Regeneration through the 'Pedagogy of Confrontation':
Exploring the Critical Spatial Practices of Social Movements in Inner City São Paulo as Avenues for Urban Renewal

Regeneración mediante la 'pedagogía de confrontación':
exploración de las prácticas espaciales críticas de movimientos sociales en el interior de São Paulo como vías para la renovación urbana

Regeneração por meio da "pedagogia do enfrentamento":
explorando as práticas espaciais críticas de movimentos sociais no interior de São Paulo como vias para a renovação urbana

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Abstract

The city centre of São Paulo is increasingly a key site for local housing movements to challenge the rules and practices of spatial injustice in Brazil. In a context where housing for low-income groups is in short supply and, critically, continues to be characterized by highly skewed social and spatial distribution, occupied buildings have emerged as laboratories for the production of novel ways of inhabiting the city. This paper addresses on-going inner-city occupations as possible alternatives to the prevailing modes of conceiving and imagining urban renewal. As such, it outlines an approach to regeneration that engages processes of self-production and self-management as a means to achieve dignified homes and contest exclusionary urbanization.

Keywords: Grassroots practices, social movements, urban regeneration, São Paulo.

Resumen

Cada vez más, el centro de São Paulo es un punto clave para que los movimientos por la vivienda desafíen las reglas y las prácticas de injusticia social en Brasil. En un contexto en el que la provisión de viviendas para grupos poblaciones de bajos ingresos es escasa, y en el que críticamente está caracterizado por una distribución social y territorial desigual, la ocupación de edificios ha surgido como un laboratorio para la producción de nuevas formas de habitar la ciudad. Este artículo aborda las ocupaciones en curso de la ciudad como posibles alternativas a los modos imperantes de concebir e imaginar la renovación urbana. Como tal, se describe un método para la regeneración que involucra procesos de autoproducción y autogestión como medios para lograr viviendas dignas y luchar en contra de la urbanización excluyente.

Palabras clave: iniciativas de base, movimientos sociales, regeneración urbana, São Paulo.

Resumo

Cada vez mais, o centro de São Paulo é um ponto-chave para que os movimentos por moradia desafiem as regras e as práticas da injustiça social no Brasil. Num contexto no qual a provisão habitacional para grupos populacionais de baixos recursos é escassa e no qual criticamente está caracterizado por uma distribuição social e territorial desigual, a ocupação de edifícios tem surgido como um laboratório para a produção de novas formas de habitar a cidade. Este artigo aborda as ocupações em curso da cidade como possíveis alternativas para os modos dominantes de conceber e imaginar a renovação urbana. Portanto, descreve-se um método para a regeneração que envolve processos de autoprodução e autogestão como meios para conseguir moradias dignas e lutar contra a urbanização excludente.

Palavras-chave: iniciativas de base, movimentos sociais, regeneração urbana, São Paulo.

Introduction

Regeneration is an open and elastic term — a "floating signifier" to borrow a statement from urbanist John Lovering[1] — which has being embraced by many different actors and authors in reference to a wide base of cultural and political traditions and interests. Widely pointing to the reconstruction or transformation of shunned urban areas, the same term serves as an expression of very diverse hopes and visions of future urban development.

1   Lovering, "The Relationship Between Urban Regeneration", 344.

Over the past twenty years, critical analyses of the discourse and practice of regeneration have delved into the linkages between the strategies and policies of urban regeneration, and their exclusionary effects on the communities who are supposed to benefit from them. The detrimental affects of urban renewal practices under neoliberal urbanisation have been widely explored in geography and urban studies, and there is no lack of articulate description of the polarised urban landscape they have produced – benefiting commercial interests, and dispersing existing groups who are excluded from decision-making and the advantages of economic growth.[2] In summary, "the extensive literature in this field takes urban regeneration, along with renewal, revitalisation, rejuvenation and of course renaissance, as depoliticised euphemisms for gentrification."[3]

2   Campkin, *Remaking London*, 1-17.

3   Porter and Shaz, *Whose Urban Renaissance?*, 4.

4   *Ibid.*

In their seminal publication: *Whose Urban Renaissance?*, Porter and Shaw[4] provide an exhaustive account of this literature, simultaneously outlining the limits imposed by such oppositional understanding of urban regeneration. Seen in this light, the limitation of critical studies on urban regeneration leads to the entrenched impossibility of conceiving any alternative way in which the processes of renewal might occur. This literature starts from the premise that the transition from a lower to higher socio-economic status population, involving displacement of the former, is precisely what the advocates of urban regeneration intend. It analyses the strategies employed and emphasizes the various injustices for individuals and social groups that result from urban redevelopment. Part of the power of this work is that it is a clear acknowledgment that although regeneration policies have been depoliticised, the processes of disinvestment and reinvestment are indeed a knowing activity on the part of the 'producers of gentrification'.[5] As a consequence, it has been argued that investors, developers, real estate agents, banks, governments and mainstream media act, in effect, as active initiators of the gentrification processes.

5   Smith, "Of Yuppies and Housing".

Building on these critiques, this text aims to investigate yet another facet of the multiple practices and discourses surrounding the renewal of contemporary urban areas. Rather than embracing a position whereby regeneration necessarily entails a process of 'class remake',[6] our aim is to focus on the existing discursive and material interstices that might allow for re-appropriating urban regeneration

6   Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*.

as both a concept and a set of practices, and for infusing it with more progressive and inclusive meanings.

The drawback of current critical approaches to the subject is that they do not acknowledge other possible ways of undertaking regeneration. And as Larner reminds us, talking about neoliberalism in New Zealand, such oppositional readings, implying something of a "programmatic coherence", are both "intellectually dissatisfactory and politically disempowering".[7] For arguably, it is in the midst of competing policies and practices of urban transformation that spaces emerge for productive dissent. Based on such reflection, this text attempts to engage with the notion of urban regeneration by exploring the on-going processes of urban change and contestation in São Paulo, Brazil. The underlying hypothesis is that the practices of social movements occupying unused buildings in the city centre of São Paulo can potentially open up spaces for creatively re-interpreting the concept and practice of urban regeneration.

Since at least the 1980s, São Paulo has experienced an intense process of peripheralisation of the urban poor, as the population within inner city areas has decreased and the population in informal settlements and dormitory municipalities has experienced rapid growth. While urban trends encouraged the formation of new economic centres in non-central locations of the city, property prices in the inner city area have reduced. However, even if depreciating, properties still retained relatively high economic values based upon the assumption of future redevelopment. As a result of speculation practices, but also a series of legal bottlenecks (wrangles over ownership, irregular documentation and unpaid property taxes), over 300,000 housing units were reported empty in 2010.[8]

Meanwhile, the city centre has remained an attractive location for the urban poor due to important advantages in terms of access to public transport, informal and formal livelihood opportunities, cultural activities, and public health and education facilities.[9]

This scenario provided the crack that local urban social movements have been exploiting since the late 1990s. Drawing from experiences from the *sem-terra* (landless) movements in Brazil, organised *sem-teto* (roofless) occupations have reclaimed inner city buildings as a means to draw attention to, and question, the logic of commodification of the city, and affirm the right for the urban poor to remain in well-located urban areas. Today, numerous social movements are active in São Paulo's city centre — operating through a composite set of coalitions including the União dos Movimentos de Moradia de São Paulo (UMM) founded in 1985, and the more recent Movimento dos Sem-Teto do Centro (MSTC), Frente da Luta para Moradia (FLM), and Movimento da Moradia para Todos (MMPT). Drawing from protests in the 1970s and 1980s for the right to have access dignified housing in the city centre,[10] such movements use occupations as a means

7   Larner, "Neo-liberalism", 21.

8   Earle, "From Insurgent to Transgressive Citizenship".

9   Kohara, *As contribuições dos movimentos.*

10 Texeira et al., "Conflitos em torno do direito".

to simultaneously provide housing to low income people, contrast market-led redevelopment policies in São Paulo, and contribute to wider struggles for urban reform across Brazil.

While such social movements in the city centre of São Paulo show heterogeneous characteristics, emerging studies do highlight certain common practices and discourses. According to Barbosa,[11] such discourses and practices have strong roots in Paulo Freire's ideas and are producing a 'pedagogy of confrontation' whereby new imaginaries of urban development are articulated through practices of resistance.[12] This text draws on the strategic objectives produced in a 2011 seminar by a wide alliance of social movements and civil society organisations contributing to the project Moradia é Central[13] (Housing is Central), to elaborate on such alternative scenarios and on their potential to re-qualify the notion of urban regeneration.

As a way of unfolding these scenarios, the text is organised around four key questions, each drawing on a different area of mainstream urban regeneration discourses and addressing a different facet of their possible reinterpretation. Each area is explored through an account of international theory and debates, combined with an analysis of social movement practices in São Paulo. The conclusion further reflects on the existing opportunities for articulating a 'pedagogy of confrontation' perspective on the process of urban renewal in inner city areas undergoing conflictive change.

Re-appropriating Regeneration in São Paulo

Decay and Rehabilitation

As has been articulated by Campkin,[14] notions of urban blight and decay are indeed among the driving narratives underlying the regeneration of inner city areas. Conditions of physical disrepair have been explicitly addressed by early regeneration policies since at least the 1970s — furthering a discourse whereby private investments ought to be driven to inner city areas, as a means to intervene in otherwise depleted urban environments. As Imrie and Thomas[15] highlight, the physical dimension and property-led nature of regeneration was rapidly mainstreamed in regeneration programmes throughout the 1980s — and can now be situated at the opposite side of a socially-oriented position interpreting regeneration "as a means to target the welfare of local residents and support the development of local economies".[16] A comprehensive account of such narratives of urban decay and rehabilitation resonates in Furbey's analysis of the metaphors of regeneration, addressing the term's connection with the "treatment" of undesirable urban qualities, and with a process of urban "resurrection".[17]

At least two broad themes can be identified within critiques of urban regeneration through the reform of material space. The first is a criti-

11 Barbosa, Protagonismo dos movimentos de moradia.

12 Freire, *Educação como pratica da liberdade*; Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido*; Freire, *Pedagogia da autonomia.*

13 Moradia è Central.

14 Campkin, *Remaking London.*

15 Imrie and Thomas, "The limits of Property".

16 Leary and McCarthy, *Companion of Urban Regeneration*, 8.

17 Furbey, "Urban 'Regeneration'".

Figure 1. Ocupacão Marconi in Edifício São Manoel, São Paulo. The building is occupied by over 130 families. Since 2012, residents have self-organised in order to renovate the building and initiate shared services and facilities. Photograph: Gabriel Boieras.

que of the labelling of certain areas as being in need of intervention, and of the idea that physical redevelopment is the primary remedy to on-going degradation. As Just Space stress in their account of 'social cleansing' in London, urban renewal schemes often stem from the idea that the targeted urban areas are failing in some way — physically, socially or economically.[18] As such, the equation of certain areas with physical disrepair neutralises the possibility to open up debates on the structural conditions underpinning the deterioration. The second theme is related to the ways in which physical rehabilitation schemes are conceived and carried out. Several authors have highlighted that regeneration practices often result in processes of selective destruction that modify spatial arrangements regardless of the values and meanings that residents attach to urban spaces. These processes have been discussed as potentially leading to the 'museumification' of urban areas, for the purposes of furthering an exogenous yet more competitive urban image.[19]

Against this background, practices of resistance to regeneration policies have productively manipulated the links between the representation of physical degradation, and the articulation of alternative forms of urban redevelopment. In many cases, movements of resistance have produced counter urban analysis to expose the structural conditions underpinning material disrepair, and to demonstrate the many possible ways of rehabilitating declining urban spaces. Among others, Holm and Kuhn examine the negotiations undertaken by Berlin squatter movements in Berlin in the 1980s, stressing the strategic organisation of 'rehab squats'.[20] Here, squatters would occupy empty buildings and immediately start to renovate them as a means "to point out the longstanding deterioration and emptiness of the apartments" — while also creating an acceptance of this method of civil disobedience.

18 Lees et al., "Just Space, The London Tenants'".

19 Colini et al. "Museumization and Transformation in Florence"; Tarsi, "Heritage Tourism and Displacement in Salvador da Bahia".

20 Holm and Kuhn, "Squatting and Urban Renewal".

21 Nova Luz.

In the context of São Paulo, the on-going large scale regeneration project Nova Luz, put forward by government actors with the support of private sector investors, over the next fifteen years aims to improve the physical conditions of a 500,000 square metres city centre.[21] The underpinning motivation for such a project is to attract private investors and involve them in the rehabilitation of the city centre through the mechanism of 'public concessions'. To ensure a desirable business environment, São Paulo's municipal authority has committed to invest 355 million reais (approximately 160 million dollars) in this initiative.

Meanwhile, in the last twenty years, a series of occupations as well as partnerships between government actors, community groups and supporting entities (NGOs, human rights and law entities, and university groups) have focused on rehabilitating empty buildings and improving the state of repair of the area, while at the same time creating housing opportunities for low-income populations. During this period, there have been approximately 120 occupations organised by social movements, which have resulted in the production of nearly 4,300 housing units in the city centre, partially realised in partnership with government actors.[22] The social housing projects called Celso Garcia and Madre de Deus are two examples of successful initiatives that worked in this direction in the end of the 1980s. During the seminar *Moradia é Central*, the partnersahips with support entities have been articulated as one of the main fronts of practice of social movements in their quest to struggle for space in inner city areas. One of the emblematic examples mentioned was the partnership with Universidade de São Paulo, Unificacão das Lutas dos Cortiços (ULC) and Centro Gaspar Garcia of Human Rights to avoid evictions and improve living conditions in the occupation of Rua Sólon.[23] Regeneration from the perspective of the pedagogy of confrontation requires building on these partnerships for collective forms of rehabilitation of buildings. From this perspective, physical improvements become a means to trigger and then strengthen collective action and social mobilisation.

22 Kohara, *As contribuições dos movimentos*; Barbosa, *Protagonismo dos movimentos de moradia.*

23 Texeira et al., "Conflitos em torno do direito a moradia".

Users, Newcomers

The character of the current and future population living in inner-city areas has been a major contention among debates on urban regeneration. By focusing on the physical rehabilitation of central districts, practices of regeneration have often unrecognised the presence or rights of the communities inhabiting them. Concealed behind a façade of social improvement and strongly subsidised by governments, practices of 'revitalisation' or 'rejuvenation' have focused on enhancing the desirability of such areas for private sector investors and on attracting a high socio-economic status population.[24] The rationale present in such initiatives is articulated on the basis of the potential trickle-down effect of investments. By generating new investment opportunities in the inner city, economically

24 Feinstein, *The Just City.*

inactive buildings and infrastructure would then be contributing financially to public resources through property taxes or direct investments in public amenities — which would then be able to benefit the city and its citizens as a whole.

Critiques of such practices have outlined the direct or indirect displacement caused by these initiatives, describing the forms of injustices that are brought upon individuals and groups, leading to further socio-spatial segregation. Studies have focused on how government, media, investors, developers, real estate agents, and banks have generated discourses and practices that create the conditions for gentrification to take place. As Porter and Shaw argue, it is in light of such processes that critical studies have been approaching the concept of urban regeneration as a 'depoliticised euphemisms for gentrification'.[25] Based on such critiques, regeneration can be understood as an institutionalised form of land grabbing and social cleansing aimed at unleashing the potential profitability for private investors.

25 Porter and Shaw, *Whose Urban Renaissance?*

Meanwhile, discourses and practices of resistance to urban regeneration have attempted to generate recognition for the existing population living in areas designated for regeneration. On the one hand, they have emphasised the right of local inhabitants to stay put. On the other hand, struggles in inner-city areas have also stressed the need to attract further newcomers from low-income groups, with the aim of facilitating access to well-serviced urban areas for otherwise marginalised city residents. Thus, squatter groups occupying unused buildings in inner-city locations have stressed the importance of re-activating the potential of such areas as a means to combat wider conditions of socio-spatial disparity. Through organised forms of re-appropriation of unused building, these groups have also finally attempted to open up new opportunities to claim for citizenship rights, by supporting individuals in obtaining the necessary documentation that would allow them to access welfare programmes and benefits.

Figure 2. Ocupacão Marconi in Edificio São Manoel, São Paulo: home. Photograph: Gabriel Boieras.

26 Brasil, *PlanHab: Plano Nacional de Habitação.*

In the case of São Paulo, the struggles against evictions from the city centre are also part of a wider preoccupation regarding the peripheralisation of the urban poor. In a country having an overall housing deficit of almost eight million homes,[26] the annual growth rates in different parts of São Paulo clearly illustrate the city's segregation. Between 1990 and 2000, while "downtown areas with the highest concentrations of businesses and apartments experienced negative growth and depopulation [...] the periphery grew at a striking 2 to 13.4 per cent, meaning some *favelas* and informal settlements doubled their population in seven or eight years".[27]

27 UN-Habitat, *Cities & Citizens Series.*

Operating within this wider set of concerns, occupations contribute to bringing into focus residents as 'citizens', rather than 'users' of urban space. A key component of occupant practices is to engage residents and movement members in a wider reflection about the inequalities entrenched in the on-going mode of urbanisation. This approach reflects the roots of urban social movements, originating from the struggles in the 1970s and 1980s for access to water, energy, housing, and health facilities at the peripheries of São Paulo, which had the support of progressive groups of the Catholic Church. It was during this period that Paulo Freire's ideas played a crucial role in the consolidation of a 'pedagogy of social mobilisation', with the objective of valuing popular knowledge, stimulating conscious awareness (*concientização*) and bringing about social change. At the same time, along with workshops aimed at collectively reflecting on urban trends and the everyday challenges faced by individuals, social movements have also been identified as crucial to enumerate and document the residents of occupations. As articulated by Earle, occupations fulfil a number of functions:

> They highlight the city's housing deficit and the humiliating living conditions of so many of its poorer residents, they draw public attention to the fact that thousands of buildings have been left abandoned in the city centre, and they emphasise that the state is failing to uphold the right to housing. They also challenge the spatial segregation of the city by calling for centrally located social housing and opposing the practice of building social housing on the extreme peripheries, contributing to the city's sprawl. In this way, they can be understood as standard acts of civil disobedience — the breaking of the law to highlight an injustice.[28]

28 Earle, "From Insurgent to Transgressive Citizenship", 119.

Seen from this perspective, regeneration through the pedagogy of confrontation means shifting the focus from city-users to citizens, stimulating reflections on the overall logics of urbanisation, while also supporting the registration of residents to access citizenship rights.

Functions, Uses, Appropriations

Within a context where there is an increasing demand for land, floor space, and infrastructure in inner city areas, urban regeneration practices emerge through the recognition that current spatial functions and designations are no longer responding to contemporary urban

Figure 3. Ocupacão Marconi in Edificio São Manoel, São Paulo: self-organised day-care nursery. Photograph: Gabriel Boieras.

trends and demands. The contentions from this perspective are related to whose demands are being met, and how the tensions between the exchange- and use-value of property are negotiated. Critics have argued that urban regeneration policies have traditionally furthered a prioritisation of the exchange value of land and property — implying that state-led initiatives have tended to redefine the use and functions of inner city urban spaces based on the sole interest of profit-making. As a result, regeneration practices have led to the stimulation of a change in the spatial character of cities, moving away from the city's social functions (for instance, in terms of addressing urban inequalities) and moving towards the provision of commercial and service spaces.

Furthermore, critics would argue that urban regeneration represents the manifestation of dominant market-led city planning principles, whereby governments focus on the stimulation of economic growth over the redistribution of benefits, in the pursue of a competitive and bankable city. In this light, private-public partnerships and zoning strategies aimed at reducing taxation and supporting development projects have been widely criticised as the instruments of subsidisation to affluent private sectors – resulting in further concentrations of wealth in cities.

Meanwhile, practices of resistance to such market-led approaches of urban development have also articulated their demands on the basis of re-arranging the functions and uses of spaces in inner city areas. Rather than focusing on the exchange-value of land and property, movements have emphasized the use-value of urban space and the need to preserve and enhance the opportunities for low-income groups to inhabit well-served inner city areas. Based on the proximity to transport links as well as health and education facilities, social movements have attempted to demonstrate the importance of such opportunities to address citywide disparities. Additionally, protest movements have also insisted on the need to increase the provision

of housing and infrastructure for the benefit of existing groups living in targeted regeneration sites, and to support the on-going community- and citizen-led activities that regeneration practices often end up endangering.

In relation to planning instruments, more distributive planning approaches to urban regeneration have also articulated the need for private-public partnerships and zoning strategies, albeit for different motivations. Private-public partnerships have been seen as a means to work with community groups in rehabilitation strategies through cooperative housing initiatives or collective self-help approaches. Zoning has been applied to intervene in market forces, trying to minimise the exclusionary forces of regeneration and assuring that local residents can still afford to remain in regenerated areas.

Contestations in the centre of São Paulo have demonstrated the importance for central areas to continue playing a role in facilitating access to services and livelihood opportunities for the urban poor. For instance, according to Kohara, in 2010 the area of central São Paulo was generating over 750,300 formal work places, representing almost twenty per cent of the city's overall job opportunities.[29]

29 Kohara, *As contribuições dos movimentos.*

While there have been increasing pressures from market-led planning initiatives, São Paulo has also experienced innovative examples of planning instruments that try to avoid the exclusionary affects of market forces. The City Statute, included in the Brazilian Constitution in 2001, has opened up new possibilities for participatory planning as well as the recognition of the social function of property. Based on these premises, many social movements participated in the city and housing councils, raising the visibility of demands stemming from occupations. Meanwhile, occupations also gained legitimacy as social movements claimed that abandoned buildings were not performing their 'social function'. Zoning instruments were also utilised as a means to reduce gentrification and avoid the consolidation of several plots by same developer. The map bellow illustrates the occupations that took place between 1997 and 2005 in the central area of São Paulo, along with the zones of special economic and social interest set up by the government. Apart from such instruments and spaces of participation, social movements taking part in the *Moradia é Central* seminar showed support for the progressive property tax, as well as the government-led programmes of 'housing for social interest'.

City Images

Across the world, urban regeneration interventions, including changes to the functional designation of 'decaying' areas, have been widely employed by local governments as a tool for overall city re-branding and marketing. Large-scale flagship projects have been promoted as catalyst interventions having the potential to enhance urban competitiveness, raise property values across the city, and at-

tract business and tourists.[30] As a means of offering renewed and more glamorous images of cities, such projects have often materialised through the creation of high profile retail, residential, entertainment or tourist spaces, in what were once perceived as shunned or underused urban spaces.

Indisputably, well-serviced central urban districts have a critical role in the everyday life of the city and its inhabitants, not only materially and functionally but also symbolically. They are the space in which diverse flows of economy and communication converge, in which social relationships are produced, as well as in which new or renewed urban images can be formed and displayed. Seen through the lens of city branding and marketing, contestations around the concept and practices of urban regeneration in inner city areas question which and whose urban images are projected towards the public realm in the process of urban redevelopment, and the values and symbols that different groups attach to those projections. Such competing images also play an important part in articulating the ways in which contested regeneration sites are created, recognised or disfigured.

Critics have particularly argued that flagship, high profile urban regeneration schemes often respond to a centralising vision of the city, in which resources are concentrated in selected areas and to the benefit of selected income groups, rather than distributed in a way that might improve the life-quality of all. Meanwhile, practices of resistance to such approaches have highlighted inner city areas, not only as spaces of functional proximity to formal or informal job opportunities, public transport and services, but also as key environments in which diverse social relations can be produced and transacted. As such, social movements have stressed the symbolic dimension embedded in the comprehension of weaker interests and claims within the projected images of regeneration – attempting to bend urban renewal strategies to the recognition that contemporary urban life comprises multiple cultural identities, modes of life, and forms of appropriating urban space.

Thus, seen from this perspective, the articulation of alternative modes of regeneration involves the imagination of targeted areas as spaces of *centrality* and encounters between different groups and identities, as opposed to spaces of *centralisation* and social and economic control.[31] Along these lines, practices of resistance have insisted on the re-appropriation of specific urban public spaces and buildings as a means to affirm not only concrete claims such as access to housing, property, and infrastructure, but also their aspirations towards a more inclusive and diversified form of urban development.

In the context of São Paulo, the images produced through the occupations of inner city areas have evolved in juxtaposition to the vision of the city as a commodity. Occupations that took place from 1997 marked the start of a new strategy of contestation to the dominant

30 Feinstein, *The Just City*

31 Merrifield, *The Politics of the Encounter.*

view of market enablement to urban development. At that moment, urban social movements, as well as the groups of technical assistance working alongside them, realised the potentiality of occupations to bring about political formation and social change due to their intense degree of politicisation. The practices of occupation enabled the construction of new images of the city: ones based on principles of inclusion and collective organisation, where the use-value of property and land is prioritised over its exchange value. The banner displayed at the occupation of the Prestes Maia building in 2006 with the sign *Zumbi Somos Nós* (We Are Zumbi) symbolises such process of politicisation of occupations. Zumbi was a leader of Quilombo dos Palmares, a fugitive settlement in the late 17th century, and he is still today a representation of Afro-Brazilian resistance against domination. It is through this and similar analogies that occupations have been articulated by movements as symbolic representations of resistance.

32 Earle, "From Insurgent to Transgressive Citizenship".

33 Tatagiba et al., "Ocupar, Reinvidicar, Partici

According to Earle[32] and Tatagiba et al.,[33] apart from resistance, occupations also work towards the projection of an alternative imaginary for the city. Their work argues that such imagery is encapsulated through the discourse of 'dignified living'. Both studies show how members of occupations have used the concept of 'dignity' to emphasize their concern for being respected as human beings. Dignity is articulated to demonstrate members' desire to be recognised as citizens who have the right to participate in decision-making processes concerning regeneration as well as wider urbanisation dynamics.

As well, occupations seek to set precedents to reclaim the inner city, demonstrating an alternative appropriation of buildings based on the collective production of urban spaces. They are often carefully studied tactics that take into account the physical and legal condition of the building, and identify the moment and places that are most conducive for occupations. Once the building is occupied, collectives are set up to manage the building's maintenance, as well as to establish a means of discussing emerging challenges. Various

Figure 4. Demonstration for the right to housing in the centre of São Paulo, August 2014. Photograph: Gabriel Boieras.

occupations include spaces for libraries, kindergartens, community kitchens, and support areas for work and income generation activities.

Therefore, regeneration practices based on the pedagogy of contestation in São Paulo meant that occupations represent urban imaginaries based on the symbolic value of resistance, building propositions led by ideas of dignity and collective forms of production of spaces.

Concluding Remarks

This article outlines the role of collective engagements in advancing an expansive terming of urban regeneration that is continually reinvented and continually reconstructed. Pointing to regeneration's intrinsic porosity, both as a concept and a set of practices, the text highlights regeneration's potential for reinvention within renewed sets of principles and transformative urban development frameworks. Porosity is understood here as a key condition: the propensity and potential of a concept to become subject to infiltration. The potential for infiltration in regeneration eventually means that it is a term that can be re-appropriated by unexpected constituencies, in such a way as to allow novel meanings to emerge.

Infiltrated by the 'pedagogy of the oppressed', urban regeneration in São Paulo is redefined as a practice that can leverage on collective forms of production of urban space. Here, the term describes the possibilities embedded in understanding the physical rehabilitation of buildings as a means to open up conversations on the processes of urban change and the logics of dis- and re-investment in cities. As well, regeneration points to practices that set precedents of collective management of buildings and sites. It also describes a shifting subject of urban redevelopment debates, bringing into focus existing residents as citizens and agents of urban change, rather than city-users. It promotes the use-value of urban spaces, rather than prioritising their exchange-value. From this perspective, regeneration exploits the existence of progressive policies, which create space for productive dissent and diversified types of partnerships with both the private and public realms. It is based on imaginaries of urban resistance that can contribute to promoting social diversity, and to broadening the focus of concern from the production of wealth to the forms and criteria of its distribution.

On a different level, this tentative process of infiltrating the notion of regeneration highlights the investigation of spatial practices as a means to grasp "the way we do things" in the city: the processes of appropriation, transformation, networking and use of the city infrastructure, and their potential capacity to produce alternative meanings and urban imagery. From this perspective, rethinking regeneration means engaging with imaginaries that can open up mechanisms to address the underlying conditions shaping the built environment and inequalities in the city.

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