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Sao Paulo, east side from popular territory to ground for urban operation

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In 2004 the Sao Paulo Local Government elaborated, conducted and got the approval of the City Council, three bills related to the Rio Verde-Jacú Urban Operation, on the east side of the city, in coordination with the eastern portion of the Sao Paulo metropolitan area, especially with the cities of Guarulhos, Santo André and Mauá.

I could carry on an investigation about Major Urban Projects, which I submitted as a doctoral thesis (NEGRELOS, 2005), seeking to understand political, ideological meanings of an action combined in an effective management and intervention in a municipal and metropolitan sub-region. The study was based on the observation of public actions – regardless of being promoted by the state itself – built around a "new" planning of the east region. The research revealed the meanings of the historical construction of Sao Paulo's suburban and metropolitan outskirts within a larger project of capital consolidation in Sao Paulo city, which has privileged historically other "more successful" areas from the point of view of public investment (such as southwest zone, with the Faria Lima, Aguas Espraiadas and Agua Branca operations).

The elaboration process of Major Urban Projects for the Sao Paulo east zone is due to the convergence of different views on the territory. On one side, we cannot deny the consolidation of a new perspective of the future, and the possibility of reverting a situation of isolated and peripheral densification based on the construction of large public housing complexes, precarious occupations in environmentally fragile areas and components of a peripheral extension model based on self-built popular houses in plots. This model was widely used in all Brazilian cities in metropolitan areas and has been a standard to the large Latin American cities. However, the projects proposed for this region are much less due to the reversion of the social and territorial exclusion process, and much more to the confirming and deepening of a process to extend the possibilities of further capital accumulation, once it "liberates" flows and access between the two largest logistics Brazilian equipments of cargo and goods transportation: the Guarulhos international airport and the Santos harbour. (Figure 1)

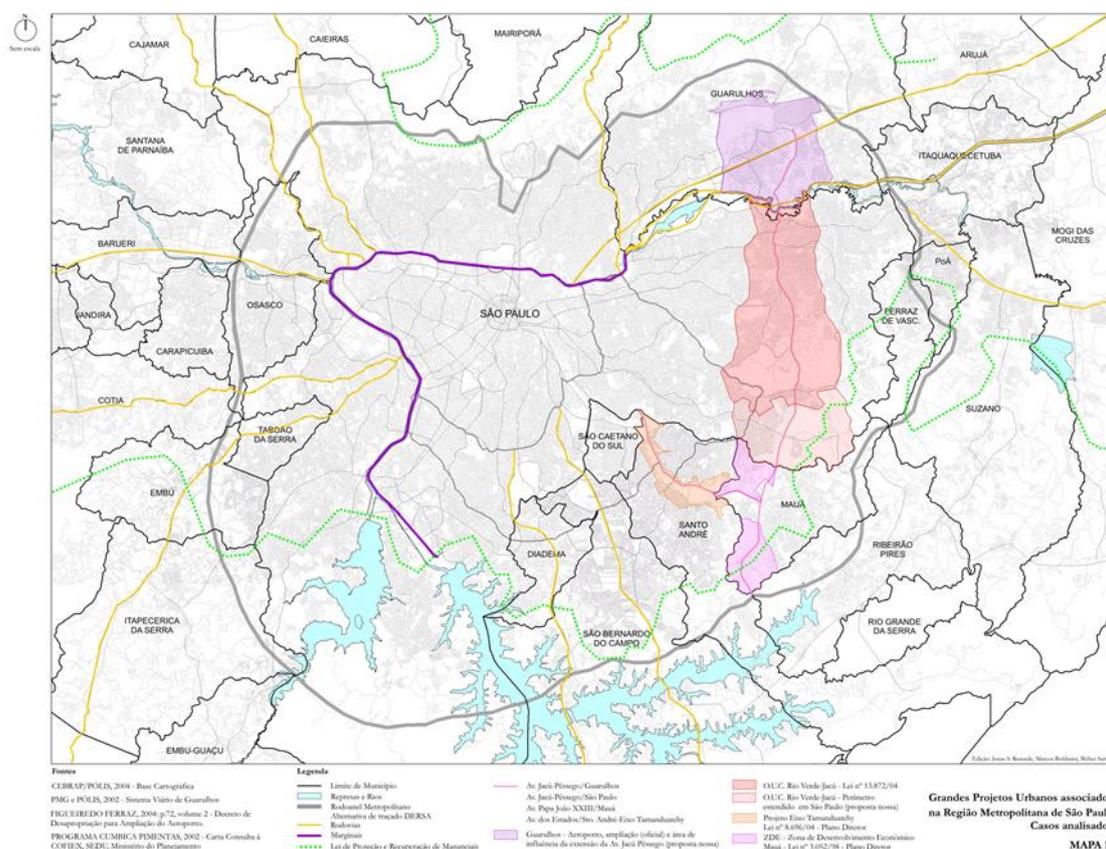


Figure 1: Major Urban Projects in association with the RMS. Analysed cases (NEGRELOS, 2005).

Hence my interest in sharing with the readers of V!RUS journal the reflection on the dilemma surrounding the contradictions of urbanization and their connections with pecuniary interests. Therefore, this region – relegated for decades to building popular homes by their people's own hard work and by their many claims to the government for improvements and infrastructure, – watches the development of new plans, projects and urban interventions. Investors are

perceiving the potential of investment through large works, now linked to the international sportive event of the World Cup and the construction of a stadium to host the event.

We wonder: considering that six years ago the urban operation in which the stadium is inserted was approved by the City Hall and its infrastructure works haven't been carried out, who will stay in and who will leave the region if the estate capital, the industrial and the tertiary ones are really interested in local substantial investments? Will the state act again as a propeller of these investments, applying public funds where private investors can work later where profit becomes sure? What will be the "leftovers" for the persons who built the region, living in extensive peripherals settlements, marked by the "ZL" (east end) stigma?

These "leftovers" can be positive externalities for the population which lives and works in the eastern zone of the metropolitan area and especially of the city, since there are already subway and train lines in there. The road system's hegemony is confirmed in this Major Urban Project, combining planning, management, strategy and other varied projects, restating road transportation as a planning axis. Likewise, the gentrifying character, changing the region's social pattern, is an effect that will be surely confirmed. The economic and territorial recycling operation used by many rich cities are accompanied, in most cases, by actions that exclude the poorest, in an extended process which considers Sao Paulo as one of the few "global cities" in Latin America. In opposition to this view, it is quite appropriate to think of Sao Paulo as a city hierarchically located into a worldwide phenomenon in which "... there is an excess (latent) of men and wealth (despite the wars), because the massive process separates people from wealth." (LEFEBVRE, 1999:144).

In the process of the hierarchical reconversion within the macrometropolis (NEGRELOS, 2005), fragmented in socio-territorial terms, Sao Paulo has been the support of projects conceived with the purpose of remodeling large degraded areas. This pushes local dwellers (such as urban operations in the southwest side), although some projects (like the Guarapiranga program, for example, which includes the mode of "redevelopment of slums" in watershed areas with deployment of leisure equipment, along with structural works, institutional and environmental education) include some level of sensitivity to the populations living in fragile conditions of social and environmental (FILARDO 2004:256). (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Aerial picture simulation of special design of a linear park with housing, from refurbishment of the area currently occupied by nesting popular. Source: PMSP, 2004.

The aim of the program and the operation is "to change the region by economic development," through "Attraction of investments; Higher quality jobs; Human resources training and research, Integration with the metropolis," according to the documents used in my thesis. Articulated to this formulation is the idea that the East Zone is the center of the Sao Paulo Metropolitan Area (RMSP as in the portuguese acronym), with 32,680 hectares (326.8 km²), covering 22% of the Sao Paulo City territory, with 3.3 million inhabitants, meaning 1/3 of the population of the whole city. It is important to indicate the scale of the urban operation: circa 7,760 ha (77.6 km²), in a city with 1,509 km² and a 8.051km²metropolitan area; 2.139km² are urbanized and about 17,800,000 inhabitants live there (IBGE/2000).

Absent in the original study is the analysis of some impacts as the (super) rising of the urban land prices and its effects on expelling part of local population. The possibility of generating a process of territorial segregation was not measured as well, nor a study on the real estate market. This action is necessary to anticipate the mapping of a "land reserve" so that the government can control and regulate the processes of urban territorial occupation, producing necessary settlements for the development's socio-territorial feasibility (eg.: new neighborhoods for low-income population resettled). Needless to say that the rise of land prices in the area of influence of this urban operation is unavoidable.

The three laws mentioned earlier were "frozen", i.e. not voted, already in the beginning of the new municipal administration in 2005, and recently the local government conducted a bid for the extension of the Novos Trabalhadores avenue to the borders of the municipality of Maua, reinforcing the relevance of the road for public actions in the region.

With the release of the selection of Sport Club Corinthians Paulista site (result of public concession) for the construction of the stadium to host the opening of the World Cup in 2014,

the discussion process is reopened on the necessary infrastructure to the region and its ability to support such a big event. This dilemma, faced by several cities in the world at international events, is now installed in Brazil and the Sao Paulo city east zone is already undergoing a fierce process of estate valuation. Such a process is being exploited by the very low-income population giving rise to speculative processes that can lead to further exclusion and to produce denser metropolitan peripheries.

(Arquivo with CBN interview)

File with an interview granted to CBN Radio in 01/09/2010, the impacts related to this work, completing the current reflection on both sides of the same process: valuing territorial / social segregation.

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