

## UNDERSTANDING THE MAP OF IRREGULAR AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE SOUTH OF BRAZIL

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The subject of the illegality and informality of the urban settlements is intrinsically related to the urbanization process in Brazil, so that the country is globally known by the “favelas” of the great cities. However, the phenomenon tends to sprawl for almost all Brazilian cities starting from a certain size and development level. Pelotas (323,000 inhabitants) is a medium city located in the south of Brazil, near to the border with Uruguay. We may consider it as a typical Brazilian and Latin-American city, sharing all the contradictions that characterize these urban areas. This paper aims to discuss the phenomenon of the irregular human settlements in the city, a structural component of its urban development, which we classify as a socially conservative and unequal modernizer.

The paper consists on three parts: first of all, I will introduce the historic evolution of the urban morphology of the city, emphasizing the plans of urban improvement that transformed its central area in a modern space provided with infrastructures. The valorization of the central spaces expelled the low income population to the periphery, where landholders and real estate promoters accomplished the division of plots of land. The solution of the housing problem in the city took place through the self-building of houses, that few times respected the urbanistic regulations in its execution.

Then, I will explain the evolution of the irregular settlements, a structural phenoma in the city, from the first quarter of the 20th century. At first, the irregular establishments were located in less valued lands by the real estate market (low and humid lands) close to the factories and not very far from the central area. Meanwhile, from the 1970s, the phenomenon sprawl to the whole urban area, mainly to the periphery.

Finally I will approach to measures used by the local government to cope with irregular establishments. From the 1980s the city hall recognizes the need to approach the issue like social process, avoiding removals and the repression of the informal establishments. Among the measures to cope with irregularity of the urban settlements in the city, stand out those that seek the regularization and ownership of the land with the institution of “special urbanistic regim areas”, in which the inhabitants have been regularizing their properties. Another important measure is the delivery program of urbanized lots to the low income population. It is an important performance, but was used as a support to politicians of populist character. Thus, many areas in the city were occupied by grassroots movements and poor people with the expect on to get the regularization of the plots. Nowadays, the map of the urban irregularity in Pelotas accounts more than one hundred areas with legal problems (ownership and property of the land, areas of environmental risk and public lands). Here is where a third part of the city inhabitants live. The analysis of this map,

conjugated with other variables, allow us to understand the model of urban development of the city and to suggest measures to cope and moderate this social problem.

### **Introducing the city of Pelotas**

Pelotas is a Brazilian medium size city located at the south-end of Brazil, close of the border with Uruguay. The city was founded in the early 1800s as a “salt beef” production center in the south of Rio Grande do Sul province. Until the end of the 19th century, its growth had been produced according the expansion cycles of the salt beef’s economy that rebounded in the urban space of the city.

In the early 20th century, the industrialization process had increased, starting from technical transformations of the “charqueadas” (salt beef’s factories). The installation of the freezers and new capitals had produced an important and diversified industrial center. As a consequence, it was necessary the accomplishment of improvement plans of and sanitation in the city, seeking a transformation of the city in organized way as well a growth of capital accumulation. The valorization and homogenization of the central space provoked the destruction of precarious dwellings and the expulsion of poor dwellers to the urban periphery, where real estate owners accomplished the first divisions of urbanizable lands.

Between the 1940s and 1980s, the outlying growth was produced starting from a increase of land divisions and of self-building housing improvements. The reception of the absolute ground income was dominant in the production of the land and of the peripheric urban space. The over-work of the low-incomes dwellers had produced the actual city. On the other hand, the growth of the central district and its middle-class neighborhood, had been produced under the rules of the building and real estate capital, which linked with the financing capital allowed the operation of the real estate market in the city. The municipality had taken part in the process implanting the urban infrastructures and guaranteeing the reception of the diferencial urban ground income.

As an example, just for the middle class people they been built more than 15,000 flats from 1967, when the Brazilian housing financing system had been structured. During the 1990s they were build more than 4,000 flats, the migration to the city increased up to 13,000 inhabitants. However, the precarious establishments could not stop growing, and nowadays about 90,000 people informally or illegally. The housing deficit, take into account precarious irregular houses and the needs for new families is calculated in 30,000 units.

There is a very clear difference between a central district and the neighborhoods planned (provided with infrastructures) and an extensive and informal periphery with lacks of basic services. It is the most typical reproduction of the Latin-American and Brazilian urbanization pattern in the city. Now, the social indicators of the city of Pelotas present a deep division among the high and medium incomes (120,000 telephones, 30,000 mobile telephones, 90,000 cars, 800 medicine doctors) and the poor inhabitants (27,000 families or more than 30% of the population with insufficient incomes), according to available data.

## **The housing question in the city**

The informality (or illegality) of both occupation and production of urban spaces used to be a structural characteristic of the city growth in Pelotas, since its early industrialization period (early 20th century). The municipal authorities were usually permissive (until a certain level) with the occupation of areas despised by the land and housing market, since those areas were not located in the central district, or in areas intended for local elite's residences or businesses expansion.

This way, the city had grown starting from a two-hand way: investments and valorization of the central area, that sprawl it with the infrastructures networks (mainly paving and laying sewers); lands market and informality in the periphery, where the industrial working class and the migrating population had set down.

Notwithstanding, the municipality constantly carried out political solutions to treat housing problems of the low income groups. From the first "workers housing" (1914) experiences, holding on with the first "cheap housing" municipal law (1925) and the popular dwelling municipal law (1948). 1956 is an outstanding year for the accomplishment of the first "municipal popular plotting", that modified the focus of the housing policies in the city: from the support to housing construction (even insufficient in relation to the demand) to the land tenure. Later, the workers should be able to solve the problem themselves, through the self-construction of the housing.

Between 1967 to 1979, it was a military dictatorship's hard time. The municipal housing policies had been such as well as all other social issues, subordinated by the federal government's policies. It is the period of construction of blocks of flats and collections of houses in the periphery. This contemplated the demand of a part of the low income population with a certain level of labour stability that allowed them to pay the house's mortgage credits. Even so, some of these projects failed in its attempt to guarantee a formal house even becoming slums.

From 1979, the political transition and the growing popular mobilization through the grassroots movements allowed the Popular Municipal Urbanization Department (DUP) the accomplishment of local programs to access and regularize the urban land tenure and property. Basically the distribution programs of land plots in the periphery of the city. This had been the case of the Navegantes neighborhood (1980). There were 1,587 available urbanized plots to families registered in the city hall. The operation had used credits of the National Program of Financing Urbanized Plots (Profilurb), sponsored by the federal government. The city hall promoted other operations of this type in different quarters of the city.

During the 1980s the policy of Urbanistic Special Regim Áreas (ARUE) took place. It was a program of regularisation of riots areas with regard to the land property and tenure that presented a different division of plots from the allowed by the urban planning of the city. The municipality declared the area "special" and removed the conventional urbanistics restrictions. After that, the regularisation of the division in plots was promoted and,

consequently, the land tenure of the residents. The called “leaseholders or occupants law” also allowed the regularisation of property and tenure of a great number of families that regularized their land portions. Thus they received the basic urban infrastructure, committing to pay a minimum value for the area to be regularized.

Both urban and housing questions stopped being technicians issues just solved at politician offices or architecture studios. These turned to be political political problems whose solution depends on the discussion of an organized civil society. They had diminished the population removals and they integrated into the formality a notable amount of dwellings in the city.

In the 1990s the regularisation policies of the informal establishments had been used by governments of populist character, seeking the consolidation of an electoral basis in the urban periphery of the city. The result of these politics was, in one hand, the distribution of plots over the possibilities of the municipality to provide the same ones with the basic urban infrastructure; and on other hand an intense mobilization of the excluded population with the right to the adequate housing. They advanced the operations of the municipal government and occupied lands destined to the delivery of plots. The worst consequence of the whole process was the increasing lacks of the outlying population, and the exponential sprawling of the precarious, informal or even illegal establishments, in the whole urban area.

Another aspect of the housing question in the city is the pressure of the organized grassroots social movements, both in “residents' associations”, and in housing movements. A great number of land occupations is accomplished seeking to press the municipal authorities in charge of land management to solve the absence of a housing policy of the federal government. Another alternative of the organized population is the constitution of “cooperatives of popular housing” sponsored by unions of more organized professional categories of the workers. Unfortunately the housing cooperatives has few members, yet. Although they already have produced very important results in the construction of dwellings.

### **The map of the informal human settlements in the city**

Nowadays the map of the precarious establishments of the city of Pelotas accounts 109 areas that present some form of informality and/or illegality. Here is where 90,000 inhabitants of the city live. This is one of the biggest problems that the municipal government should face. It is a paradoxical situation that many inhabitants of the Latin-American cities have: the impossibility to accomplish all the urbanistics regulations. These are imposed by planning models that basically reproduce rules of societies where market structures widely dominate the forms of production of the urban space. In this map not many precarious houses appear, because a lot of houses present satisfactory conditions of dwelling. In fact, a first view of the map shows the extension of the areas and the number of residents whose daily life is on the borderline of the legality.

Successive surveys and registers accomplished by the municipal city hall concernidly areas of informal, illegal and precarious settlements, also include areas of environmental risk,

predominantly poor settlements. In such case, a survey accomplished in 1983 detected 17 zones “predominantly poor” in the city, where 24,5% of the population lived. Later the cadaster of the city hall already worked with 44 areas, 14 of the which were of priority performance of regularisation of the land tenure (basically the oldests and consolidated areas).

In 1990, 55 areas of precarious establishment were already accounted. This shows that despite the public policies that try to cope with the informality, structural factors and conjunctural and local causes take away the growth of the number of areas and families installed in the precarious settlements.

Among the structural causes we could indicate the the same model of excluding and unequal development of the Brazilian society and the economical policies with neoliberal character implanted in Brazil since 1990. They enlarge the social inequalities and reduce the State’s expenses in social programs, including housing programs. On the other hand, the regional economy which the city of Pelotas is inserted in is based on the agroindustrial sector which suffers hard impacts with the opening markets for foreign products, such as Mercosur, or from Europe and the United States.

The city reaches in 2000, 109 precarious settlements where a wide portion of inhabitants live. In the map of the precarious settlements they found the following informalities and illegalities forms:

#### *Land tenure inconsistencies*

There are a great number of irregular occupations in the city, mainly occupations of public lands, so much of the municipal government, as of the state and federal governments. These areas were destined to projects of infrastructures, services, or even for projects of popular housing which were never accomplished. Other areas are private estates and they present litigious situations about the land tenure and property. Thus they are reasons of conflicts in the judicial authority. The permanent occupation and the progressives improvements accomplished by the occupants make the resolution of the conflicts more difficult. Disabled factories lands, old rail-tracks, areas to enlarge highways and avenues, dry channeled rivers, are some of the most frequent examples of this type of “illegality.”

#### *Urban planning inconsistencies*

A great number of houses are built in environmental risk areas. The urban place of the city is plain, not having risks of landslides. Though, the occupation in margins of streams and marshy lands, where the market laws not govern is a constant. Some establishments are consolidated in these areas with the substitution of houses built with precarious materials for others more stable. This makes removal more difficult.

Another characteristic of urban planning inconsistency is the occupation of public lands destined to social equipments. The ordinary urban legislation determines that about 30% of the area of any division into plots has transferred for the public authority and destined to collective equipments. This transfer usually happens, but the municipality does not

accomplish the works. As result, several areas are unoccupied and later on they are irregularly sold by the owners or occupied by people that build their houses in these areas.

The division and redivision of plots by family members is another quite common informality. Accomplished without registration or authorization in the responsible public organs, improve the density of certain areas of the urban fabric without the respective increase of the infrastructures capacity. This cause maintenance and operation problems of water, energy and sanitation networks.

#### *Infraestructure inconsistencies*

Occupation of unserviced, undeveloped lands, and lacks of connection to the infraestructure network. These lacks can be evidenced starting from some basic data: according to the last census, the city accounts 92,000 houses. However, the network of water supply operates in 83,000 savings, the network of electric power 88,000 consumers and the network of sewers, only 44,000 houses.

#### *Construction inconsistencies*

This is a very common illegality, product of the informality of the self-building housing wich is widely practiced in Latin-american cities. Like this, a great number of houses present constructions with inappropriate materials as well as precarious techniques of construction. Another form of construction inconsistency are the 1,380 collective dwellings and improvised shelters detected on the last national demographic census.

### **Policies to cope with the illegality and precariousness**

The previously mentioned policies to cope with the informality and illegality of the settlements are still considered like instruments of performance on part of the municipality in housing issues. However, a government more committed with the social issues tries to improve these “traditional” mechanisms of regulation of the urban land property.

The current municipal government, “Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT” (Worker’s Party), a left-wing formation with strong presence in the organized grassroots social movements, had installed the Municipal Housing Forum, in which they announced the community's different sections (social movements, universities, professional associations, unions). They seeking the creation of a discussion space to solve the housing problem in the city. The initiative also tries to construct an action plan that assists the dwellings demands in the city, mainly the requests of tenure land regularisation, considered the largest “social debt” of the public authorities.

The initiative opens the door to a new and innovative policies to cope with the informality, like the policies that they are being implanted by the government of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, also commanded by the Partido dos Trabalhadores. This government has renewed the urban management forms through the worldwidely known “Orçamento Participativo” (Participative Budget) in the city of Porto Alegre. They have also reactivated the state housing policies, one of the most important social policies.

Among their measures they held the State housing conference. The creation of a Housing Secretary acts formulating projects of production of popular dwellings, land tenure regularisation in the state government's areas. Also they are fomentating the self-managed cooperativism and act like a relationship link with the organized grassroots social movements concerning to housing issues. The program of land tenure regularisation also benefits informal or illegal establishments' areas, with the register and identification of lands and resident families. Then the urbanization and the division of plots of the area is operated, setting them up as special areas of social interest and allowing, at last, the regular registration of the lands.

Another important performance is the "re-settlement". This action involves the removal of housing occupants in risk or protected by the law of areas of environmental interest. In this case, the removal guarantees the residents' safety and the resettlement project allows the illegality overcoming a very important number of housing owners. The involvement and the residents' participation is intrinsically linked to the whole process.

The incentive program to the housing cooperatives is an indirect action which cannot be constituted to cope with the informality of the settlements. Meanwhile, the action seeks to aid the low incomes population so that they can build their houses themselves within legal parameters. It prevents the progress of informality, that too many times block the exercise of citizenship. Through a social development fund which accounts with public credits, financing values are reviewed for organized housing cooperatives by low income population that take charge of the management and of the production of houses. Likewise, the resources can be used so much for the construction of houses, for the production of urbanized plots, construction of urban equipments, as well as to the land tenure regularization and acquisition of construction materials. Besides, it is treated as a program that improves the organization of the population because the cooperatives should participate with 50% of the total credits of the project.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper we introduced some measures used to fight against the informality, and illegality, as well as the precariousness of human settlements in the city of Pelotas. It is sure that I cannot accomplish a meticulous analysis of the urbanization process that generated these establishments where a significant part of its inhabitants lives. Such urbanization process combines structural and situational elements, global processes and local factors that both generate and allow the conservation and consolidation of the several types of "marginal urban forms."

The measures of coping with the informality of the settlements used in the city of Pelotas since the earlies 1980s can be considered of a traditional type, taking advantage of experiences accomplished in other urban and social realities. The action of the municipality, so many times pressed by social movements, is a political decision. To act in marginal areas (that a lot of times coincide with the informal ones) also means lighting delicate social issues.

Nowadays, a new model of urban management is being implanted in the city. The new government has already inaugurated the municipal housing forum and the participative budget. This renewal of the urban government opens the doors for the application of alternative policies, to solve the urban problems and a larger commitment with the social movements.

The map of the informal settlements of the city is already drawn. The municipal government is working together the organized civil society to minimize the informality levels in the marginal human settlements. It is not a liberal, authoritarian or hygienist vision. It deals to allow and guarantee the full exercise of the citizenship.