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## Brazilian cities between modernization and marginality

Yara Vicentini

The paradigms of the great contemporary urban reforms in progress in the cities of the world do not correspond to the investment and income possibilities of the population of Latin America, where there are incomplete processes of urban management policies or incomplete scenarios of urban projects. The big Brazilian cities need investments in basic infrastructures and in social policies aimed at recovery of the quality of urban life; in particular, reference is made to the impossibility of transferring and adopting the model of European cities and planning, without revising this model allowing for the different reality of Latin America. Nevertheless, the echo of the grand urban operations in the international panorama is making itself heard in Brazil: a whole range of terms are used, such as renewal, revitalization, refunctionalization, rehabilitation, restructuring, urban redevelopment and restoration, just to name the most frequent ones, which are directly connected with the question of enhancement of historic centres and the upgrading of run-down areas and/or areas occupied by low-income population. In this sense mention is made of the Project to upgrade Pelourinho, in the Baroque-Colonial historic centre of Salvador, which makes reference to the Italian methodology of intervention in historic centres, formally connected with Non Governmental Organizations and with reference organizations such as *Progetto Italia* in Rome. But the management process of the Pelourinho

Project, in areas already recuperated, has taken on a different form, with statistics that show the choice of the financial compensation of 95% of the inhabitants and the consequent transfer of the latter, by their own decision, carried out using trucks belonging to the Prefecture, to the *favelas* in the periphery of Salvador. In this way the recovery of the historic centre has been a debatable operation from the social and cultural standpoint. At the same time the discussion of the strategic plan of the city of Salvador as a whole has foreseen privatization measures for public spaces for leisure amenities earmarked as thematic parks in the municipal concession policy for public areas. This is leading to a loss of identity and the ancient city is living in an allegorical form. In the northern and southern peripheries, as in the historic lagoons of Salvador, the policy of basic reclamation together with international NGOs and with the financing of world banks, is weak and not incisive in providing a network of primary infrastructures in the areas that have been flooded for decades, located below sea level. With regard to the city of Curitiba, the scenario is no different: without doubt this is one of the Brazilian cities that have had most recourse to planning actions for the redefinition of the urban space, starting with the Agache proposal (1943) which, according to the modernist conception, designs the city foreseeing monofunctional areas and creating a network of *avenidas* with a radial layout. The urban planning process forms part of the idea of modernization provided by the development models of the period, in which the imperative feature is

industrialization within the context of an agricultural state. The 1965 Urban Development Plan (PDU), drawn up by the town planner Jorge Wilhelm and associated architects, and supported by a local team of Prefecture technicians and university professors, formed the embryo of the IPPUC, whose first chairman was the famous architect Jaime Lerner. Starting in 1970, the urban designs drawn up by this institution were put into practice, from when in 1971 Lerner himself, formerly Prefect of the city, produced the traffic and mass movement system which redefined the urban alignments with its structural axes and traffic corridors. In this period the industrial city of Curitiba was implemented (1973), construction was started on extensive parks in a system of renewal of old, rundown quarry areas and occupation of the free areas of the city liable to flooding. All of this as part of a project to upgrade the urban centre according to modernist principles and rules. The ensemble of the works carried out by the PDU inexorably marked the city, even in subsequent periods. At the end of the Eighties the city's development guidelines were taken up again even though the problem of the marginalization of the low-income population, now resident in outlying municipalities of the metropolitan region, was on the agenda. Curitiba went from one slogan to another: from model city to ecological city in line with the evolution of the disciplinary debate on the city at world level. A series of environmental themes and specific programmes (tube stations, parks and memorials) were then implemented, and exalted to the utmost a consumer culture, the object of intense

propaganda, ultimately including the creation/invention of urban traditions by means of a programmed symbology. On the other hand, the image created had to be kept up, even though that meant inventing traditions, since the old Portuguese colonial nucleus, based on a mining, slave-owning economy, was banished from the collective image and replaced by a European city based on the composition of heterogeneous populations, such as Germans, Italians, Poles, Ukrainians and Russians, which conferred on it a 'white', European identity extraneous to that of the national population. The invasion of the land and the illegality of the plot-divisions and constructions came as a surprise to Curitiba, in 2002, showing that 28% of its population were resident in illegal settlements. The city became the object of inadequate projects to upgrade the *favelas*, inexorably fated to be visually, formally and socially segregated, separated off from the enclosed apartment buildings surrounded by the high walls of the city's privileged class, in the areas of connection with the urbanized zones of the outlying municipalities of the metropolis, so as to prevent the invasion of the 'barbarians'. The contemporary process of programming the city of Rio de Janeiro can be interpreted in the same sense. Starting in the Nineties, this has taken over the new international paradigms of planning, borrowing from the experience of the strategic plan of Barcelona. The strategic plan for Rio de Janeiro and its thematic formulations of the city contain expectations of upsetting the picture of urban disorder and establishing a new matrix of

social power in the city. In this sense it can be stated that the Plan contains a management model that has been capable of providing a methodological interpretation of the Barcelona plan, adjusting it to the city's problems, in such a way as to attribute to the historic *favelas* of Rio the dignity of a district after about a century of repeated attempts to expel their inhabitants, and to construct a social model with the participation of professional associations and representatives of the companies in the form of a consortium of more than 40 enterprises. The *favela-district programme* appears in its new formulation of city planning. The programme came into being in 1993 as one of the elements of the housing policy and in 1994 was organized as a programme included in the city's Strategic Plan. It was the outcome of a financing agreement between the Prefecture and the Inter-American Development Bank, which foresaw various actions such as the urbanization of the favelas and the recovery of illegal nuclei. While in Brazil, throughout the twentieth century, imported models and theories have revealed all their fragility when up against such a complex, characterized situation, manifesting many difficulties of assimilation from both the social and the political points of view, as already argued at length by Arantes (1998), today we are once more facing the same situation although presented in different terms. Faced by the question of the big Latin-American cities and of their consolidated spaces fated for decades to remain marginal, the adoption of new models of urban management, in a new sphere of social relations, causes profound mutations unforeseen in consolidated economic models. Theories

and methodologies, when imported and reinterpreted, produce simulacra, mere semblances, and are impracticable in a context of reformulation of the world economic system that excludes from any upgrading actions those cities that do not constitute a strategic asset. These projects, developed by the municipal administrations and by the state, have constituted attempts at modernization and aggregation of improved areas for the expansion of the city, acquiring them solely for property speculation. This urban transformation has not aimed only at the expulsion of the populations from the flooded areas, but has introduced modern criteria of planning in a form similar to that of other Brazilian and international metropolises; in the Seventies and the Eighties the repertoire of urban planning was bombarded by methodologies and systems of rationalization of urban spaces from which abstract institutional models have emerged, incompatible with the new forms of privatization of space. The fundamental urban questions have to be resumed in relation to the urgent problems of housing policy and of basic infrastructures by means of redevelopment projects able to involve the population, creating job opportunities, and which can be put into practice with simple technologies.