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Lula's government and the Ministry of Cities

Raquel Rolnik

The Ministry of Cities was established in 2003, following Lula's election, with the objective of guaranteeing, without any discrimination, the right to the city, to decorous houses, to basic infrastructure, to traffic and mobility under conditions of safety, and to environmental restoration, through a democratic management. The creation of this Ministry represented an innovation in national urban policies as it went beyond the sectoral dimension of housing, restoration and transport policies, taking instead as its aim the integration of these policies and those of soil occupancy; at the same time, the Ministry pursues a national policy of urban development, in step with the large number of State federal agencies, foreseeing the participation of society and aiming at the co-ordination and integration of investments and actions. Deserving of mention among the main conquests of this new Ministry are the organizing, in October 2003, of the National Cities Conference, which represented the final act of a process of participation of municipal, regional and state conferences which involved almost two-thirds of the country's 5,561 municipalities. The objective of this National Cities Conference was to pinpoint the main problems of the urban realities, acting as spokesman for the requirements of the various subjects and actors involved in city management, as well naturally as the inhabitants. More than 1,200 proposed amendments of the basic text of the national urban policy were put on the agenda of the National Conference, in the form of support for the discussions

that had developed within the framework of the municipal and state conferences. The objective was thus reached of forming the City Council for the purpose of defining the principles and guidelines of national urban development policy, and the action priorities of the Ministry of Cities. The basic principles underpin and give priority to the right to the city, to decorous houses as a fundamental right of the human person, to the restoration of the public environment, to public transport, to social integration and to the reduction of inequalities, to the financial and social-environmental sustainability of urban policy, to democratic management and social control (guaranteed through decentralized, democratic management mechanisms achieved through transparency and participation), to the struggle against the discrimination of social and ethnic-racial groups, to the fight against urban segregation, and to the guarantee of social-spatial diversity. The main lines of this policy lie in respecting and backing up local authority, with the participation of society and the integration of all the organs of the federal government responsible for educational, social assistance, health, leisure, security, environmental protection, employment and labour policies. The commitment and defence of social participation in discussing and formulating urban policies is of particular interest, by means of organizing a system of conferences targeted on the definition, execution and constant evaluation of the choices adopted, while fully respecting the autonomy and the specific nature of the various movements and agencies; in substance, an

attempt is being made at collaboration between representative democracy and participatory democracy. Absolutely essential objectives of the Ministry are respecting of urban, regional and cultural differences, the formation of a balanced network of cities, the definition of complex, integrated policies to face up to the deficit of the housing sector (both qualitatively and quantitatively), guaranteeing indiscriminate access to urbanized land, to land regularization, to quality of the environment, to free technical and legal assistance, the promotion of the use of public buildings and expropriation of private buildings that do not have social ends, for residential purposes, of environmental restoration services, of accessibility and of mobility, of quality of transport, and of security for all citizens, making social integration possible. In this sense the main actions being implemented reveal the correction of historical distortions in carrying out federal programmes in the housing sector, fixing the objective of ear-marking resources for the low-income population brackets. With regard to environmental renewal, the conditions have been created for establishing a mechanism of co-operative action among the organs interacting in the sector. This action has led to the concentration of all the national renewal policies, which until 2003 were split up into over 80 actions, 24 programmes and eight ministries, into only five programmes unified under the Ministry of Cities. At the same time new democratic planning practices are being supported and implemented, by means of drawing up Master Plans in conformity with the City Statute. A new legal basis is

being drawn up for the land ownership question, aimed at regulating land use and combining it with urbanization works complete with building sites that will involve more than 800,000 families by the end of 2006.

As far as urban mobility is concerned, national policy goes beyond the limited sector of vehicular transit, but promotes personal mobility in a safe, integrated and sustainable form. National urban development policy is oriented towards the promotion, organization and upgrading of local level and vast area management mechanisms, towards partnerships for consortium activities at various levels, towards modernizing access to information and making it more democratic, towards the promotion of the national city conference preceded by state, municipal and regional conferences, towards participative democracy as the method of deciding on public policies and on a Participatory Balance Sheet, to promote discussion and resolution of the use of public resources.