, originating the current urban and metropolitan poverty "belts" that characterize this country's major urban areas (Dupas, 1999, *apud* Rolnik and Nakano, 2000).

According to data provided by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2004 there were some 2.200 "slums", half of which were located in the two major metropolitan areas and economic centres of Brazil, namely Rio de Janeiro (513 "slums") and São Paulo (612 "slums"). In the early 1970's these two cities' "slums" accounted for only 7% of the country's population. In 1999 those figures have risen to circa 20% (Sachs, 1999).

Between 1990 and 2000 the growth rate of households located in "slums" was about 5% per year. The UN states that the Brazilian slums "growth" is expected to remain constant at least until the year 2020. This institution's figures point out that in 2005 around 30% of Brazil's population (circa 50 million people) was living in slums (Garau and Sclar, 2005).

Synthetically, two major hypotheses can be appointed to explain this situation. First, it is possible to underline the above-mentioned rural-urban population movements, and secondly (more recently, especially since the late 1970's) the impoverishment of an important share of Brazil's already urban population, a process creatively presented by Taschner (1988) under the name of "descendent filtering".

Nevertheless, the previous processes did not happen likewise in all the Brazilian cities. In Rio de Janeiro the slum growth started even before the 1950's. On the contrary, in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo – which currently has Brazil's higher number of "*favelas*" – this phenomenon started not before the early 1970's (Taschner, 1988).

In resume, it is clear that the proliferation of slums in most of Brazil represents the downside of the so-called "Brazilian Miracle" presented by Fausto (1997) as the period extending from 1969 to 1973 when the annual GDP kept on rising in double digits. Unfortunately this "apparent" economic success built during the military dictatorship has attracted thousands of migrants, mainly from rural "*Nordeste*" areas towards São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (this last movement started about 20 years earlier). These migrants, given their low incomes and the consequential inaccessibility to legal housing markets, had no choice but to settle in "slums" (Sachs, 1999).

Regarding to the (in)existence of basic infrastructures, the Brazilian "*favelas*" can be seen as some of the most characteristic and instructive examples of the effects and problems (either on the scope of housing and concerning other social and environmental issues) cause by illegal urbanization. They usually do not have any kind of sewer systems, drinking water supply, social services, public transportation or even roads. The individual parcels where the houses are built are small, often shorter than 50 m^2. The houses themselves are usually shacks, mostly built with precarious materials like wood or zinc plates, with cemented ceilings ad floors. Most slum dwellers build their own accommodation.

The Brazilian case confirms that illegal urbanization areas have multiple problems that exceed the housing issues. In the "*favelas*" – particularly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro – environmental accidents are frequent caused, for example, by floods after the occurrence of the heavy rainfalls characteristic of Brazil's tropical climate. «*After a heavy rainstorm in Rio de Janeiro favelas slide down hillsides, drinking water is polluted, and power and telephones are cut off for days*» (Henshall and Monsen Jr., 1976: 241).

The poor sanitation conditions and access to drinking water on these slums often leads to a proliferation of diseases and epidemics being the so-called "*dengue*"[4] one of the last visible examples, widely broadcasted by the media. Also crime, drug trafficking and gang (truly fully-armed local militias) conflicts are common and daily problems in these areas socioeconomically dominated by hierarchically influent drug-trafficking leaders. Given all the above mentioned, it is not surprising that in many "*favelas*", the mortality rates are extremely high, in many cases above 40 ‰, surprising numbers especially when compared to the 6 ‰ value associated to Brazil's general mortality rate by renowned international institutions such as the World Bank.

All the previous aspects elevate the urgency of intervening politically and socially in these areas. These interventions must be multi-thematic, adequately able to respond to their problems' complexity and diversity, and comprising measures adapted both to the "global" characteristics of the critical urban areas and to each context's specificities.

3. Policies to Improve the Lives of Slum Dwellers: The International Agreements

At an international level, and in matters related to environmental, social and housing sustainability of the urban areas it is impossible to not stand out the work developed by the UN (Garau and Sclar, 2005; Rolnik and Saule Junior, 1996; Sachs, 2005).

A diachronic analysis of such policy action takes one back to 1976, year of the pioneer HABITAT Conference ("United Nations Conference on Human Settlements") in Vancouver, Canada. This event basically consisted of a meeting of representatives from

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[4] The dengue fever is caused by a virus transmitted by a mosquito bite. In early 2008, there was a serious outbreak in Rio de Janeiro, which led to the death of thousands of people.

several states, with particular focus on LDC's, organized by the UN in subsequence of the decisions taken in the earlier "United Nations Conference on the Human Environment", which took place in Stockholm (Sweden) in the year of 1972.

The participants of this preliminary HABITAT conference set up the first general and international action framework concerning the scope of illegal urbanization growth mitigation measures. Rolnik and Saule Junior (1996) synthesize them in the following manner:

The human lodgings conditions determine the life-standard of their residents. Its improvement is an essential pre-requisite for the overall satisfaction of these people's basic needs, such as employment, health or education;

The human dwellings problems can not be isolated from each countries' socioeconomic development and the existence of profound internal social inequalities;

There is a need to point out to policy-makers the existence of a vast number of people living worldwide in illegal neighbourhoods with unacceptable housing and social development conditions. This is inevitable for the implementation of concrete steps to control this situation. Measures should be made operational to merge and combine political advisory coming from different territorial decision levels;

The uncontrolled urban growth – recognizably driven by various causes, being migration flows one of the most important – should be avoided as a way to reduce the incidence of social and ecological tensions resulting from the world's (especially concerning the LDC's) main cities overcrowding;

The establishment of a global egalitarian housing and socio-economic scenario is only possible by the implementation of major changes in several areas, such as international trade, monetary systems, industrialization and resource consumption worldwide;

The problems posed by the spread of slums are imposed on current societies as complex issues that can only be solved by a global and multi-thematic intervention.

Following the previous policy directives, the HABITAT I conference's final declaration argued that improving the life standard of the human beings living in unsatisfactory housing conditions should be the first and most important objective of any policy aimed

at solving the problem of illegal neighbourhoods. These policies should be used to facilitate the rapid and continuous improvement of the dwellers' life quality, especially with regard to the satisfaction of their basic needs (for example food, housing, drinking water, employment, health, education, social security) without regard to race, gender, language, ideology or social origin.

One of the main tangible results of this conference was the establishment of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT) which is currently seeded in Nairobi, Kenya. The initial profile of this agency was the treatment of critical housing situations derived from the occurrence of natural disasters, civil wars and urban violence. It was originally directed to refugees and families who had become homeless because of natural or human-induced disasters. Over the years the housing and social issues derived from extreme urban growth started to become increasingly important in the UN-HABITAT policies, strategies and goals (Bonduki, 1996; Rolnik and Saule Junior, 1996).

Less tangible but equally important was the pioneering work on the increasing of the scientific community's (and stakeholders) awareness to the importance of considering illegal urbanization as a problem of global incidence. The results of this inspiring procedure are made clear, for example, by the program of the second World Population Conference (the Mexico Conference, in 1984), in which the worldwide exponential increase in urban population (clearly related with illegal urbanization) was emphasized – alongside with the status of women, international and in-boundaries migration movements (phenomenon also closely connected with clandestine urbanization and the appearance of "slums") and the ageing of world's population – as a major "problem" for the future population development.

Twenty years after its first version (in 1996) a second edition of the HABITAT conference was undertaken. Called HABITAT II, this second event was held in Istanbul (Turkey) under two main thematic motivations: i) Sustainable Cities; and ii) Adequate Housing for All. This conference's main objective was to adopt an agenda – called the HABITAT Agenda – comprising a set of principles, goals and commitments constituent of a global action plan designed to guide national and international efforts regarding the

improvement of the human settlements' conditions for the first two decades of the 21st century.

The HABITAT Agenda emphasizes several aspects. Among them, it is of extreme relevance to highlight the recognition of "adequate housing" as a basic Human Right. In this perspective, governments were from there on obliged to promote measures to satisfy that right, through the development of national and local housing programs and plans.

Another essential aspect of this document regards the importance placed upon local entities in these procedures. The Agenda recognized that the local community agents are the ones that determine the success (or failure) of the policies developed to improve the lives of slum dwellers. According to this, the principle of "Partnership" must be closely inter-connected to the "Participation" and "Proximity" principles (Rolnik and Saule Junior, 1996).

Still, it is also recognized in the named Agenda that another essential intervention axis in the establishment of urban management policies for the alleviation of the social problems related to these critical urban areas is the building up of social equipments and infrastructures, which is by itself closely linked to the environmental sustainability of these slums' areas and in general to the cities to which they pertain to.

The specific urban situation of the LDC's is also approached in the HABITAT Agenda, through the recognition that all the interventions directed to these countries critical urban areas should be developed regarding the local economic structure of these fragmented spaces. The Agenda states the obsoleteness of the practices that defended that the "slums" were merely circumstantial, thus promoting the implementation of mass social housing policies endorsed by the country's states. It warns that the national level is inefficient in dealing with these issues. According to this document, the upgrading-type interventions – meaning the measures concerned with the consolidation and urbanization of these human settlements without the recurrence to evictions – based on the local logics of communitarian organization are more effective. For example, in spite of directly attacking the informal economies that tend to be developed in these areas, policy-makers must try to make the best use of their opportunities through the design of policies directed to finance and empower (at least in a more preliminary stage

of the process) this "popular" economy's role in the improvement of the housing conditions of these urban slum areas' dwellers. This would prove to enhance each community's housing conditions and simultaneously promote job opportunities and the creation of newer, more efficient and diversified sources of revenue for the populations (Rolnik and Saule Junior, 1996).

Finally, a set of measures concerning communities' training and empowerment and the promotion of entrepreneurship and economic development within them was also advanced in the HABITAT document, standing out the importance of capacity building and empowerment of the local populations (Garau and Sclar, 2005; Rolnik and Saule Junior, 1996).

More recently, the UN's eight Millennium Goals also accounted for the critical urban areas' problems. Although implicitly linked with most of the objectives designed, clandestine urbanization and more specifically the people living in these areas – the "slum dwellers"– are also addressed directly through target 11, included in the goal 7 – "to ensure environmental sustainability*"* – that points out the desire to «*have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers*» (Garau and Sclar, 2005: 1).

Aiming at the fulfilment of such a "desire" a group of political and institutional measures were recommended (Garau and Sclar, 2005; Sachs, 2005):

Recognize that the urban poor peoples should be regarded as active agents and not just as passive beneficiaries of the development process;

Improve the local governance system, especially by means of recognizing "the right of the citizens to the city", by the perception of the importance of the notion of "planning to sustainably develop" and by acknowledging the relevance of the implementation of locally-based development strategies;

Support and implement local policies for poverty alleviation including, for example: i) the design of renewed legislation inhibiting forced evictions of people without income; ii) the management of different land uses and urban constraints; or iii) the infra-structuring of these illegally built areas. Measures to be prioritized include the improvement of these neighbourhoods accessibility and transport networks, the providing of access to clean water and sanitation, the creation of partnerships between

private and public entities and local communities to enhance local governance, or the search for alternative housing and income sources for these neighbourhoods population;

Mobilize financial investment and human and land resources, coming from diversified (public and private) sources, and working at multiple levels of decision;

Promote the communities' empowerment through the development and strengthening of local solidarity networks and associations, and by means of providing support to the strategies for poverty reduction or the effective creation of so-called Millennium Cities (constituting benchmarks of good practices in urban governance).

It is almost needless to say that all the above mentioned measures must be developed regarding a clear inter-connectedness with the territorial features of each specific spatial context. The importance of a careful diagnosis – following the premise of "Economic Development Clinic" developed by Sachs (2005) – is unquestionable.

Summarily, and although they are not political measures in a strict sense, the importance of the UN in the establishment of an international framework to direct the action-plans to be implemented in the critical urban areas is relatively obvious. Even if the guidelines designed do not have a direct and immediate effect on the national (and local) housing and urban policies their referential role upon these policies is not to be disregarded.

The approach to the Brazilian case-study – which is to be pursued next – should be suitable to shed a more comprehensive light to the transposition of such a framework to the national and local decision-making contexts.

4. Policies to Improve the Lives of Brazil's Slum Dwellers: National and Local Contexts

In what concerns to the Brazilian case, one can consider that the first "modern" attempts of government intervention on the issues of housing date back to the 1920's. Specifically targeted at preventing the proliferation of slums, one can highlight the 1940's restrictive and prohibiting policies, of which the 1947's creation in Rio de Janeiro (then, still the capital city of Brazil) of a governmental commission to eradicate slums must be detached. In the subsequent years, and although the number of slums in Brazil was, at that time, almost residual when compared to the current situation the

government conducted a series of surveys in the slums of some Brazilian cities. In 1956, a decree unblocked federal funding for projects aimed at improving the living conditions of Brazil's main cities' "*favelas*" inhabitants.

Not disregarding the previous measures it is only under president's Jânio Quadros (1961-1964) mandate that the housing crisis became a matter of great importance for the Brazilian federal state. Indeed a "reform ideology" led the Brazilian government to establish an alarmist social crisis diagnosis. A "Housing Assistance Plan" was proposed – whose funding should be guaranteed by the Inter-American Bank – as well as the creation of a Brazilian Housing Institute (IBH), a federal government agency responsible for the conceptualization and coordination of all the country's urban and housing policies.

In 1964, Brazil became a military dictatorship for more than two decades. The authoritarian regime used housing policies as a showpiece of its social interventions, since they were easily articulated with this regime's political and ideological objectives and above all because a situation of urgency started to establish itself, driven by the already mentioned urban explosion of the country (Sachs, 1999).

During that (approximately) twenty year period (ranging from 1964 to 1985), the dominant housing policy paradigm was driven by intense state intervention, through a process named by Bonduki (1996) as the "Central-Development Model".

During that time the housing matter was unquestionably dominated by a federal public player, the National Housing Bank (BNH). The institutional basis for public production of housing and urban infrastructure was created by the Federal Law number 4380 (of August 21, 1964), which established several regulatory and interventive institutions such as the Housing Finance System (SFH), the National Housing Bank (BNH) and the Federal Office for Housing and Urban Planning (SERFHAU).

All those institutions intended to develop the national government's vision of a unified national housing and urbanization policy. Its focus was placed on the stimulation of the construction of social housing and on the granting of assistant financing aid for the acquisition of housing by the poorer urban populations (Sachs, 1999).

The intervention model was therefore extremely centralized. The federal government had full responsibility in the establishment of the country's housing policies. The

housing and urban policies were driven solely by the bureaucratic authoritarian national State, represented by the BNH. The hegemony of the dominant class was clear and legitimated by the social housing federal initiatives that were used as a mean of socioeconomic and political dominance (Veras and Bonduki, 1988).

Synthesizing the information provided by Sachs (1999), Bonduki (1996) and Rolnik and Saule Junior (1996) it is possible to identify the existence of five federal housing policy basic principles, directed by the federal government and financed by the BNH during this period:

Prioritizing the construction of new homes, sold as a form of access to private property, by opposition to the virtual absence of social housing for rent;

Promoting financial autonomy through compulsory recovery of costs on debts. The financing of these operations was made through the peoples' savings and by the use of cross-subsidies (equalization mechanisms);

Full indexing of either savings or debt in order to eliminate the effects of inflation in the housing stock (monetary correction measures);

Using of the private financial sector (which fed the BNH) and promotion of the exclusivity of the private sector in housing production;

Centralizing the financial resources and the institutional system with delegation, first for the state and, only then, to local authorities.

In summary, during the nearly 20 years of BNH's existence – or the political period marked by the presence of a military dictatorship in Brazil – it was possible to acknowledge the predominance of an approach consisting of a Central-Development model, through which housing policies were implemented according to the fluctuations of the economic and social conjuncture seeking to overcome the successive contradictions inherent to the established system and providing better responses to the different needs of diverse housing market segments. As noticed by Veras and Bonduki (1988) the failure of such policies is visible in the post-regime urban spaces housing situation. The formal housing market and public policies were not effective in answering the increasing urban population's needs leading to the emergence of

"creative" sheltering solutions, the so-called "favelas" displaying poor housing and urban (infra-structures and socioeconomic services) features.

The last years of BNH's intervention (before the collapse of the military regime) were characterized by the elaboration of new social policies, "forced" by the increasing weakening of the political dictatorship and the already mentioned changes in the international ideological conjunctures (during the 1970's and 1980's) related to the management of critical urban areas. Slum urbanization, assisted self-construction or support to critical areas infrastructure and sanitation programs started to be developed, specifically directed at the peoples with lower economic capacity. An example is the creation of the operation "*João de Barro*" (in 1984) that allowed for the promotion of self-construction and urbanization by the poorer population of the main Brazilian cities (Taschner, 1988).

The collapse of the totalitarian regime (1985) led to a gradual democratization of the central and local political powers – clearly associated to the rise of the aforementioned role of the local realities in a Globalization context. This would come to promote a strong paradigm change in Brazil's housing policies.

According to Bonduki (1996) this new paradigm is characterized by a radical counter-posing to the previous centralized model revealing a new attitude towards urban management in Brazil based on the trinomial interaction between "public participation", "sustainable development" and "universal life and environmental qualities". The referenced author designates this "new" approach as an "Environmental Participative Model", claiming the increasingly local and sustainability driven scope of intervention of the recent urban management initiatives in Brazil.

An empirical methodology was undergone in order to try to approach and assess the main characteristics of this turned-over vision of urban management. This approach consisted on the descriptive and thorough analysis of a total of 16 housing, social and environmental management projects applied in some of Brazil's main cities presented in Bonduki (1996) as successful practices in urban management in the 1990's. The objective of such an approach was to identify the common features (and specificities) of the initiatives applied in order to make possible to categorize some of this new paradigm's main characteristics.

Although the projects analysed are generally scattered across the Brazilian territory, it is necessary to advise that the municipality of São Paulo is dominant with two projects. As a Metropolitan Region, São Paulo solidifies its prominence, answering to its position as the leading "slums" area in the entire Brazilian territory. The absence of projects in the city of Rio de Janeiro (where Brazil's second largest concentration of "slums" is located) is another important aspect of the analysis recognized by this paper's authors as an important methodological flaw. The projects territorial distribution is displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Territorial distribution of some successful projects of urban management

Source: own work (after Bonduki, 1996)

Rather than describing all the projects' main characteristics, or even detaching any of their specific aspects – that, apart from their general interest, would not fall under the scope of this specific paper –, a synthetic and systematic categorization of these projects common features will be summarily presented next. It is the authors belief that this will contribute for the establishment of a general analytical framework of the recent

(meaning the last two decades) trends in urban management in the Brazilian cities, thus contributing for the accomplishment of this paper's initial objectives.

Given this, the main aspects deriving from the empirical descriptive analytical approach to the projects related to new urban management initiatives applied in some of Brazil's urban areas – and reflective of the new Environmental-Participative model's characteristics – can be conclusively synthesized as follows:

The scope of intervention has been diversified and is now not centred solely in the housing issues. Although each project had its own objectives some main common areas of intervention can be identified, namely: i) the participative management of financial public and private resources and of the housing regularization and improvement; ii) the environmental recovery of degraded areas (notorious concerns laid upon river basins management, sanitation and vulnerability to natural disasters); iii) public transport, traffic regulation and these aspects' relations to the promotion of citizenship and to social education;

All the projects present a democratic and decentralized management methodology placing the emphasis on the role of local powers and on sector policies' articulation. The initiatives primarily motivated by ecological concerns tend to be developed in a more integrated manner not only at a local level but through the magnification of the scales of intervention to the regional (or at least inter-municipal) level;

There is a clear focus on the creation of institutional channels for popular participation (for example, through the establishment of urban management councils, or the development of participatory budget[5] techniques) elevating the importance of including citizens participation in the decisions about the government priorities;

The renewed priority of most of these projects is placed upon ensuring the right to housing and the city. The establishment of improvements in the population's social situation and life quality not just in terms of housing conditions, but also in the critical

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[5] Participatory budgeting is normally seen in these projects as a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, in which ordinary residents decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget allowing citizens to identify, discuss, and prioritize public spending.

areas' infra-structuring, the population's educational levels enhancement, or in a more integrated role of "family" as a social institution, are current aspects of intervention;

There is a tendency for the establishment of partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations in order to promote the development of programs and projects. Other new forms of governance are also prioritized such as the stimulation of self-management and co-management communitarian processes, the implementation of self-production initiatives and programmes addressed at housing, employment and multiple sources of income generation;

Massive social housing production is being replaced by new and more efficient forms of management, production and improvement of these poor urban populations dwelling conditions. This includes direct funding to the final users, the development of legal frameworks directed at these sites' urban land regularization and the urbanization (new infrastructures) of the areas occupied spontaneously;

General concern with the compatibility between environmental preservation and the implementation of urban projects and housing production, including the focus on the ecological recovery of environmentally protected areas already occupied;

Importance of the reutilization and the recycling of urban waist, and the reduction of waist generation and of water consumption. In a similar vein, the transport policies are now directed at the promotion of the use of public transport and traffic safety. All these previous objectives are pursued through a greater focus on environmental education and education towards citizenship.

5. Final Remarks

Last decades' urban growth – promoted by the last years economic development models, that placed a strong focus on highly valued economic activities' development, mostly located in urban spaces – was induced by the ever-flowing arrival of new immigrants to these urban areas. Formal housing (seen here as a "market" and as a "policy") was in many cases not able to respond efficiently to this challenge. One of the results of this process is the proliferation of critical areas in the urban spaces, designated by the UN as slums. These are particularly relevant in the LDC's being Brazil one of the most prominent cases.

These problematic areas' global incidence has captured the attention of some worldwide-based institutions. Among them, the work developed by the UN has been particularly relevant, providing a series of conceptual and operational directives to be transposed to each national and local context.

The analysis of the paradigmatic Brazilian case-study has made visible that the current urban management initiatives are mainly environmentally driven, focusing in the enhancing of the public participation of the citizens in the decision-making processes. This represented a rupture with the previously more centralized policies.

The analysis of a relevant number of projects designed under the scope of this "new" approach was undergone in the current paper, enabling the categorization of a series of characteristics of these renewed urban management initiatives. It was possible to understand that these programmes were normally developed following the UN's indications. They are, therefore, more empowering, integrative, dynamic and ecologically driven.

It appears that this "renewed" international ideological framework has been directing last two decades Brazilian urban management initiatives, with recognized and promising results for the future. Nevertheless, and withstanding the positive characters of these types of interventions, they must continue to be applied and perfected. Even though these local agendas are representatives of a national (and even international) framework of action their success will always be reliant on their capacity to adapt to each specific situation.

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