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## RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE IN CITIES: EXPLORING AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE NEW SOCIAL URBANISM AGENDA TO COMBAT INEQUALITIES

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**Abstract:** When we analyze social inequalities, we realize that they are not caused by a single factor, but rather by a complex interaction of different forms of oppression and discrimination. An intersectional perspective recognizes that people have multiple views that intertwine, such as race, gender, social class, sexuality, among others. Identities are not independent of each other, and individual experiences are determined by the interaction of these elements. Cities are spaces where people face great difficulties, but also demonstrate an incredible ability to adapt. Resistance can be manifested in many ways, from social and political movements to networks of community empowerment and mutual support. The New Agenda for Social Urbanism emerges as an approach that aims to build citizenship based on a comprehensive intervention model that places human beings at the heart of their own development.

**Keywords:** cities; inequalities; social urbanism.

## INTRODUCTION

“The much-desired social peace will only be achieved when we are

capable of building territories with more dignity and greater citizenship.”

Murilo Cavalcanti – Director of ‘Rede Compaz’, Recife

During the period from 1930 to 1980, there was a significant increase in migration from rural areas to urban areas, driven by the industrial boom. This accelerated population growth resulted in the formation of precarious settlements in large cities. Latin America is characterized by the prevalence of informal urbanization, which refers to the spontaneous occupation of territories without adequate planning. This type of settlement today represents a common element in our cities, considering that one in every three inhabitants in the world currently resides in

areas of informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2008). Over time, these settlements are gradually regularized and acquire a formal character, with the improvement of public spaces and roads. This process results in structural development that enables orderly growth.

The urbanization of the world is implying the urbanization of poverty (MARICATO, 2014, p.83). The lack of control over land use and occupation, a central issue for ensuring social justice and environmental preservation is evidenced by the unequal predatory nature of the land and real estate market, whose speculative attitude was enhanced by the introduction of massive investments from federal programs.

It must be noted that for the first time in Brazil in the 1934 Constitution, social function is a condition for the right to property. It determines that urban or rural property must, in addition to serving the interests of the owner, meet the needs and interests of society. This way, the social function conditions the right to property, by establishing that this right is limited by respect for the collective good. To regulate articles 182 and 183 of the 1988 Federal Constitution, Law number: 10,257/2001 – City Statute, which establishes the general guidelines of urban policy and aims to regulate the use of urban property in favor of the collective good, security and well-being of citizens, as well as environmental balance. The City Statute was the result of social struggles for a more inclusive city, and a distributive land regulation strategy was adopted, centered on instruments that must allow low-income populations access to urbanized land.

Brazil has around 33 million homeless people, according to the report released by the United Nations Human Settlements Program. Of this number, around 24 million who do not have adequate housing or have nowhere

to live in large urban centers. The housing deficit in the country currently reaches 7.7 million, of which 5.5 million are in urban centers<sup>1</sup>. The principle of the social function of property aims to serve the well-being of the community, combined with the private interest of the owner. Private interest must be reconciled with the public interest. This is not a fixed concept, as society is constantly evolving, a dynamic that constantly alters the values and interests of the community.

A good subdivision of urban land seeks to interact coherently with the environmental group to which it belongs, involving: proximity to other types of activities (residential, commercial, urban center, industrial hub, leisure, well-being, etc.); the use of natural resources, paying attention to air quality, bodies of water, vegetation and geomorphology of the terrain, among others. All of this will generate a good or bad biophysical, social and economic balance for humans, fauna and flora in this environmental group, making or incompatible the main result of this land division, which is living, working, among others. If the effectiveness of urban policies practiced by what we could call the “new school of urbanism” can be questioned when taking as a measure the evolution or devolution of the quality of urban life in recent decades, or if the effectiveness of movements can also be questioned. urban social issues in achieving real changes during this period, the same doubt does not occur when it comes to reading, imaging, analyzing or interpreting the city. (MARICATO, 2018, p. 111)

In this regard, there is undoubtedly an analytically difficult “scale problem” that requires (but does not receive) careful assessment. These transformation processes can result in and trigger a phenomenon known as urban gentrification<sup>2</sup>. Urban gentrification is one of the most pressing and polarizing issues facing cities today. In so-called “popular” discussions, advocates of gentrification tend to frame it as a badly needed influx of capital into urban areas. They point to increased commercial activity and tax revenue, capital circulating and flowing to low-income housing families, decreased crime, and improved public services as evidence that gentrification is, overall, a good thing. Critics see urban gentrification as a quasi-colonial invasion of privilege in economically vulnerable communities<sup>3</sup>. But gentrification is plural and more complex than that, involving fundamental issues related to the right to the city.

Due to urban gentrification, affected communities have demonstrated and developed a variety of resistance and resilience skills to protect their homes, identities and ways of life, for example, expanding the creation of support networks among families living there, developing small businesses and cooperatives, or revitalizing public spaces to encourage community empowerment. Based on what has been presented, it is clear that community empowerment and intersectionality are closely connected. Both recognize and value the diversity of identities and experiences within a community, ensuring that all voices are heard and all needs are met. These territorial approaches not only

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1. Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) based on the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), from IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).

2. Gentrification, used for the first time by British sociologist Ruth Glass in her work *London: aspects of change* (1964), where the author described and analyzed certain changes in the spatial organization of the city of London. This theme gained popularity after the urban phenomenon present in different temporalities and spatialities.

3. For Marx, capitalists exploit their workers by extracting “surplus value”, the difference between what the worker actually pays and the value added by the worker’s work. Even if we reject Marx’s economic theory, he identified a general form of distorted human relationships. The basic form of this relationship is that a stronger party extracts undue benefits from a weaker party, which the stronger party can only do because of the latter’s vulnerability.

empower communities to claim their rights and needs, but also promote more inclusive and democratic governance of cities.

While uncontrolled urbanization, without adequate planning, contributes to the increase and worsening of social inequalities along with the phenomenon of gentrification, social urbanism actively considers the impact of urbanization on inequalities.

## **HOUSING DEFICIT AND RIGHT TO THE CITY**

The 1st National Census and Survey on the Homeless Population, carried out in 2008, identified approximately 32 thousand people living on the streets in the country (SAGI, 2009). In August 2023, based on data and information from administrative records and federal government systems, the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC) released a report indicating a total of 236,400 homeless people registered in CadÚnico, based in data from December 2022 (BRAZIL, 2023). Data released by the João Pinheiro Foundation (FJP), the institution responsible for calculating the housing deficit in Brazil, in partnership with the National Housing Secretariat of the Ministry of Cities, demonstrated that the housing deficit in Brazil totaled 6 million homes in 2022, representing 8.3% of the total occupied housing in the country. In absolute terms, compared to 2019 (5,964,993), there was an increase of around 4.2% in the housing deficit (CAMPOS, 2024).

The housing deficit in Brazil in 2022 can be attributed to three factors: (i) precarious housing: inadequate housing conditions, especially in the North and Northeast regions, contribute significantly to the housing deficit, directly impacting people's quality of life; (ii) excessive burden on urban rent: the high cost of rent in urban areas, especially for low-income families, compromises the family budget and makes access to other basic needs difficult; (iii) unwanted family cohabitation:

the need to access housing due to unwanted family cohabitation also contributes to the housing deficit, as families who wish to establish a single-family home face difficulties in this process (REPORT FJP, 2024).

Government strategies to address the lack of housing in Brazil encompass a variety of actions, such as initiatives to increase the availability of housing through housing construction projects, property regularization and stimulation of the private sector; creation of social rental programs for low-income families, with the aim of alleviating the excessive rent burden in urban areas; relocating families in situations of unwanted coexistence and improving the use of residential space; use of the Single Registry (CadÚnico) to obtain information on precarious homes, in order to better understand the housing needs of the population with lower purchasing power; and development of housing policies adapted to the specificities of each region, taking into account the diversity of the housing deficit in different parts of the country. These actions aim to guarantee universal access to decent housing and contribute to reducing the housing problem in Brazil.

Lefebvre (2016, p. 96) defends the idea of the right to the city which, in general terms, is confused with the right to life itself, and for this reason it is independent of its recognition as a "natural" member or not of a certain space. The city is the place where people of all types and classes mix, however reluctantly and conflictually, to produce a common life, albeit perpetually changing and transitory. The concept of the right to the city is intrinsically linked to discussions on housing and urban policies, as it encompasses the idea that all citizens must have access to an inclusive, sustainable and accessible city. This involves ensuring adequate housing, efficient public transport, quality basic services and other essential aspects for a dignified life.

## **SOCIAL URBANISM: AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH**

Social urbanism emerges as an intervention strategy in urban space with the objective of paying off the social debt with the community, promoting inclusion, dignity, participation, security, coexistence and hope. Despite the various and solid opportunities for progress it presents, social urbanism does not escape more critical assessments in relation to its principles and its implementation.

Community resistance can arise due to concerns about gentrification, displacement, and changes to people's everyday lives, creating tensions between planners and communities. Financial viability is another issue, as these projects often require significant investment. Bureaucracy and administrative barriers can delay implementation, while persistent inequality can persist despite social urbanism efforts. Lack of long-term sustainability and inadvertent environmental impacts are also concerns. Furthermore, inadequate community participation, interagency coordination issues, and complexity of stakeholder engagement can affect the effectiveness of these projects.

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These criticisms highlight the complex challenges that urban public policies can face during their implementation in equally complex social environments. Furthermore, they illustrate the difficulties that can arise when the project under development does not receive sufficient political and/or social support (SOCIAL URBANISM GUIDE, 2023, p. 55).

The social urbanism approach emerges as a fundamental response to the complicated issues of inequality and social exclusion in the context of urban development. This human-centered approach takes a holistic view, recognizing the diversity of communities' needs and encouraging people's active participation in formulating strategies. Social urbanism aims to develop solutions that effectively combat the spread of social problems, mainly inequality, deviating from the traditionally modernist vision of a universal individual. This approach places human beings at the center of their own development. This aims not only to reduce disparities, but also to build a fairer and more inclusive society.

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