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Urbanising *favelas*,  
overlooking people:  
Regressive housing  
policies in Rio de Janeiro's  
progressive slum upgrading  
initiatives

Mariana Dias Simpson

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# Urbanising *favelas*, overlooking people: Regressive housing policies in Rio de Janeiro's progressive slum upgrading initiatives

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**Abstract.** The history of Brazilian housing policies and programmes mirrors approaches and methodologies set by international organisations such as the World Bank. This history is clearly reflected in interventions that have taken place in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, the object of this working paper. Since the mid-1990s, Rio de Janeiro has been at the forefront of *in situ* slum upgrading initiatives. A number of programmes pursuing the “urbanisation of *favelas*” have been implemented in attempts to integrate *favelas* into the city fabric. The expectation was/ is that the arrival of urban infrastructure would requalify these territories and transform them into regular neighbourhoods, leading to the spatial and social integration of *favelas* and the rest of the city.

Adequate housing brings immediate and systemic benefits to

its residents and should, as such, be a strategic priority shared by the state. In Rio de Janeiro's slum upgrading initiatives, however, urbanisation has become the main priority over every other aspect of development: in this pursuit for the integration of urban areas, is housing being forgotten?

Identifying the lack of citizen participation in decision-making as the main reason for failure, the author analyses how, despite the evolution that led to Rio's progressive urbanisation programmes, authorities insist on seeing housing through regressive lenses and resorting to failed approaches. This paper argues that interventions must combine and address the tense demands and aspirations emanating from slums and the city as a whole, allowing housing to be an on-going process that happens in the city and the urban poor to be the protagonist of the process.



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## **List of acronyms**

- BNH – Brazilian National Housing Bank (in Portuguese, Banco Nacional de Habitação)
- CBO – Community-based organisations
- CODI – Community Organisations Development Institute
- IDB – Inter-American Development Bank
- IMF – International Monetary Fund
- MCMV – My Life, My House Programme (in Portuguese, Minha Casa, Minha Vida)
- MDG – Millennium Development Goals
- NGO – Non-governmental organisation
- NULICO – National Union of Low Income Community Organisations
- PAC – Programme for Growth Acceleration (in Portuguese, Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento)
- SAP – Structural Adjustments Programmes
- UN – United Nations
- UPP – Pacifying Police Units (in Portuguese, Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora)

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# 1. Introduction

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Perhaps the first step for solving “the issue of slums” is to understand that they are not an aberration, but rather a part of existing city structures that needs to be improved (Somsook, 2005). Informal settlements are part of the solution found by over one billion people living in poverty in a context of “accumulation by dispossession”<sup>1</sup> that has made land unavailable to so many urban dwellers in the world. Slums are not disassociated parts of the city. They are city. They present a different paradigm and show that diverse urban spaces may coexist, provided inequities are overcome and adequate living standards are universalised. (Silva, 2011)

A journey to solve the problems present in slums must be part of “the more difficult journey towards ‘poverty eradication’, which is essentially a journey for sustainable urban livelihoods” (UN-Habitat, 2003: 53). When slums are perceived as a threat, struggles for citizenship and their strategies for guaranteeing the right to a habitat are ignored: occupations are seen as invasions, the struggle for rights is translated as a struggle against the private property, and a system based on self-construction is defined as urban chaos. This is the perspective which often guides public policies that fail – and among so many “learn by doing” experiences, forced evictions represent the biggest failure, with the most malign consequences. (Simão, 2011)

The second chapter of this paper outlines the different stages through which housing policies have undergone in the developing world, since the appearance of the first policies in the 1960s to date. “They range from passively ignoring or actively harassing men and women who live in slums, to interventions aimed at protecting the rights of slum dwellers and helping them to improve their incomes and living environments.” (UN, 2003: 128)

A significant change in approaches is what some authors have classified as a paradigm shift from “conventional” housing policies (characterised by the direct intervention of the state in the production and provision of ready-to-occupy houses) to “non-conventional” housing policies (characterised by the indirect state intervention to provide support systems for the production of housing and habitat by the users themselves) (Fiori *et al.*, 2000). “This process of apparent retreat has not only been occasioned by governments’ inability to meet their construction targets, but has also been in response to changes in the understanding of the role of housing as

an important component in the social development of urban communities” (Wakely, 1988: 122). Even though the understanding of housing and poverty evolved significantly, the limited outcome of most interventions indicate that governments and organisations still have a long way to go if living conditions in informal settlements are to be truly transformed<sup>2</sup>.

The history of Brazilian housing policies and programmes mirrors approaches and methodologies set by international organisations such as the World Bank. This history is clearly reflected in interventions that have taken place in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, the object of this working paper. Since the appearance of Rio de Janeiro’s first slum at the end of the 19th century, governmental responses have undergone several non-linear stages: negligence; centralised “conventional” policies with attempts to eradicate slums while mass producing housing; “non-conventional” policies, through aided-self-help, sites-and-services and basic slum upgrading; neoliberalisation reforms; and, finally, comprehensive slum upgrading and urbanisation. All these stages have run in parallel to the constant growth of slums in every part of the city. Following the historical evolution of the understanding of housing, informality and poverty, in chapter 3, I aim to focus on the “comprehensive slum upgrading” experiences implemented in the city of Rio de Janeiro for over two decades now.

Since the mid-1990s, Rio de Janeiro has been at the forefront of *in situ* slum upgrading experiences. A number of programmes pursuing the “urbanisation of *favelas*” have been implemented in attempts to integrate *favelas* into the city fabric. The expectation was/ is that the arrival of urban infrastructure would requalify these territories and transform them into regular neighbourhoods, leading to the spatial and social integration of *favelas* and the rest of the city.

Despite its relevance, this objective, so far, has not been fulfilled. It is estimated that by 2020, the total invested in slum upgrading by the national, state and local government and international organisations will have passed the US\$ 9 billion mark. This considerable amount of money is an indicator of the centrality of *favelas* to the city’s life and of the political weight attached to attempts of “solving the problem of *favelas*”. The challenge, however, presents itself as extremely complex and despite the billions spent, promises remain unfulfilled and projects remain incomplete.

Adequate living standards require adequate housing, a human right that encompasses not only shelter, but access to infrastructure, a safe and healthy environment, access to development opportunities (health, education, etc.) and livelihood/ income generating opportunities. Adequate housing must also be accessible, affordable and provide secure tenure (Rolnik, 2011a). Adequate housing brings immediate and systemic benefits for its residents and, as such, should be a strategic priority also shared by the state. In Rio de Janeiro's slum upgrading initiatives, however, urbanisation has become the main priority over every other aspect of development: in this pursuit for the integration of urban areas, is housing being forgotten?

Identifying the lack of real citizen participation in Rio de Janeiro's interventions as the main reason for failure, chapter 4 analyses how, despite the evolution that led to Rio's progressive urbanisation programmes, decision-makers insist on seeing housing through regressive

lenses and resorting to failed approaches. In search for alternatives, this chapter also presents the case of Baan Mankong, a people-led housing and community development programme being currently implemented in Thailand. The case is an attempt to illustrate what may happen when governments decide to take an enabling role and allow slum dwellers to procure and deliver their own housing solutions.

Finally, the conclusion of this paper reflects upon prior arguments while presenting recommendations for future policies. It is argued that interventions must combine and address the tense demands and aspirations emanating from slums and the city as a whole, allowing housing to be an on-going process that happens in the city. For that, challenges related to knowledge production, access to urban land and the need to reach scale whilst allowing the urban poor to be the protagonist of the process must be tackled.

### What is a favela?

There are 582 favelas in the city of Rio de Janeiro. They house 20 per cent of the city's 6,323,037 inhabitants (IBGE, 2010; IPP, 2010). In Rio, informal settlements are not an invisible phenomenon as it happens in so many developing cities around the world: they are very present in the city's life and agenda. Every carioca (a native of Rio) simply knows what a favela is. They know what it means, and they are always capable of identifying where the city "ends" and a favela begins – and that is seen as a necessary "skill" to avoid the "danger" that these perceived no-go zones may bring. Although the conventional distinction between formal and informal and the views of a "dual city" are too blurred to define its reality, "perhaps the single persistent distinction between favelas and the rest of the city is the deeply rooted stigma that adheres to them and to those who reside in them." (Perlman, 2010: 30)

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Harvey, 1973.
2. When referring "transformation" in this working paper, the author understands it as being "a dynamic, on-going and systemic process which leads to the reordering of power

relations among urban dwellers and to the equitable (re) distribution of and access to urban resources for men and women, boys and girls in the city". (Burzynski, Dias Simpson et al., 2011)

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## 2. Understanding housing: An evolution of approaches

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### 2.1. 1960s| First policies: Slum eradication and government built mass housing

With excessive costs and limited social outcomes, the 1960s was marked by slum clearances and the mass construction of ready-to-occupy housing by the state in the developing world. These interventions, often referred to as “conventional housing policies”, came about as a response to the political need to house the poor in order to neutralise social unrest in a context of “Cold War”, dictatorships and fast growing cities (Pugh, 2001; Wakely, 1988). During this period, central governments of developing countries built thousands of housing units and established financial systems to “capture savings and generate resources for housing programmes.” (Fiori *et al.*, 2000: 22)

This type of formal housing typically consisted of minimal sized houses or flats designed to produce the lowest possible cost per unit while meeting standards set by laws that translated professionals’ views on how the urban poor should live. Such dwellings usually left a dissatisfying difference between the views of “those who decide and those who have to live with it” (Turner, 1976:11). These units were commonly located far from the city centres, where land was cheap, and relied on poor infrastructure and transport connections. The beneficiaries were households with incomes below an established ceiling and/or those displaced by slum clearances. People were never involved in decisions that determined the location, design, standard of construction or management of their own housing. (Wakely, 1988)

Overall, the bulldozing of slums and the mass construction of units had little impact on the housing deficit. As such, not only was “conventional” housing “prohibitively expensive for the majority”, but it also failed to accommodate “survival strategies” common to low income groups, such as horticulture, the use of housing as a workplace, subletting as a source of income, and room for expansion. (Burgess, 1991: 78)

“Many developing countries were at this time implementing policies of import substitution industrialisation (ISI), and one sector that could act as an engine for domestic growth was the labour- and materials-intensive construction industry” (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 23). Under this ideology, mass housing production was meant to stimulate domestic capital accumulation and industrialisation, generating wealth and employment – housing the poor as a side-effect.

The wealth that was meant to “trickle down” from this strategy, however, never did. Additionally, the housing mass delivered by the state simply could not/ cannot be sensitive to the needs and aspirations of its diverse and heterogeneous occupants. As a consequence of this unsuitability and unaffordability, many of the units that followed such conventional approaches were soon sold or transferred to the better off (Fiori and Brandão, 2010). Where units could not be sold, conditions deteriorated rapidly, resulting in the creation of new, high cost slums, carrying the same stigma and inadequacy of the ones they replaced.

#### Rio de Janeiro

In the early 1960s, the state was determined to “beautify” Rio de Janeiro by eliminating favelas from attractive areas of the city and moving the poor to isolated locations. Those eradication attempts were initially funded by the U.S. Agency for International Aid (USAID), in an alliance launched by President John F. Kennedy. The United States saw Latin America’s rapid urban growth as a “breeding ground for discontent and revolt” and favelas as the “hotbeds of communism” (Perlman, 2010: 71). As a response, the American government sponsored the construction of 7,720 housing units for families violently evicted from central areas of Rio de Janeiro.

In resistance to forced evictions, residents’ associations of 100 favela gathered to form Rio de Janeiro’s Favela Federation (FAFEG). They promoted an intense campaign against evictions, but were quickly constrained by the dictatorship. (Zaluar and Alvito, 1988)

In over a decade, the national government managed to build 35 estates with approximately 40,000 housing units. The national programme to rid Rio of its favelas lasted until 1975, resettling 28 per cent of the pre-existing population of favelas. On the other hand, between 1970 and 1974 alone the number of favelas had increased from 162 to 283 (Valladares, 1978). In this way, treating “symptoms” rather than the “causes” of poverty proved to be as traumatic as irrelevant.

## 2.2. 1970s| The path to “non-conventional policies”

“By the late 1960s, the consequences of the state’s inability to fulfil its promises of trickle down and wealth creation became so glaring that rhetoric was no longer sufficient to appease social pressure for change” (Fiori *et al.*, 2000: 24). In the field of housing, slum clearances followed by the usually unrealised intention of rehousing dwellers had destroyed more dwellings than it built (Wakely, 1988). If little or no subsidy was given so that a higher number of units could be built, the new units could only be afforded by the relatively well-off. Alternatively, if sufficient subsidy was given to reach lower income groups, only a few units could be built. (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1998)

Moreover, the period’s macroeconomic ideology was starting to shift from pure economic growth to “redistribution with growth”. The introduction of investments in pro-poor public services and the encouragement of self-help policies were part of the strategies to improve the absolute incomes of the poor and to distribute new income increments resulting from “growth” (rather than redistribute existing assets). (Burgess, 1992: 80)

During this period, a cooperative-based model of spontaneous, strongly organised community-led constructions was gaining force in some parts of South America, especially in Uruguay. The methodology was developed and spread by organised social movements, presenting a response to top-down interventions and showing that the urban poor also had the capacity to procure and produce their own housing and communities in reflection to real needs and demands.

At the same time, international researchers (namely Charles Abrams and John F. C. Turner) studying informal settlements in Latin America started to draw the developed world’s attention to what the poor had managed to accomplish without official support. They shared an enthrallment with “the order behind the apparent disorder”, the spontaneous and organic ways informal settlement dwellers had found to organise themselves. (Castillo, 2001 cited in Fiori *et al.*, 2010).

Dwellers were showing that housing is an individual and collective process of self-fulfilment. Observing the success of these community cooperatives, Turner defended that “what matters is not what housing is, but what housing does”, and that the solution was to give people “freedom to build”, since the state “cannot respond to the true heterogeneity of low-income housing demands” (Turner, 1972: 257; 174). The researcher also observed that “the lower the income level, the better the match must be between the demand and the housing process”, as the poor cannot compensate for “diseconomies of unsuitable housing through alternative expenditures, e.g. a car.” (ibid: 162)

In a context which combined the clear notion that previous approaches had failed; the reconceptualisation of informality, now understood by some as a resourceful response in need of enhancement rather than eradication; and the need to cut costs, the path to “non-conventional” policies was open to paradigm shifts.

A new set of “non-conventional policies” began to be adopted by governments and donors in different parts of the world. They were translated into different forms of aided self-help, sites-and-services and *in situ* slum upgrading projects and also included some levels of land

### Rio de Janeiro

“Removal/ resettlement policies had cost the government dearly in both political and monetary capital. (...) While it had been successful in removing favelas, it had been a total failure in removing the causes of favela growth” (Perlman, 2010: 272). Dwellers’ resistance, their return to other favelas, unplanned family growth and rural-urban migration (pushed by the “economic miracle” that brought jobs, but no housing for low-income earners) meant that the pace in which favelas grew was significantly faster than the pace in which forced evictions took place.

Furthermore, the National Housing Bank (BNH) opened in 1964 to finance the construction of low-income housing did not manage to recover its investments, as dwellers refused to repay mortgages as a way of protesting against the low quality constructions and appalling conditions forced upon them. With high default rates and high maintenance costs, BNH changed its focus and started to build subsidised housing for the middle and upper classes. Without new units to house the displaced, evictions proved to be pointless. (Valladares, 1978; Perlman, 2010)

With the political disruption brought by evictions, clientelismo (“patronage”) flourished. Nevertheless, amidst politicians’ petty favours, organised leaders still found ground to resist and demand for participation and the improvement of living conditions in favelas. The redemocratisation process in the late 1970s allowed popular protests to happen again. Community based organisations were pressuring the state and, in a context of greater political freedom, authorities were forced to shift to a more accommodating approach to favelas. (Fiori *et al.*, 2000)

regularisation, provision of public services and access to financial and technical assistance.

Community groups and experts raised their voices. And as the merits of self-produced settlements matched macroeconomic goals to “redistribute with growth” as well as the discourse dominating lending policies<sup>3</sup>, the World Bank listened.

Eventually, the ideas of defendants of an organic logic of spatial organisation were “misappropriated” by governments and international agencies attempting to cut investments whilst neutralising escalating social pressures: strategies that were seen as “compatible” with their interests were adopted, whilst recommendations regarded as “incompatible” (e.g. dweller control, power devolution) were completely dismissed. (Fiori and Brandão, 2010; Burgess, 1992)

**Aided self-help.** The first phase of “non-conventional” policies saw the use of beneficiaries’ unpaid labour in construction as a means to reduce costs whilst fostering commitment to the new dwelling, developing community cohesion and giving locals a chance to learn a trade. However, according to Wakely (1988), this approach was “short lived for few basic reasons”: labour represented a small portion of the costs and was less productive this way; livelihood necessities meant that building a new dwelling had low priority if compared to their need to earn an income; and beneficiaries had become a source of free labour, and not the drivers of the process as it had been advocated for. In the pursuit of cheaper housing, lending and donor agencies (i.e. World Bank) and governments attempted to invest in self-construction without devolving decision-making power. Once again, authorities had failed to understand the multidimensional meaning and strategic functions housing has.

**Sites-and-services.** Responding to calls for more participation and still aiming to “help the poor to help themselves” (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 25), the next programme promoted by the World Bank was that of serviced sites for incremental construction. Although these projects varied a lot from country to country, they typically offered a small piece of serviced land in the outskirts of the city, access to credit and technical help for construction, and were “frequently badly administered, poorly located and expensive” (ibid). The programme was short-lived and never reached scale. By 1983, the World Bank had funded approximately 70 sites-and-services projects in Latin America and Africa. (Choguill, 1995 cited in Fiori and Brandão, 2010)

**The first *in situ* slum upgrading projects.** With the consequent failure of yet another programme, *in situ*

slum upgrading became increasingly popular and is, until today, considered the most effective approach. Its popularity was not only founded on lower costs<sup>4</sup>, but also on the political and social gains to be won from avoiding evictions (Pugh, 2001). This third type of “non-conventional” policy promoted by the World Bank partly recognises, for the first time, the right of the poor to live in urban land and that slums are part of the city.

“Upgrading consists of land regularisation and improvements to the existing infrastructure up to a satisfactory standard. Typical upgrading projects provide footpaths and pit latrines, street lighting, drainage and roads, and often water supply and limited sewerage. Usually, upgrading does not involve home construction, since residents are expected to be able to do that themselves” (UN-Habitat, 2003: 127). In this way, *in situ* slum upgrading acknowledges people’s capacity to produce (or procure) and manage their own shelter and that, given some kind of security of tenure to land, households tend to invest their savings, however small, in housing development (“a lengthy, sometimes never-ending process”). (Wakely, 1988)

For Wakely (1988: 125), slum upgrading’s underlying principle should be “the devolution of responsibility to the lowest effective level”. The argument for this devolution is three-fold: a) economic efficiency and flexibility, as users make sure they get the best value for their investments and act according to needs (“for individual households, investment in their own dwellings represents a low financial risk with high social and economic return, whereas the same housing built by government represents a high risk at a very low return”); b) housing as a process – “households and communities in control of the basic decisions that shape their environment (...) provide a fundamental support to their own sense of well-being, confidence and, therefore, development”; c) pragmatic – governments simply cannot build for all, but people can (and standards may be improved with governmental support).

Although an important transition, this first phase of slum upgrading projects was still limited. Fiori and Brandão (2010:185) point out that governments concerned with the provision of basic sanitation and infrastructure paid little attention to the “connectivity of settlements with their immediate surrounding as well as with the city as a whole”. For the authors, the increasing emphasis on the local “led to a growing loss of the city scale and, ultimately, of the city itself” (ibid: 184).

Additionally, slum upgrading did not address poverty in its multidimensionality. As Moser (1995: 161) observed, the objective of urban programmes and projects “must be to enter the city not just through ‘the house and the bathroom’ but through inter-relationships between poverty, productivity and environment”.

### Rio de Janeiro

Due to the long-running dictatorship's lack of commitment to poverty alleviation, Brazil was late in adopting "non-conventional" approaches to housing policies. The first official self-help project (Projeto Mutirão) in Rio de Janeiro was only launched in 1982, when Leonel Brizola, the first governor democratically elected in two decades came to power.

The project counted on the provision of construction materials and technical help by the state, and on the free labour provided by favela residents. The project was extended to 20 settlements, giving access to basic sanitation infrastructure to 130 thousand people (Fiori et al., 2010). Rio's aided self-help movement was quite limited, as it focused on the physical aspects of community building (e.g. basic water and sanitation provision), rather than on social aspects and power devolution.

Brizola, a populist politician, won with the bulk of his support from lower income groups. Under his administration land invasions increased, creating new favelas throughout the state. As an attempt to fulfil his pledge, Brizola announced the "Each Family, One Plot" programme (Cada Família, Um Lote) and promised to regularise and upgrade 1 million plots in favelas and illegal sub-divisions. Nevertheless, the initiative issued less than 23 thousand deeds and slum upgrading was ever only completed in two favelas (Fiori et al, 2010).

Overall, the wide array of "non-conventional" projects implemented by federal, state and municipal governments in Rio de Janeiro during the 1980s were marked by poor administration, paternalism, political conflict and scarce resources, a product of the on-going transition to democracy. (ibid)

In addition, drug trafficking organisations grew and armed itself during this period. The violence generated from wars between gangs and the police reinforced the borders between favelas and the formal city, strengthening the stigma and transforming these informal settlements into no-go zones. Thus, the intervention of heavily armed traffickers changed relations amongst favela residents and contributed to disrupt community cohesion.

### 2.3. 1980s| Neoliberalisation through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)

Despite an array of limitations, government support rather than the initial attempts to deliver mass produced units was widely recognised as a more effective approach to low income housing. Despite the multiplication of "non-conventional" projects in the 1970s and early 1980s, in 1984, however, the focus shifted once again.

In a context of oil price shocks, inflation, debt crises, high inflation and unemployment, a neo-liberal group presented a "new theory but old remedies – a return to *laissez-faire* economics" (UN-Habitat, 2003: 36). The neo-liberal agenda of state withdrawal, free markets and privatisation, budget cuts and price rises impacted strongly on the urban poor – and women and children in particular. "From 1973 to 1993, inequality, however measured, increased between countries, within most countries and in the world as a whole". (ibid)

With both developed and developing nations in recession, "the control of inflation, rising of interest rates, devaluation of currencies and rescheduling of debt payments became priorities at the expense of investment in education, housing, health or welfare services" (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 27). Although commitment to "redistribution with growth" remained in the official agenda, the implementation of "structural adjustments programmes"<sup>5</sup> (SAPs) by the major international funding agencies (i.e. the World Bank and

the International Monetary Fund) overshadowed poverty reduction policies in the developing world.

In the field of housing, the 1980s focused on the de-regulation, de-specialisation and privatisation of housing finance. As a consequence, self-help programmes reached a new phase based on neo-liberal principles: the withdrawal of government and the fostering of efficient markets (UN-Habitat, 2003). Thus, agencies moved away from the poverty relief and began to allocate a much smaller share for poor countries and low income housing (The World Bank, 2008). Austerity measures have been pinpointed as the main cause for poverty and inequality growth in the 1980s and 1990s (UN-Habitat, 2003).

The closure of national housing banks around the world exemplifies the restructuring of financial markets occurring in the forefront of neo-liberal policies and many nations' entry in an era of privatisation and globalisation (Fiori and Brandão, 2010). At the same time, the retreat of the state from direct intervention "to enabling markets to become more efficient mechanisms for the distribution of both goods and services" has also been considered a characteristic of poverty reduction strategies of the late 1990s. (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 27; UN-Habitat, 2003: 127)

Figure 2.1 presents changes in the *favelas*' share of the city population, along with the number of people living in *favelas*. From 1950 to 2000, the share increased from 7 per cent to almost 20 per cent of city inhabitants. The

period with a slight decrease in numbers corresponds to the harshest years of dictatorship and eradication policies (Soares, 2005). This was soon replaced by the steady growth of informal settlements in the following decades.

## 2.4. 1990s| Comprehensive approach to poverty

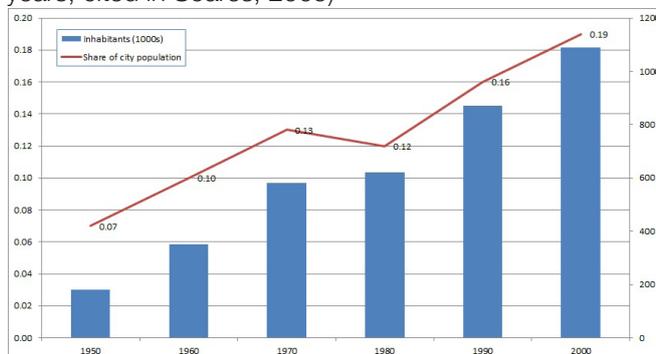
Concerns with the impacts of globalisation and the recognition that SAPs had adverse effects on the poor's living conditions brought poverty back into the international agenda in the 1990s (Fiori and Brandão, 2010). Studies concerned with issues of "relative poverty", marginalisation, vulnerability and the central role of the poor in defining solutions were abundant in this period<sup>6</sup>. Thus, poverty began to be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that must be addressed comprehensively. Cities began to be looked at not only from an economic

perspective (for goods, services and trade), but also from a social perspective, with regards to collective behaviour, social relationships and society.

Respecting this understanding, a "new generation" of housing policies emerged in the mid-1990s, focusing on the issue of poverty alleviation through an integrated, multisectoral, city-scale and participatory approach (Fiori *et al.*, 2000). Acknowledging that sectoral policies cannot deliver comprehensive solutions ("while planning agencies plan at the sectoral level, households and individuals plan [and live] cross-sectorally" [Moser, 1995: 161]), policies were now meant to target not only the manifestations of urban poverty, but to "address the underlying causes of poverty" whilst involving "the people who live in poverty and their representative organisations." (UN-Habitat, 2003: 136).

In this framework, "the enabling or integrative approach refers not only to housing delivery systems, but to urban development and management as a whole" (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 29). These "non-conventional" housing policies and programmes are more ambitious and part of a multisectoral attack on poverty, aiming at the integration of the poor, their housing and settlements into the city fabric, economy and social and political institutions". (ibid)

**Figure 2.1.** Growth in Rio's *favela* inhabitants and the share of *favelas* in the city. (Source: IBGE Census, various years, cited in Soares, 2005)



Nevertheless, as the goal shifts from isolated slum upgrading to integrated urban projects, housing ends up losing its centrality. In this "new generation" of multidimensional poverty policies, housing became so many "things" that it disappeared from poverty alleviation strategies altogether. "Housing lost its own urban portfolio in government and was subsumed into social security in many countries. Expenditure on housing also fell substantially." (UN-Habitat, 2003: 123)

### In Rio de Janeiro

Amidst political and economic crises, the situation of the urban poor in Rio de Janeiro became even more precarious in the 1980s. During this period, favelas expanded four times the number of social housing previously built; 36 per cent of the city's population was working informally; and 32.5 per cent were living under the poverty line. (Cardoso and Lago, 1993 cited in Fiori *et al.*, 2010)

As a consequence of the financial crises and neoliberal, the Brazilian National Housing Bank (BNH) closed in 1986. The dismantling of the second strongest financial institution in the country, meant to reduce the role of the state, left a vacuum in housing policies and led to the disarticulation of the presence of the national government in the housing sector, institutional fragmentation and loss of resources. (Ministério das Cidades, 2004)

By the late 1980, it was clear that housing and land markets had become even less favourable to low-income groups. As a response, the National Forum for Urban Reform (FNRU) was formed by the civil society and CBOs. This social movement had power to influence the Constitution approved in 1988, in which new legislative instruments were developed to improve housing conditions and establish government control over land use (Lago, 1992 cited in Fiori *et al.*, 2000). Although more restricted to paper than practiced in reality, the progressive laws and regulations shaped by popular participation shed a new light in Brazil's urban development policies, culminating in the approval of the City Statute in 2001.

## 2.5. 2000s| A millennium development goal

Since the United Nations announced its Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2000, development agencies aligned activities to meet these goals, bringing a certain shift to poverty reduction policies whilst reinforcing other initiatives (The World Bank, 2008). Goal number seven is to “ensure environmental sustainability”, aiming “to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers”<sup>7</sup> by 2020 (Target 7D, UN, 2000). Through the *Cities without Slums* Action Plan, the World Bank and UN-Habitat highlighted that scaling-up slum upgrading is “central to the Bank’s poverty-reduction mission and urban development strategy”, being the “centrepiece of a global

strategy for improving the living conditions of the urban poor.” (Cities Alliance, 1999: 12; 3)

This approach reinforces the role of *in situ* slum upgrading as the main strategy recommended for addressing infrastructure and service needs of the urban poor. However, the challenge of addressing poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon remains. Even successful slum upgrading programmes seem to have failed to support, for instance, the generation of income and employment, the provision of direct housing subsidies, the creation of social safety nets, the promotion of quality education, health, transport, and so on. The challenge of promoting equity and reduce exclusion for the attainment of socially just cities remains.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

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3. “The vast majority of self-help projects were internationally sponsored, and this alone indicates that a global perspective is important for understanding their nature”. (Burgess, 1992: 81)

4. “A 1980 study estimated World Bank upgrading projects cost US\$38 per household, compared with US\$1,000 to US\$2,000 for a core sites-and-services housing unit or US\$10,000 for a low-cost public dwelling.” (UN-Habitat, 2003: 130)

5. Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) were austerity policies implemented by the IMF and the World Bank in developing countries as conditionalities for loans. SAPs pushed “free market” policies, such as privatisation and deregulation, as well

as the reduction of trade barriers. Chang (2002, cited in UN-Habitat, 2003:40) stated that “forcing the developing world to remove barriers through SAPs and other conditionalities is like someone trying to ‘kick away the ladder’ with which they [developed countries] climbed to the top. It has become very much a case of ‘do what we say, not what we did’.”

6. See, for example, Chambers (1997) and Moser (1995).

7. In 2000, it was estimated that 850 million people lived in slums. Moreover, it is projected that by 2020 the number will reach 1.8 billion (UN-Habitat, 2003). In this way, the target to reach only 100 million people has been heavily criticised for being too modest.

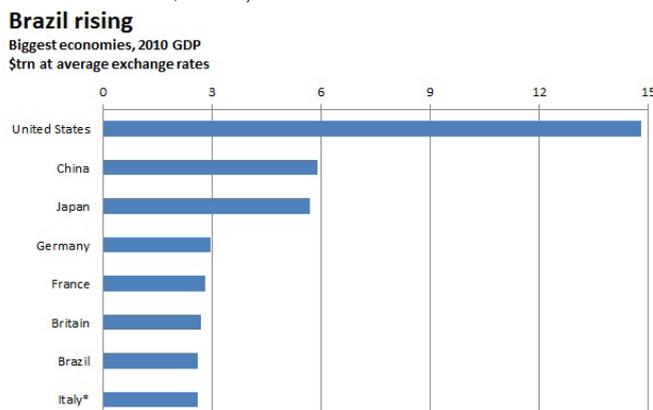
## 3. The case of Rio de Janeiro

### 3.1. Context: The present

Nationally, the housing sector currently sees simultaneous investments in “conventional” housing policies and comprehensive slum upgrading. The first, entitled *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (“My House, My Life”), aims to build 1 million units throughout the country. The latter, PAC/*Favelas*, aims to connect informal settlements and the formal city through infrastructure improvements in *favelas* located in a number of large cities. More details on both follow below.

These massive investments are enabled by Brazil’s most prosperous period since the “economic miracle” of the 1970s, combined with the government’s efforts to expand social programmes and improve the living standards of the very poor<sup>8</sup>. Between 2003 and 2010, the country has grown at an average of 4 per cent a year and, although the rate is lower than India and China’s, the balance of income distribution has improved more rapidly in Brazil than in other large emerging markets. It is estimated that 49 million people have been lifted into the so-called “new middle class” or above since 2003. Moreover, in the past 10 years, “the income of the poorest 50 per cent of the population grew 68 per cent in real per capita terms, while the income of the richest 10 per cent grew by 10 per cent; and the income of the average illiterate person rose 37 per cent between 2003 and 2009, while that of the person with at least an incomplete university degree fell 17 per cent”. (FT, 2011a)

**Figure 3.1.** The Brazilian economy in the world (Source: The Economist, 2011)



As Brazil reaches a new international economic and political status, Rio de Janeiro is joining the competition for the attraction of transnational capital. While globalisation fragments the urban-regional territory into areas and groups that are “in” or “out” (Borja and Castells, 1997), Rio de Janeiro has, for over two decades, attempted to reinvent and re-brand itself in order to join the circuit of global cities. Following the “recipe”<sup>9</sup>, in 2009 Rio finally won the bid to stage the 2016 Olympic Games. Now, the Olympics and the 2014 FIFA World Cup<sup>10</sup> are presented as an opportunity to “re-design the future.” (Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro, 2009)

In the pursuit of this “vision”, the local government is copying global cities around the world and trying eliminate obstacles that may stop Rio from “going global”. *Favelas en route* of the mega events are being upgraded, removed or “pacified” with constant police occupation. Building regulations are being altered to suit developers and new hotels are exempt from taxes until 2020. Airports are to be privatised, new ports are being built and the old port in the city centre is to become the centre-piece of a waterfront regeneration project, part of the largest public-private partnership deal ever signed in the country. The underground is being expanded to a wealthy neighbourhood where only 5 per cent of the population live, although the budget of over US\$3 billion would suffice to improve the inadequate train network linking the city centre and suburbs where more than 50 per cent of the population reside. (Dias Simpson, 2011)

So far, it may be said that the plan is “working”. With international investments pouring into the city, Rio is now one more bubble. Last year alone Rio received US\$7.3 billion in foreign direct investment – seven times more than the previous year. Prime office rents in the city are now higher than anywhere else in the Americas, north or south (The Economist, 2011). The real estate market alone ‘boomed’ by 44 per cent in 2010 (Rolnik, 2011c). The question now is whether the bubble will bust before or after 2016.

### 3.2. Urbanisation of *favelas*: Recent past and present (1994 – to date)

**Favela-Bairro (1994 – 2000s).** The Favela-Bairro programme was labelled a “best practice” by the World Bank and UN-Habitat and is considered “one of the most ambitious and advanced illustrations” of the “new genera-

tion of comprehensive slum upgrade policies” (Fiori *et al.*, 2000:22). Since the programme was launched in 1994, Rio de Janeiro has been in the forefront of *in situ* slum upgrading and urbanisation initiatives.

Favela-Bairro was the largest slum upgrading programme to ever be implemented in Latin America and counted on the unprecedented investment of US\$ 600 million, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the local government. The programme was implemented by the municipal Housing Department, and due to its comprehensive objectives, also involved other governmental departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector and grass root leaders.

Favela-Bairro inaugurated a goal that has been the objective of every slum upgrade intervention implemented in Rio ever since: to unify a city that, for a number of reasons, has been divided into “formal” and “informal”, “slum” and “city”, *favela* and *asfalto* (“asphalt”), even though both “sides” are intrinsically connected and dependent. Hoping to blur these boundaries, projects have mainly attempted to connect the spatial differences between the two territories through the “urbanisation of *favelas*”. The expectation was/ is that the introduction of urban aspects can requalify the perception of these territories so that they may be seen as a regular neighbourhood of the city (a *bairro*<sup>11</sup>).

The Favela-Bairro programme did not aim to meet housing

**Figure 3.2.** Hillside improvements implemented by Favela-Bairro in Sagueiro. (Source: Jauregui, 2011)



ing needs of individual residents, but, instead, it “addressed the collective needs of *favelas* as a whole” (SMH, 1995 cited in Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 194). The head of the municipal Housing Department defined Favela-Bairro as “a housing programme that is not about housing” (Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro, 1996), as authorities shared the belief that *favela* residents would spontaneously improve their homes as a side effect of the urbanisation process.

Together with a national governmental bank, Favela-Bairro did create a special credit line for construction materials and specialised labour, but because *favela* residents were unable to pass the governmental bank’s risk assessment, the initiative never thrived (Magalhães, 2011, pers. comm., 31 August). This bottleneck is one of many examples of how the programme’s comprehensive intentions were jeopardised by institutional and political fragmentation<sup>12</sup>. The list goes on and include crèches without staff; abandoned sewage systems as the water company refused to connect pipes; etc.

The programme produced positive results in the 178 settlements where it was implemented: physical conditions were improved and having *favelas* as the object of public investments gave dwellers a sense of secure tenure (Perلمان, 2010). However, the social and economic components which were part of the initial ambition to comprehensively improve the quality of life in *favelas* through a multisectoral alliance were never accomplished. Furthermore, with political changes and the lack of consistent social policies, slums (and violence) continued to grow. Many of the Favela-Bairro improvements were quickly “swallowed” by *favelas* and the programme slowed down significantly in early 2000s and was officially discontinued in 2006.

Today, there is no doubt that despite physical improvements, Favela-Bairro did not fulfil its strategic objective to transform *favelas* into neighbourhoods, blurring boundaries between the informal and the formal city. “The stigma attached to living in a *favela* runs too deep to be obliterated by appearances”. (Perلمان, 2010: 281).

Furthermore, it is important to note that, despite its positive ambitions, Favela-Bairro prioritised urbanisation over every other dimension of slum upgrading. In a rich and necessary evolution, the programme took a step forward in recognising that, as learned in the 1970s, housing is a process and should not be treated as an object. Nevertheless, the implementation process culminated in the loss of a fundamental dimension: housing in itself – a concern to men and women and a strategic dimension to urban development.

*The biggest stumbling block to achieving cities without slums is, in fact, housing, because formal sector housing is well beyond the reach of most slum dwellers and without formal housing, areas are usually automatically considered to be slums.*

Therefore, it is, strictly speaking, necessary for governments to follow the example of the highly developed countries and the few other countries that have achieved this goal by providing the funds to meet affordability constraints. (UN-Habitat, 2003:190)

**PAC/ Favelas (2007 – present).** In 2007, the federal government announced the investment of US\$ 650 million (from national, regional and local funds) in slum upgrading in Rio de Janeiro. Known as PAC/ Favelas, this investment is the social slice of the so-called “Programme for Growth Acceleration” (*Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento – PAC*), a national strategy to reach and maintain a 5 per cent annual growth rate whilst investing in infrastructure and development. (Ministério das Cidades, 2009)

Differently from Favela-Bairro’s attempts to reach city-level scale through intervening in *favelas* located throughout the city, PAC/ Favelas, although of large scale in numbers and ambitions, is being implemented in three of Rio’s largest “complexes of *favelas*”. Together, Complexo do Alemão, Complexo de Manguinhos and Rocinha are

home to approximately 500,000 people and are known for being some of the most “dangerous” favelas in the city and the “headquarters” of powerful drug trafficking organisations. For instance, the road surrounding Manguinhos is often referred to as “Rio’s Gaza strip”.

Differently from Favela-Bairro’s attempts to reach city-level scale through intervening in favelas located throughout the city, PAC/ Favelas, although of large scale in numbers and ambitions, is being implemented in three of Rio’s largest “complexes of *favelas*”<sup>13</sup>. Together, Complexo do Alemão, Complexo de Manguinhos and Rocinha are home to approximately 500,000 people<sup>14</sup> and are known for being some of the most “dangerous” *favelas* in the city and the “headquarters” of powerful drug trafficking organisations. For instance, the road surrounding Manguinhos is often referred to as “Rio’s Gaza strip”.

The bulk of the PAC/ Favelas’ investments is destined for urbanisation – this time in the form of large-scale infrastructure. Inspired by the urbanisation model implemented in informal settlements in Medellín, Colombia, the three projects aim to create public spaces and transport alternatives (e.g. swimming pools and libraries, cable car, a public park. At the same time, it is expected that the

**Figure 3.3.** Image on top shows the project of a cable car inspired in the Medellín model (Source: Jauregui, 2011); in the image below, the cable car already in use. (Source: Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro)



**Figure 3.4.** Top photo shows the project to create a public space under rail tracks (Source: Jauregui, 2011); bottom photo, a police officer “protects” the construction works from local drug traffickers. (Source: O Globo, 2011)



presence of the state in these territories would help to regain spaces “privatised” by drug traffickers, usually the most powerful actors in *favelas*. (Dias Simpson, 2009)

Even though construction works are far from being completed, certain parts of the projects are being inaugurated in the pace dictated by the presidential and state elections. With politicians re-elected, PAC 2 was soon announced, with generous additional resources paid to the construction companies that sponsored political campaigns and never executed what they were supposed to during PAC 1. Against a backdrop of serious complaints of lack of participation and transparency, the programme is set to have limited outcomes.

With the understanding that physical interventions alone cannot tackle all dimensions of poverty, the federal government, through its Ministry of Cities, determines that 2 to 3 per cent of slum upgrading resources are spent in “social work” – a value that indicates the dimension of the importance given to social aspects, although in practice translates into large sums, as hundreds of millions are at stake. Keeping to this directive, private companies are hired after public bidding to fulfil the role. Social work usually encompasses “impact management” (mainly families’ relocation) and “territorial development” (i.e. social mobilisation through the constitution of commissions; work and employment, typically through training courses; and “environmental and sanitary education”, typically through campaigns).

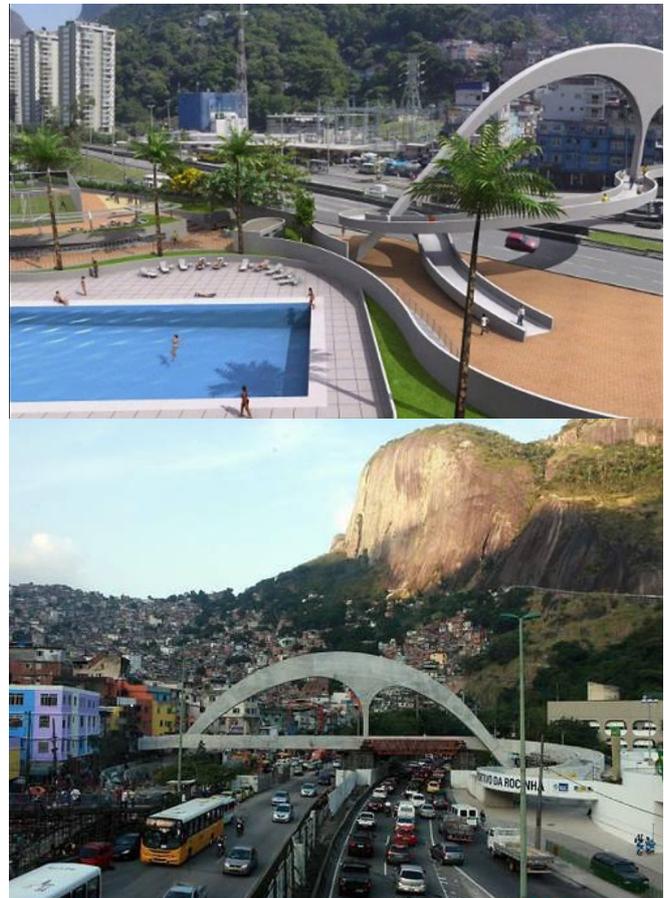
Even though intentions are good, this “technical social work” has practically no power to influence the main (physical) interventions or echo people’s demands, being often restricted to ticking bureaucratic boxes. In Complexo de Manguinhos, the social work was boycotted: the pre-existing Social Forum disregarded the fact that an external, for profit actor was hired to implement a work they believed they could do themselves, with more transformative and democratic outcomes. In Complexo do Alemão, rumours suggested that part of the “social work” was forced to become a channel of communication between the government and drug lords (through local representatives) to ensure constructions happened without interruption. Finally, in Rocinha, groups were formed and local leaders were eager to participate, but the construction works were so delayed that the community lost its hope and people eventually abandoned the process.

Overall, the vast majority of local dwellers remained distant from the process. Research carried out by an independent NGO showed that only 20 per cent of residents interviewed felt they were well informed about interventions taking place in their communities. Although over 70 per cent of the interviewees were optimistic and expected the PAC to successfully fulfil its objectives, most mistakenly believed the project’s main objective was to build housing. (Ibase, 2009)

As the numbers indicated, the improvement of housing conditions is in the forefront of local’s expectations. This argument is also confirmed by the fact that among all groups formed by the “social work”, “housing commissions” always attracted the highest number of participants. Thus, community leaders from Manguinhos have also declared: “we have numerous needs in Manguinhos, and therefore we see the elevation of the rail tracks as a secondary element to the improvement of our quality of life, given the urgent demands for basic sanitation and housing for all.” (Manguinhos Social Forum, 2008)

In fact, over 4,000 mid-rise flats were built on site by the PAC/ *Favelas* in the three complexes of *favelas*. Although a significant number, these units were destined to replace houses demolished to give room to PAC’s ambitious physical interventions and for the clearance of certain “areas of risk”, curtailing the impact on the housing deficit. Furthermore, the high number of relocations can be seen as an indicator that the architectural approach

**Figure 3.5.** In Rocinha, PAC’s main intervention includes a footbridge designed by Niemeyer and a swimming pool. Both are built in the entrance of the *favela*, where dwellings also received a coat of colourful paint for pleasing aesthetics on the “border” of the *favela* and an upper-class neighbourhood. (Sources: Governo do Estado, 2009; Folleto, 2010)



promoted during the Favela-Bairro period, which aimed to “build upon and respect the existing layout of houses, roads and walkways” (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 194), was replaced by interventions that are too large to exist in harmony with the organic layout of *favelas*. Cable cars, elevated train tracks and roads led to the (more often than not forced) displacement of thousands of families, leaving dwellers with the feeling that resources would have been spent differently if their voices were heard.

Furthermore, as it often happens when housing is seen as an object rather than a process, families relocated to the new units are already struggling to pay for the costs of living in a formal home; the low quality of the constructions is leading to the rapid deterioration of brand new estates; regulations stop households from using their residence as a place of production and a mean for survival (i.e. it is forbidden to sell products or rent out rooms in the new flats); among many other issues that come about as consequences of sudden obligations which do not correspond to the residents’ needs or ways of living. Once again, top-down housing proves to be unsustainable and, as a result, cases of (illegal) sales and rent are abundant, especially in the wealthier parts of the city.

Responding to a legitimate demand, the housing element that was lost in Favela-Bairro reappears with more strength in the PAC/ *Favelas*. However, housing was brought back into the equation in its “conventional” form, ignoring the lessons learned. Amidst Rio’s large scale slum upgrading initiative, we witness, once again, housing being delivered ready as an object to “beneficiaries” who do not participate in the decision-making in any form and who are only informed that they will need to move after all decisions have been made.

In this way, slum upgrading and housing policies seem to have completed a cycle in Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas*: housing understood as an object mass produced during a period of eradication of *favelas* was followed, after decades of failures, by *in situ* improvements which, in a step forward, are understood in a multidimensional perspective that, in a step backward, led to the loss of housing. With the PAC/ *Favelas*, housing returns to the agenda – but together with regressive methods.

**Minha Casa, Minha Vida (2009 – present).** Reinforcing the cycle, the programme “My House, My Life” (*Minha Casa, Minha Vida* – MCMV) brings Brazil fully back into the failed “conventional” housing policies implemented in the past. Announced in a period of global financial crisis, the programme aims to deliver 1 million ready-to-occupy units for middle and low-income households throughout the country while fuelling economic growth through the construction industry<sup>15</sup>. The programme targets three different ranges of income:

households who earn up to US\$1,000; up to US\$2,250; and up to US\$3,060. Last February, the government increased the target of construction to 2 million units and raised subsidies by 75 per cent (to a total value of US\$78 billion).

For the construction of lower income units, authorities are rewinding a film of failed policies whilst ignoring lessons they should have learned. MCMV is based on strategies to enable the construction sector (through subsidies, tax exemption, etc.) and augment the supply of housing and access to credit “without any connection with urban or land strategies, confusing housing policies and income generation policies” (Nakano and Rolnik, 2009: 4). Many have pointed out that the construction companies are the main beneficiaries of MCMV.

In Rio de Janeiro, the units are located in the sprawling poor north and west zones, in “non-cities” where land is cheap, but far from development opportunities, deepening socio-spatial segregation, increasing public expenditure on infrastructure and individual expenditure on mobility. “Building houses is producing cities. It is essential to discuss the impact of real estate in the living conditions, in the institution or removal of social rights, in land use and functioning of cities. Let’s not fall into the trap of seductive numbers: 1 million homes? Yes, but where, how and for whom?” (Nakano and Rolnik, 2009: 4)

**Evictions.** Days after Rio de Janeiro won the bid to host the 2016 Olympic Games, the local government released a list with 119 *favelas* to be cleared due to developments related to the upcoming mega event (Bastos and Schmidt, 2010). Rebranded market-cities do not promote what the city actually is, but what it wants to become. It is a symbolic process with concrete consequences, as in the case of evictions in Rio de Janeiro. (Vainer, 2011)

**Figure 3.6.** Units for low income families and *favela* resettlements. This development is located 75km from the city centre. (Source: Jornal Atual, n.d.)



Rolnik, special rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council on the right to adequate housing, has identified what “seems to be a pattern of lack of transparency, consultation, dialogue, fair negotiation and participation of the affected communities in processes concerning evictions undertaken or planned in connection with the World Cup and Olympics” (Right to Housing, 2011). For many of the families evicted due to these and other city “developments”, MCMV units are presented as the solution for relocation.

The organised social movement is struggling to find room for protest. NGOs and CBOs are trying to raise awareness of the illegality of these forced evictions: the short notice given; the fact that authorities avoid collective negotiations in order to fragment resistance; the inadequate relocation plans; and the insufficient compensation offered to households. Disregarding the Brazilian constitution and international treaties, even communities that have already obtained land use concession are being evicted. The plans show, for instance, the placement of the Olympic village exactly where a traditional fishing community has lived for over 50 years, even though they possess deeds to the land.

**Figure 3.7.** Woman and child hide behind a door as an armoured police vehicle enters Complexo do Alemão; Children play in a pool at a trafficker’s house after police occupation. (Source: Penner, 2011)



### “Pacifying Police Units”

Among the many factors leading to the stigmatisation of favelas, the violence caused by “wars” between drug trafficking gangs and the police is probably the most obvious barrier in attempts to “sew up” Rio’s urban fabric. As a young man from a community that was part of the PAC/ *Favelas* programme concluded, “as long as we have violence, a favela will always be a favela” (Ibase, 2009). *Favela* inhabitants live under what Machado (2008) called a “triple enclosure”: “the drug traffickers’, who dominate favelas; the ‘permission to kill’ exercised by the police, that can also be manifested in “softer” terms, such as everyday oppression and permanent treatment of dwellers as potential suspects; and the mentality of certain sectors of society, that erect symbolic walls of detachment and disinterest through the lack of bridges and dialogues that would ensure the problem belongs to all – as if peace could be achieved in spite of others”.

In December 2008, the state launched a public security programme aiming to maintain permanent police occupation in some of Rio’s favelas through “Pacifying Police Units” (known as UPPs, *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*): “We cannot guarantee that we will put an end to drug trafficking nor do we have the pretension of doing so. [The idea is] to break the paradigm of territories that are controlled by traffickers with weapons of war. Our concrete objective is [to ensure] that a citizen can come and go as he pleases, that public or private services can get in there whenever they want”, explained Beltrame, state secretary for Public Security. (Phillips, 2010)

UPPs are indeed breaking paradigms: the expulsion of drug traffickers from territories they ruled for decades was considered an impossible mission; in order to avoid the widespread police corruption, UPP staff are formed of newly hired police officers, which so far, seems to be working; even very large favelas that functioned as the “headquarters” of trafficking operations are now occupied. With almost unanimous approval, UPPs have become dangerously critique-proof. UPPs now occupy 18 of Rio’s 582 favelas – a small number, but with far-reaching effects. Whether UPPs are going to live beyond 2016 to sustainably rid favelas of the control held by drug traffickers or beyond parts of the city that “matter less”, only time will tell.

So far, all *favelas* occupied by the police are related to the hosting of the Olympics – officials have declared that their objective is to create a “security belt” around the mega events. Some fear that the police occupation may open room for the gentrification of favelas located in the wealthiest parts of the city. In the past, drug traffickers kept *favelas* walled and city away. Now, utility companies are rushing to recover the profits lost and people who would never consider living, working or visiting a favela due to violence, may do so. With the “pacification” (not with urbanisation), *favelas* are being formalised<sup>16</sup> in a pace that is so rapid that may lead to the expulsion of their original dwellers to other (non-pacified) favelas located in less disputed areas of the city or distant suburbs, away from development opportunities.

**Morar Carioca: Future?** Adding these patchy projects together, the city of Rio de Janeiro is currently living with mass housing construction, evictions, mass policing as well as with what should be the most ambitious slum upgrading programme ever implemented. In July 2010, the local government announced yet another programme: *Morar Carioca*<sup>17</sup>. Its number one objective is, once again, to “promote social inclusion through complete and definitive urban and social integration of all *favelas* by 2020”. The programme is being presented as part of the city’s “Olympic legacy”. (SMH, 2011)

Although connections with Favela-Bairro are not officially mentioned, the new programme has the same scope but larger proportions – in terms of numbers, reach and ambitions. Morar Carioca also has the financial backing of the Inter-American Development Bank and, with resources from the national and local government, should cost over US\$ 5 billion. Authorities openly declare that the criterion for determining which *favelas* are going to be upgraded first is their proximity to the Olympics. (Phillips, 2010; Daflon, 2011)

The programme promises to urbanise all of Rio’s *favelas* and to promote accessibility, waste management, public spaces and services, environmental protection and eco-efficiency, reduction of density, resettlements and housing improvements – “all with transparency and popular participation” (SMH, 2011). As with the Favela-Bairro, 40 interdisciplinary architect-led teams (the previous number was 16) are being hired after competition open to public tender to redesign 582 inner-city slums (ibid). These private firms are also expected to limit and register *favelas*’ boundaries, prepare a social and legal diagnosis, create a project for the intervention and a development plan for the *favela*.

Acknowledging that the housing element was lost in Favela-Bairro, the programme promises to invest more directly in the issue. Information on how this is going to happen is not yet available, but as Morar Carioca aims to reduce the high density of *favelas*, clear households living in “areas of risk” and create public spaces and transport alternatives – and considering political interests and politicians’ close ties with construction companies – the programme is likely to invest in “conventional housing” through the delivery of new flats on site and the use of units built by MCMV, instead of consolidating existing homes residents according to residents’ necessity.

Morar Carioca opens up opportunities for significant changes in the lives of *favela* residents. Taking advantage of Rio’s prosperous moment, the local government and its partners have a real chance (and resources) to transform the city’s reality. For that, however, effective participation is fundamental to guarantee the success of this programme. Is Rio finally going to make it this time?

Scarred, *favela* leaders remain sceptical. They have heard these promises too many times. One incredulously referred to the programme as *Remover Carioca* (“Removing Rio’s residents”) (Silva, I. 2011, pers. comm., 10 February). They believe projects mainly aim to hide Rio’s “ugly” reality from international spotlight. Policy-makers argue that such approach is strategic for blurring boundaries and erasing differences. Community leaders, on the other hand, argue that the strategy works as a “make-up” and only changes what the outsider’s eye can see.

Large scale interventions seem to be the current trend. The visual impact easily seen from the distance and photographed by the press may help to create new landmarks for these areas – as they become “the *favela* with the cable car”, “the pool”, the archway”, rather than “the dangerous *favela*”. It is still too early to assess the systematic impact these interventions can cause, but as Favela-Bairro showed, the stigmatisation probably runs too deeply to be overcome by appearances.

Although also too soon to tell, current approaches indicate that the “*favela*-friendly” architecture seen in Favela-Bairro is being replaced by grand interventions – something that, in the case of areas of high density linked through narrow passages resembles a somewhat “bull-in-the-porcelain-shop” type of architecture. With the construction of infrastructures that would be too big to be inserted even in the “formal” city, thousands of homes are likely to be demolished.

So far, with billions of dollars destined to slum upgrading projects, a handful of very large construction companies<sup>19</sup> continue to be the main winners of investments that are supposed to transform the lives of slum dwellers.

**Figure 3.8.** Where is the *favela*? One of the projects awarded in the Morar Carioca competition. (Source: Concurso Morar Carioca, 2011)



### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

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8. “The breakthrough for Brazil’s economy came during the 1990s when former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso launched a series of policies aimed at stabilising consumer prices and the exchange rate. His successor, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, continued this focus on macro-economic stability while expanding social programmes”. (FT, 2011b)

9. For more on “strategic planning” see, for example, Borja and Castells, 1997; Bryson and Roering, 1987; and Steinberg, 2005.

10. Initially presented as a World Cup to be sponsored by the private sector, a recent study showed that 98.5 per cent of the budget is now coming from public funds. (Rolnik, 2011b)

11. The term “Favela-Bairro” can be literally translated as “Slum-Neighbourhood”.

13. A “complex of favelas” encompasses a number of slums (in these cases, approximately a dozen) that were initially located near each other and that, with growth, merged into what, for the outsider, looks like one continuous occupation. In this way, the title “complex” is normally given by external actors (i.e. the police, the state or the media) and does not necessarily reflect the views or relations of local dwellers. In fact, there are cases (such as in Complexo do Alemão) where different favelas that constitute a “complex” are ruled by competing drug gangs, causing constant “wars” and preventing dwellers from coming and going freely.

14. Slum upgrading works happening in other favelas (e.g. Pavão-Pavãozinho, Cantagalo and Grande Tijuca) when the PAC/ Favelas was launched were later also given the “PAC” label. Two years later, another area known as Colônia Juliano Moreira was also added to the PAC/ Favelas.

15. One million houses seem to be a key number in programmes implemented by governments of developing countries around the world. The first programme of its kind started in Sweden in 1965 (a period where “conventional” policies were the only approach) and the product is now considered a problem for Swedish cities, concentrating the poorest, higher crime rates and socio-spatial segregation. In 1894, Sri Lanka launched a programme to reach the same number, but the path chosen was aided self-help. Besides Brazil, the same number is being pursued in Angola (hence, under the influence of Brazilian construction companies), South Korea (with an environmental friendly approach, entitled One Million Green Homes Project), Thailand (through a combination of “conventional” and “non-conventional” policies) and a plan was announced for Spain (2009-2012). China recently announced the construction of not one, but 10 million units.

16. Utility companies, such as electricity and cable TV, tend to enter favelas in the very first days of police occupation, looking to bill thousands of new clients who previously relied on illegal connections. Over 2 thousand businesses have been formalised, bringing new opportunities, but also burdens to local entrepreneurs.

17. Morar means “to live”; carioca is an adjective relating to someone or something that comes from the city of Rio de Janeiro.

18. This is probably due to the fact that a new mayor, from a different political party, is now in power and to avoid association with Favela-Bairro’s weaknesses.

19. The construction companies that typically win public bids in consortium are Odebrecht, OAS, Delta, Andrade Gutierrez, EIT and Camter.

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## 4. Housing in the city

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### 4.1. Overlooking people

Urbanisation is very positive, but it is not enough. For almost three decades and at a cost of billions of dollars, the belief that urbanisation may have the power to trigger the comprehensive development of *favelas* has not materialised. Despite best efforts, it can be affirmed that attempts to urbanise Rio de Janeiro's informal settlements have not led to the social, spatial, economic and institutional integration of these territories in the city or altered their *status quo*. Amongst institutional fragmentation and conflicts of interests, the “comprehensive” discourse has become rhetorical, since physical interventions carried out by powerful construction companies are prioritised over social and economic development.

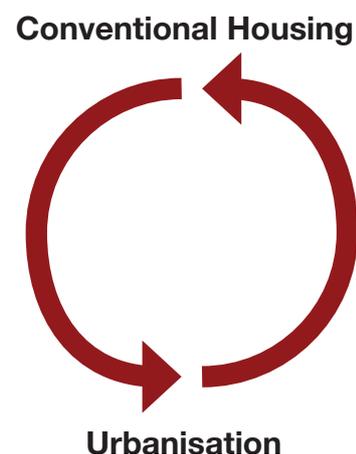
At the core of interventions' failure lies the lack of citizen participation. Amidst today's mega slum upgrading projects, people's on-going demands for education, income earning opportunities and public security continue to be overlooked. Additionally, with projects that tend to destroy more homes than they build, housing is naturally another issue in the forefront of slum dwellers' concerns. The right to adequate housing and the right to participation are present in of the Brazilian Constitution and international treaties signed by the government. However, considering the wide gap between dwellers' demands and projects delivered, it may be concluded that the state is only able to allocate the majority of resources in ambitious urbanisation projects because the right to participation is being overlooked.

*We want the opportunity of an honest and less discriminatory dialogue, where people can discuss the course of their lives with the government and the various political and social movements engaged with the problems of favelas (...). Laws that could ensure the sustainability of the PAC/ Favelas investments are being ignored. The communities of Manguinhos and their social actors have not found effective means of social participation. We did not participate in the formulation of Manguinhos' development plan, [and the plan] was not even presented to the public. (...) The investments made by the PAC/ Manguinhos are not at all in agreement with the communities' priorities. (Manifesto written by the Manguinhos' Social Forum, 2008)*

### 4.2. Escaping the vicious cycle

As shown in chapter 3, slum upgrading and housing policies seem to have completed a (vicious) cycle in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*. *Until the mid-1970s, housing as an object of four walls and a roof was the only dimension taken into consideration during a period in which mass produced estates in the outskirts of the city were seen as the solution to rid Rio de Janeiro of its slums. After three decades of failure, decision-makers realised that *in situ* improvements are a more social, political and cost-effective approach to the “problem of *favelas*”. In an important step forward, Favela-Bairro recognised that urban poverty needs to be tackled through a comprehensive approach. Focusing on the urbanisation of *favelas*, this optimistic experiment hoped issues related to housing would solve itself as a side-effect of environmental improvements. As a result, however, housing lost its centrality and direct investments disappeared from interventions altogether. With PAC/Favelas, housing returns to the agenda, but with the regressive approach of “conventional” policies. MCMV and present evictions close the cycle and bring policies back to where they started. Soon to be launched, Morar Carioca has the resources and the expertise to break this cycle, but within a context of mega events, where Rio de Janeiro tries to rebrand itself, this is not likely to happen. Housing is being remembered, but important lessons are being forgotten.*

**Figure 4.1.** A vicious cycle (Source: Dias Simpson, 2011).



Although Rio de Janeiro's urbanisation programmes are progressive in attempting to universalise urban development, interventions directly associated with housing are still very regressive. Upgrading has the potential to contribute to the transformation of slums and the lives of its inhabitants, positively impacting society as a whole. However, for the change to be definitive, Rio de Janeiro's politicians and policy-makers first need to let go of old habits left by decades of top-down bureaucratic interventions that insist on underestimating the knowledge accumulated by slum dwellers and the importance of participation. In the field of housing, this means breaking, for once and for all, a paradigm that insists on the delivery of unsustainable ready-to-occupy housing. Since institutions normally "want" to stay the same, it is up for NGOs and CBOs, practitioners and activists to find alternatives and push for change. As the Brazilian organised urban movement knows well, "participation" should not be restricted to ticking boxes in localised projects. Participation – or even better, local protagonism – must be intrinsically linked to institutional and political reforms.

### 4.3. Lessons from Thailand: The case of the Baan Mankong programme

Hoping to add to this reflection, here this paper aims to briefly present an interesting housing and slum upgrading programme being currently implemented in Thailand. Following almost an opposite approach from Rio de Janeiro's experiences, the Baan Mankong ("Secure Housing") programme provides an example of what can happen when the state starts functioning as an enabler rather than a provider of subsidised housing. Launched by the Thai central government in 2003, Baan Mankong aims to be "a people-driven housing development process in which poor people themselves are the main actors, the main solution-finders and the main delivery mechanism" (CODI, 2011a). The initiative channels government funds in the form of infrastructure subsidies and housing loans directly to poor communities in order to enable *in situ* upgrading or nearby relocation.

**Empowerment.** Baan Mankong builds on people's capacity to manage their own needs collectively and on what slum communities have already developed (Boonyabanacha, 2005). With support from the government as well as from a strong national network of communities<sup>20</sup>, households collectively control and partly fund resources, negotiate solutions, plan, manage and carry out housing and community improvements. A successful and advanced type of "aided self-help", dwellers' participation in this process has not been reduced to ticking boxes or free labour<sup>21</sup>.

The programme is implemented through the Community Organisations Development Institute (CODI), a public or-

ganisation under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security established in 2000 to fulfil this function<sup>22</sup> (see Appendix 1 for stakeholders involved). Differently from the billions of dollars commonly referred to in Brazilian interventions, CODI commenced with a seed of US\$ 85 million. Between 2003 and 2008, CODI provided US\$ 65 million in subsidies for infrastructure upgrading and another US\$66 million in housing and land loans (UN-Habitat, 2009), which sufficed to support 858 projects in 1,546 communities, in 277 cities in all of Thailand's 76 provinces, achieving 90,813 households<sup>23</sup> (CODI, 2011b).

Through operating as an enabler rather than as a delivery institution, this centrally-managed organisation is able to cope with the complexity and variability of personal and local housing needs. Because Baan Mankong does not specify physical outputs, a great variety of possibilities is allowed: "planning is decided by the people, not by architects that never lived there<sup>24</sup>" (Boonyabanacha, 2005: 26). CODI provides technical support through its "community architects" for the presentation of alternatives, and households collectively decide on the most appropriate solution to meet their needs and resources.

As Turner suggested in the 1970s, "when dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contributions in the design, construction and management of their housing, both this process and the environment produced stimulate individual social well-being" (Turner *et al.*, 1972: 241). In this way, Baan Mankong is promoting "more than just physical upgrading", as the programme stimulates deeper changes in social structures and in relationships with authorities and other key actors. (Boonyabanacha, 2005)

For Boonyabanacha (2005: 27), the former director of CODI, Baan Mankong's main paradigm shift is grounded on the fact that the programme is "demand-driven by communities rather than supply-driven" by governments. If demand is also understood as social pressure, it can be said that Rio de Janeiro's experiences are also demand-driven: they respond to years of struggle. The difference between the two cases, however, is tangible and pragmatic.

In Rio, projects and locations are chosen in a top-down manner. More often than not, *favela* residents are merely informed (usually through the press) that they were "lucky" to be included in the government's next undertaking. For instance, on-going debates among leaders always surrounded the reasons why their communities are object of the PAC/ Favelas: was it a response to community pressures? Once the president was flying over in a helicopter and decided something had to be done? Or was it just that the government decided to invest and an architecture firm had the projects ready? A more recent example is Morar Carioca, where communities are being prioritised "in order of appearance": if they impact the staging of the Olympic Games, they are going to be upgraded first. As such, decisions come "from above" and are disconnected

from the demands of people living “on the ground”. From inception to implementation, real participation is close to non-existent.

In Thailand, communities actually have to apply for the programme and prove that they are sufficiently organised to drive interventions before they can join Baan Mankong. Each intervention is negotiated directly with the community, guaranteeing long-term sustainability. Through this mechanism, households feel that they are the main actors of change, enhancing community ties, the feeling of belonging and ownership. Although the requirement of “community organisation” may exclude many poor communities, its fulfilment is strategic for the success of the programme.

**Collectively saving.** Whilst in Rio de Janeiro the construction of each housing unit costs several thousands of dollars, in Thailand CODI grants only US\$750 per family in subsidies for the implementation of collective infrastructure (water and sewage, street lighting, public spaces or whatever communities deem necessary). Individual housing improvements, however, are not paid for by the government: instead, communities have access to credit and technical support to produce housing themselves. Thus, just as when operating with a bank, organised communities are required to make a 10 per cent deposit to guarantee their loan. The loans are given to co-operatives (the community’s legal body) with an interest rate of 4 per cent – much lower than market rates, but high enough to ensure the long-term sustainability of CODI’s revolving funds. In turn, co-operatives make loans available to individual households at a 5-7 per cent interest rate, also aiming to leave a margin that guarantees their own financial and organisational sustainability<sup>25</sup>.

A common saying at CODI is “no savings, no housing”, but how can communities afford deposits? They do so

through the establishment of savings groups, a common practice in some Asian countries that does not quite exist in Latin America. Poor communities in Asia have a long tradition of collectively saving to invest in improvements and to provide small welfare loans at low interest rates to dwellers, as they are not able to access formal credit. CODI (2011b) estimates that there are approximately 50,000 savings groups in Thailand, adding up to US\$760 million in assets.

Both CODI and community leaders agree that saving is not an issue: before the programme is launched in the community, each household already tends to save between US\$4 and US\$17 per month. When communities join the programme and must start re-paying CODI, the value usually increases to between US\$26 and US\$50 per month, depending on how much households chose to borrow<sup>26</sup>.

Generally, small amounts are collected daily due to the unstable nature of dwellers’ income sources. Despite the small sums, what communities have managed to accomplish with their savings (and many times without any loans from CODI) is impressive.

Savings groups are not “about collecting money but about collecting people” (Burra, 2000). The scheme presents an efficient method to mobilise and enhance people’s sense of community. Additionally, CODI finds in savings groups a useful methodology for controlling funds in transparent, equitable and effective ways: “in most development works, someone else always holds the purse, and people (for lack of finance-management skills) are always holding their hand out (...). If a community cannot manage money, it is doomed forever to having its development process determined by someone else”. (Boonyabancha, 2005: 45)

The successful implementation of Baan Mankong depends on strong community organisation. The programme emphasises collective tenure and operates in a

**Figure 4.2.** Upgraded community in Klong Toey district, Bangkok. (Source: Dias Simpson, 2011)



**Figure 4.3.** The amount saved by each household and the total saved collective are displayed on the wall of a community centre. (Source: Dias Simpson, 2011)

|       |                          |            |      |
|-------|--------------------------|------------|------|
| 16/22 | นาย วรพด                 | คุณ:ไอศน   | 100  |
| 16/93 | น.ส. จริญญา(น.น. ปิ่นพา) | ปิ่นอติ    | 100  |
| 16/11 | นาย นัยน                 | อ.น.น.น.น. | 100  |
| 6/9   | น.ส. นงเยาว์             | อินทวารด   | 100  |
| 6/81  | น.ส. สัมม                | นาง:เทก    | 100  |
| 6/7   | นาย วังพนา               | พานิช      | 200  |
|       |                          |            | 6600 |
|       |                          |            | 6600 |

“consensus” that is often reached through peer pressure. The difference in mobilisation capacities between Rio’s *favelas* and Bangkok’s “communities” is great. According to Thai community leaders, disasters, such as fire or eviction threats, tend to function as catalyst opportunities for mobilisation. In Rio, decades of paternalism, top-down interventions and violence have fragmented communities.

Overall, the Baan Mankong programme operates with the flexibility required to house the poorest. The programme is doing very well what it proposes to do: people-led upgrading in communities that are already mobilised, in a holistic manner. Although of quite large scale, the programme is not able to tackle structural problems, such as land disputes and city integration. Yet, lessons can be learned not only from the programme’s successes, but also from its challenges and contrasting cultural differences.

#### 4.4. Self-sufficiency or rights

There is a world of similarities and also a world of differences between informal settlements and the manner the “issue” is treated in Rio de Janeiro and Bangkok. Communities in Bangkok count on a level of mobilisation that Rio’s communities are far from reaching, due to years of both political and violent control that helped to fragment these territories. At the same time, Rio counts on a level of public policies and urban planning that does not exist in Bangkok. And of course, there are cultural, social, political and economic differences.

Perhaps the most obvious “cultural” difference between the two cases is that Thai social movements pursue self-sufficiency, reflecting the culture of a country where “people are expected to look after themselves” (Kitti, 2011). The country’s social and economic development plan, for instance, follows a “philosophy of self-sufficiency economy”, a concept created by the king and promoted by the government<sup>27</sup>. In Brazil, social movements follow a rights-based approach, which also reflects the local culture and a history of dictatorship, (re) democratisation and resistance. This was materialised in the approval of the City Statute in 2001, a chapter on urban policy included in the Constitution that defends “the right to the city” and, among other points, “the right to sustainable cities, understood as the right to urban land, housing, environmental sanitation, urban infrastructure, transportation and public services” (Instituto Polis, 2001). The strategy picked for the battle is not “do it yourself”, but demanding the fulfilment of rights.

One concrete example of how urban issues are tackled in the two different “cultures” is found in debates on housing standards. In Bangkok, the network of slums lobbies for flexible regulations, arguing that standards are not for the poor: “we do people’s standard” (Boon-

**Figure 4.4.** Flyovers cut the city of Bangkok. (Source: Di Girolamo)



**Figure 4.5.** Land-use clash: On top, Klong Toey, Bangkok’s largest slum, occupies a large part of the Port Authority’s land; bottom image shows the Authority’s vision for the area. (Source: Mc Leod, 2011; unknown, n.d.)



yabancha, 2011). In Brazil, as housing in slum upgrading projects are paid and delivered ready by the state, the opposite happens: minimal standards<sup>28</sup> are not considered a barrier, but an achievement, and the fight is for making sure the state respects and continue to improve them. On this topic, Turner (1988) observed that people tend to be a lot more open to lower standards when they have the sense of ownership, when living conditions are a reflection of their own “sweat”. Standards become counterproductive when the gap between how much they cost and how much they demand cannot be closed with subsidies. (ibid)

Taking the goal for self-sufficiency further, the National Union of Low Income Community Organisations (NULICO) recently initiated the collection of US\$7 per household per annum, with the objective of reducing their dependence on government funds. Although it is true that power comes with money, housing problems arise to a large extent from the maldistribution of resources. The belief that communities can solve problems on their own, however, can create illusions about what can be done without governmental action or reform, shielding the *status quo* when the *status quo* needs to be changed. (Marcuse, 1992)

#### 4.5. City-scale

Because Baan Mankong is founded on participation, individual housing and basic community infrastructure are the

programme’s entry points for development. Contrasting with Rio de Janeiro, where the focus is on urbanisation, for Bangkok housing is the strategic priority – but, in turn, is the city being overlooked?

When upgrading projects are implemented with their ‘back’ turned on the city, they may reinforce the logic of “ghettoization” of poor settlements (Fiori and Brandão, 2010). “The shortcomings of self-help are particularly evident in the allocation of land and the planning of infrastructure, the provision of utilities, transportation modes, community facilities or services effectively provided only on a city-wide or national basis. None of these should be done on a project-by-project basis”. (Marcuse, 1992: 15)

Today, approximately 9.3 million<sup>29</sup> of Thailand’s 64 million inhabitants live in Bangkok (UN, 2011). Even though the city is growing at a fast pace, little attention is given to urban planning. Overall, projects are implemented in isolation and authorities play a “catch-up game”, as master plans are designed after constructions have taken place (Boonyabancha, 2011). This disconnection is expressed in the many flyovers that cut the city in every direction, ignoring surroundings. Thus, it may be argued that Baan Mankong is not connected to Bangkok’s urban development plans not only because it is community-led, but because “Bangkok does not plan.” (ibid)

With or without formal planning, Bangkok continues to grow and, as in Rio de Janeiro, slums are suffering from the impacts of local and global pressures.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

20. Communities in Thailand count on a very strong network entitled National Union of Low Income Community Organisations (NULICO).

21. For the actual constructions, communities may decide whether they want to train and hire local residents, hire private contractors, and/ or rely on the work of the “Community Builders’ Network”, formed by a large group of professionals from several communities.

22. Although CODI was established quite recently, it is important to note the praxis has a history that starts with “land sharing” schemes in the 1980s and gives continuity to the Urban Community Development Office, set up by the Thai government in 1992.

23. When launched in 2003, “Baan Mankong set a target of improving housing, living and tenure security for 300,000 households in 2,000 poor communities in 200 Thai cities within five years. This represents at least half the urban poor communities in Thailand”. (Boonyabancha, 2005: 25)

24. “If there are many women involved in the design, it means it is being done right”, adds Boonyabancha (2011).

25. Data collected during field research in May 2011.

26. Interestingly, communities that have loans tend to undergo a more obvious economic change. Default is very low within Baan Mankong communities, and the obligation to re-pay a loan often pushes people into the job market. “Before Baan Mankong, every house was the same: one person working, six or seven unemployed. With the development projects and the need to re-pay CODI, people felt stimulated to get jobs. One helped the other find work. People became more active, and many also learned a trade during the construction works”, told a leader from Bang Pua community. (Field interview, May 2011)

27. “Sufficiency economy is a philosophy that stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the population at all levels”. The philosophy encompasses “moderation” through self-dependence and sufficiency living; “reasonableness” and “self-immunity to accept and face the impacts change brings about”. To achieve this, “wisdom, moral and patience” are pre-requisites. (NESDB, 2011)

28. The minimal standard for housing provided by the state in Brazil is 44m<sup>2</sup>.

29. As in Rio, it is estimated that 20 per cent of Bangkok’s population live in slums (Duang Patreep Foundation, 2011).

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## 5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

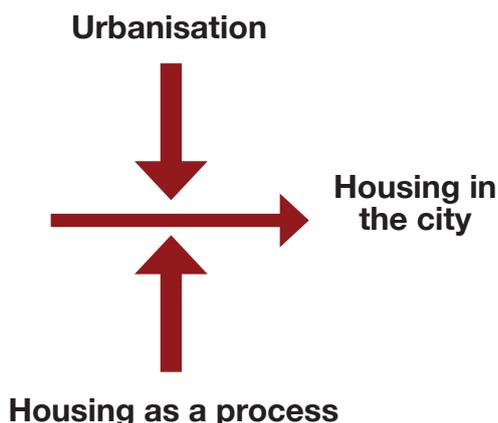
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### 5.1. In search of a middle ground

Rio de Janeiro and Bangkok each have their own merit, and a combination of both expertises – Bangkok’s community-led housing, personal, collective and holistic development with Rio de Janeiro’s attention to city development and integration – would be ideal. These complementary approaches need to work in co-operation: bottom-up, in a human scale, where people are the protagonists of their development; and “from above”, yet participatory, ensuring that the city is understood in its entirety. This cooperation is necessary because a city is an organism that must function as a whole:

*What an insider sees, looking outwards and up from a personal and local situation, is quite different from what an outsider sees, looking down from an expert’s professional altitude. While connections between one small place and its surroundings are clearly seen from above, they are not easily seen from within. Conversely, the vital details are difficult to see or too numerous to cope with when seen from above. When outside experts are responsible for making detailed housing solutions for multi-families developments, they are bound to generalise (...) and limit variations in order to minimise their costs. (...) On the other hand, when people make their own personal and local decisions without due regard for the larger environment, substantial losses may also occur, for them, for their neighbours, or for the city and society as a whole. (Turner, 1988:15)*

**Figure 5.1.** Breaking the vicious cycle. (Source: Dias Simpson, 2011)



As dream scenarios do not exist in the world of urban poverty, knowledge must be shared, as learning is a step closer to reality. In a recent interview, the influential architect Jan Gehl explained in a simple way why knowledge is so important to urban planning: “no one can ask for something they never heard about. If you ask a child what she wants for Christmas, she will only list the things she knows. The same goes for people’s demands in relation to cities. It is vital to have information on how a city can be better for society to demand the right things” (Gehl, 2011). Although true, this point of view has been misused too many times by decision-makers who assume they are the best judges of other people’s demands when justifying top-down interventions.

In the day the president inaugurated Complexo do Alemão’s cable car, a young community leader wrote the following letter:

*I wonder if, from up there [where the president was riding a cable car], the problems that affect our every-day lives are visible. On the ground, we live a reality that deserves more attention than a cable car: attention to a population who feels in their bones the meaning of living in a favela and that, therefore, knows what the real demands are. (...) I felt like screaming “hey, there are people living down here, and we still have problems”. But who would hear me, when all the spotlights are turned to the embellishment of the favela? (Amen, 2011)*

Knowledge needs to be shared so that those who know better than anyone else, as said in the letter, what the “real demands” may have a fair chance to present and discuss their usually creative alternatives. “Architects, planners and policy-makers pretending to be god need to slow down and understand the power of people, the power of change. They [dwellers] know how to do it, they do it every day. It may not look pretty, but it works. They are the experts” (Boonyabanacha, 2011). Rio’s slum dwellers also know that interventions are not working in the way they happen today.

There are alternatives. For instance, Rio de Janeiro has a high number of underused governmental buildings located in the city centre. They were left empty when Brasília became the new capital of the country in the 1960s. Thus, the state needs to make better use of unused public buildings and advance other forms of property owner-

ship such as co-operatives properties. Subsidised rent, a common practice in European cities, is only applied in Brazil in “case of emergency”, normally when relocated families are forced to wait for a new dwelling. Technical assistance and resources for the promotion of self-managed housing or for the purchase of building materials present additional alternatives, but remain marginal. The creation of finance arrangements that are not limited to the construction of new units in the outskirts of the city as we have today, but also destined to consolidate the existing stock located in urban areas, must also be explored. (Nakano and Rolnik, 2011)

## 5.2. The challenge of reaching scale

Reaching scale is a challenge commonly faced by development interventions around the world. With the type of policies currently implemented in Rio, the demand for housing cannot be solved in scale because, as shown in chapter 2, the provision of ready-to-occupy housing is just too expensive and too homogenous to serve all. For CODI, the belief is that the challenge may be met by allowing “people to become the scale of the solution” (Boonyabanacha, 2011). From this perspective, if Baan Mankong continues to enable communities’ development, the process is theoretically unlimited.

In practice though, the limiting factor for solving the urban housing deficit in scale, both in Rio de Janeiro and in Bangkok, is the underlying problem of access to urban land. In the case of Baan Mankong, this becomes visible when CODI is unable to support self-organised communities if the land in question is under dispute<sup>30</sup>— a recurrent situation in Bangkok that may jeopardise scale. In Rio, where so many *favelas* are located in prime real estate locations, the tensions between the existing social conditions and decision-makers’ imagined opposite<sup>31</sup> vision of a city without the poor are pressing. Although most *fave-*

*las* are already quite consolidated in the city’s geography, the threat of eviction that was kept quiet for three decades has now returned under the guise of mega events. If the threat becomes a catalyst opportunity for community mobilisation, as it happens in Bangkok, *favelas* will have a greater chance of resisting (as they did in the past) and of playing a decisive role in their own future.

In comparing and contrasting the cases of Bangkok and Rio, we see that a pure community-led approach does not offer a complete solution either. “Autonomy means inter-dependent self-management, not independent self-sufficiency” (Turner, 1988: 15). Nevertheless, given Rio’s progressive urban policies and comprehension on the importance of infrastructure and integration with the rest of the city – a result of a history of struggle and resistance –, stronger community organisations would have the necessary power to bring in the missing component for the change of current paradigms in order to ensure the transformation of Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas* really occurs.

This means breaking, for once and for all, a paradigm that insists on the delivery of “conventional”, unsustainable housing. Housing is a verb (Turner, 1972). For the urban poor, housing is a long, incremental, personal yet community-building process. In this, lies a conflicting political issue that must be overcome: the “problem” with sustainable housing processes is that it takes time and cannot be squeezed into a four-year mandate. Neither can it be massively delivered by powerful construction companies that gain multi-million contracts after generously sponsoring political campaigns. Furthermore, “processes” do not bring the immediate political benefit that comes with the public handing over of a key to a poor family by a populist politician. Processes do not win immediate votes. Nevertheless, history has shown too many times that the belief that informality can be replaced by formal housing delivered by governments is unattainable, expensive and inefficient, and that housing must be seen as an on-going process in order to be sustainable.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

30. More explicitly than in Rio, informal settlements are considered illegal invasions subject to relocation or bulldozing in Bangkok. As a governmental body relying in public funds, CODI is not always in the position to interfere, neither can it upgrade communities located in land under dispute. Al-

though part of the land occupied by slums belongs to private owners, slums usually occupy land belonging to other sectors of government or to the “Crown Property Bureau” (the royal family).

31. Holston, 1999

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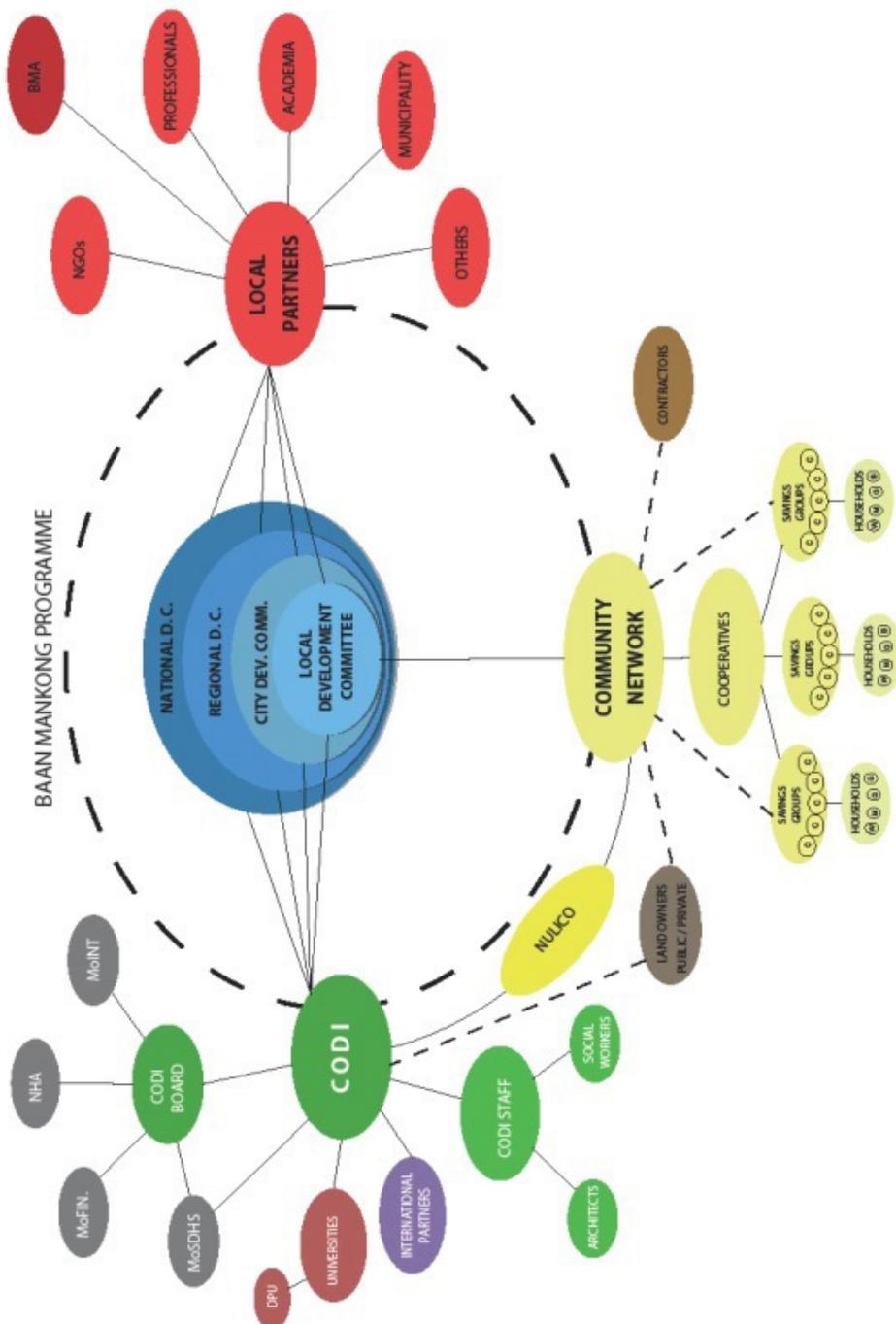
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## Appendix 1

### Baan Mankong actor mapping: Stakeholders involved in the programme

**Figure A1.** Baan Mankong actor mapping (Source: Burzynski, Dias Simpson et al., 2011)











## DPU WORKING PAPER NO. 155

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