

“Urban Informality, Participation and Imaginative Resistance in Brazil. A case study in the peripheral Nordeste.”

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ABSTRACT

In the last twenty years, urban policies in Brazil, especially those dealing with urban informality issues, have been characterized by a participatory approach. Such approach has implemented the constitutional provisions aimed at ensuring the full development of the social functions of the city and the welfare of its inhabitants (1988 Federal Constitution, Art. 182). The Government has adopted innovative prescriptive tools (City Statute, National Housing Policy, Participatory Master Plans), allocated large amounts of public money to finance urban development (Growth Acceleration Program - PAC), and established public spaces for discussion on urban themes (City Councils, public hearings / open court...) making Brazil an interesting urban planning and management laboratory (Fernandes, 2011; Rolnik, 2011; et al.). This paper discusses the limits of Brazilian urban policies and participatory models by showing alternative strategies put in place by the citizens to claim their rights. The paper describes the case study of the small favela of Porto do Capim, in the city of João Pessoa, where the conflict between inhabitants and institutions has both strengthened the community and made it aware and insurgent (Holston, 2008). The community has reinvented the modalities and spaces where to claim their right to the city. Therefore, they have destabilized the dominant regime of subordination and, at the same time, have highlighted how citizen inclusion, especially in informality, is often reduced to a formal act in which spaces of institutional participation assume the character of an invited space of citizenship (Miraftab, 2009). At the end of 2012, the Comissão Porto do Capim em Ação, consisting of the most active members of the community, understood the need to invent a new and different strategy to defend their territorial and cultural identity. Thanks to the organization of debates and workshops and by opening, advertising and inviting the Institutions to participate, the Comissão was able to shift the arena of discussion from the Institutional spaces to the favela. The Comissão scheduled a calendar of cultural events whose aims are breaking down prejudices towards the favela, gaining consensus, turning the spotlight on the Porto do Capim and fighting the administration eviction project by using alternative means. A network of supporters has grown around the Comissão: local artists, cultural associations and the University. This paper shows that Brazil is actually still far from an inclusive, effective, participatory and equal planning. The need to maintain the pressure and to carry on insurgent practices to claim a more just society is more relevant than ever.

INTRODUCTION

“La democrazia inclusiva è associata ad una valida divisione dei poteri a livello territoriale, insiste sull’affidabilità come processo centrale, e assicura uno spazio politico aperto per gli incontri civici e la mobilitazione. Una democrazia così concepita, che include tutti i potenziali interessi e preoccupazioni, assegnerà un ruolo significativo alla società civile organizzata, includendo i più poveri nella presa di

decisioni pubbliche, a tutti i livelli rilevanti. Perché tutto questo si realizzi, la democrazia inclusiva ha bisogno di uno stato con una capacità molto sviluppata sia di innovare che di regolare; uno stato che favorirà l'affermazione di un nuovo tipo di politica, che si impegnerà nella pianificazione a lungo termine delle risorse e degli investimenti e nella creazione di condizioni più eque in tutto il suo territorio; uno stato preparato a difendere gli interessi e modi di vita locali, e che persegue gli orientamenti normativi dello sviluppo alternativo.” (Friedmann, 1992:96)

The words written by J. Friedmann can be a lens through which we can understand the direction taken by Brazil in the twenty-first century. Since the rise to power of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT,) the government pursued a process of democratization of urban and social policies, whose premises were in the struggles of the Movement for the Urban Reform (*Movimento pela Reforma Urbana*) and whose practical implementation remains partial to this day. As J. Holston (2008) argued that the roots of these problems are many and complex. They can be traced back to as the Brazilian “citizenship” and the perception of citizenship rights, developed in the last two hundred years. Holston explains that between the XIX and XX century the concept of citizenship in Brazil developed, following two parallel and dichotomic trajectories: one of inclusion, through the universalization of the nationality and policies that fostered the interethnic and intercultural mixité; the other of exclusion, based on social differences and making the distribution of rights uneven. The majority of Brazilian citizens were denied political rights, excluded from property rights, segregated and forced by the system to live illegally, without access to fair justice and subject to alienation from the law.

Since the early 80s, with the decline of the military dictatorship, the pressure from below by social movements, non-governmental organizations, religious, professional and academic associations, encouraged the spread of an awareness of the meaning of “citizenship” and the “right to the city” in every level of Brazilian society. A claim for access and recognition to rights of what had been hitherto considered needs, began to mobilize citizens. It activated what J. Holston (2008) defines *Insurgent Democratic Citizenship*. An example of this is the birth of the Movement of Urban Reform, in the middle of the 1980s. Synthesizing, he departed on a struggle for more democracy in the decision-making processes on urban development and regeneration that in the twenty years that followed led to what many authors define as an institutionalization of the right to the city (Fernandes , 2011; Maricato, 2003; Rolnik, 2011; Roy, 2013 et al.).

A first expression of this is the new Democratic Constitution of 1988. For the first time it includes a chapter on urban policy¹. The two articles establish the social function of the city and of property; recognizing consolidated informal settlements and promoting their inclusion in the formal city; establishing the democratization of urban governance (understood as the widening of the application range of direct participation and social control over land use policies) adopting parameters to adjust

¹ *Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988, Título VII, Capítulo II, Arts. 182-183.*

urban and territorial management instruments and administrative sanctions for non-compliance with the provision. Moreover, it obliged all cities with more than twenty thousand inhabitants to develop local master plans (Rolnik, 2011: 241-242).

In 2001, the Federal Government approved the "City Statute", a law that consolidates and expands the constitutional provisions providing guidelines and tools for implementing the same. The Statute reinforces the role of Municipalities (*Prefeituras*) in the planning and management processes of urban development; it highlights the centrality of the social, cultural and environmental collective interests, social inclusion and environmental sustainability; it promotes the regularization of informal consolidated settlements, both in public and private areas, enabling local governments to promote land regularization programs; it encourages citizens and associations participation in planning and urban management by creating devices of interaction between public Institutions and citizenship (hearings and public consultations, representative councils of assessment, evaluation reports of social and environmental impact, urban laws of popular initiative, public litigations and practices of participatory budget) (Fernandes, 2011; Maricato, 2003; Ministerio das Cidades, 2010).

E. Maricato wrote about these legislative innovations, "Não se pode negar que a Constituição Federal de 1988 e o Estatuto da Cidade de 2000 constituem paradigmas inovadores e modernizante no que diz respeito às relações de poder sobre a base imobiliária e fundiária urbana. O nó da questão reside, como já foi destacado, na aplicação dos novos instrumentos urbanísticos trazidos per essa legislação."(Maricato, 2003: 162)².

Since the 90s, Brazil has become "*an interesting laboratory of urban planning and management, with new strategies and processes that have established new relationships between the public, the community, the private and voluntary sectors, where urban land development was concerned*" (Fernandes, 2011: 304). But it must be noted that the difficult implementation of the new policies and economic and political interests, often linked to clientelistic dynamics, did not allow for the construction of real democratically inclusive and participatory basis assumed in the introductory quote by Friedmann and, apparently, pursued by the new way of governing PT.

With the electoral success of the PT and the election of Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva in 2003, Brazil took further steps to strengthen the diffusion and implementation of urban development policies at the institutional level. Since the beginning of its mandate the Government accepted and followed the suggestion, advanced by the movements of the Urban Reform, of creating the Ministério das Cidades

² "*It is undeniable that the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the City Statute are innovative and modernizing paradigms concerning power relations in planning and urban real estate, but it is not enough: the heart of the matter lies in the reception and in the application of the new planning instruments introduced*"

(Ministry of Cities). The Ministry is configured as an “Executive Secretariat” which aims to promote, implement and ensure the application of the laws approved to date.

It also furthered a national mobilization to discuss and arrange a list of targets on land, urban and housing policies, which led to the democratic and participatory election of the National Council of Cities, the integrative unit of the Ministry of Cities with an advisory and monitoring role.

The Government instructed the Ministry to develop policies that systematically address urban and living problems afflicting the Country. In line with the precepts of the Statute it created important and long-lasting instruments for urban planning as the Participatory Master Plans and the National Housing Policy. In 2007 the re-election of Lula coincided with the worsening of the international economic crisis, which resulted in an adjustment of the governmental politic and economic strategy. There was the need of new measures to foster growth and give life to the market, especially in the construction sector. Thus they promulgated the Growth Acceleration Program - PAC and the Program My Home My Life - MCMV. These two programs make substantial amounts of money available for, among other things, the urban development and regeneration and housing production, without subjecting them to the control and management of the Ministry of Cities. The new policies encourage action characterized by rapid, direct and immediately visible results (even if superficial) and set aside participatory practices. They take care of the symptom but not of the disease, furthermore they bypass the dialogue with citizens evading the urban instruments and regulations achieved thanks to the struggles of the grassroots movements.

“The institution of hegemonic power – the media, the state and the international development agencies – however frame the complex, diverse and fluid range of grassroots citizenship practices as binary relation. They celebrate grassroots and their collective actions selectively, applauding those that help the poor cope with inequality, while criminalizing the others. Planning practices that celebrate inclusive planning through citizens’ participation, yet remain uncritical of other complexities of inclusion and resistance in the contemporary neoliberal era are complicit in the binary misconception of civil society and public action.” (Miraftab, 2009:39).

The new spaces of discussion established by the Institution to ensure the debate became “invited spaces of citizenship” (Miraftab, 2009). There the exercise of citizenship from below was still subjected to consolidated hegemonic dynamics, in which the State continued to be the one that set the rules and the course of the debate. Thus grassroots movements start to reorganize themselves, in order to affirm their claims and carry out the struggle in defense of their requests. They create new spaces of citizenship, those which Miraftab (2011) defines “invented spaces of citizenship”, where it is possible to overthrow the established order and the conflict is enlivened by different input.

“Insurgent movements do not constrain themselves to the spaces for citizen participation sanctioned by the authorities (invited spaces); they invent new spaces or re-appropriate old ones where they can invoke

their citizenship rights to further their counter-Hegemonic interests. Fluidity characterizes insurgent citizenship practices: through the entanglement of inclusion and resistance they move across the invited and the invented spaces of citizenship” (Miraftab, 2009:35).

In such a dynamic the local dimension regains relevance, related to the development of new models of approach and negotiation of policies. Carrying out creative strategies in the political conflict through tactics of re-appropriation of spaces and participation from below, they invite the Institution to redefine the places where the debates take place in the same contested areas.

JOÃO PESSOA AND THE FAVELA OF PORTO DO CAPIM

This case study was selected according to its local dimension, finding in it some key characteristics for the purposes of the research. It is actually a small favela, the Porto do Capim³, located near the historic centre of João Pessoa, capital of the state of Paraíba. João Pessoa is a city less exposed to the spotlight and much smaller than cities such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Salvador de Bahia. This allows one to observe how the innovations introduced in urban management and planning have been (or not) transposed and implemented on a small scale, whereas also the order of the informal is proportionately lower. The coincidence of factors such as the economic availability for urban development and renewal funds from the PAC and MCMV and the election of the PT at the city government (2012/2013) gave way to the possibility of managing the situation of informality of Porto do Capim in a participatory and sustainable way.

The community of Porto do Capim, until recently, lived with related passivity the urban and social changes that over fifty years revolve around its settlement. The disposal of the port and its progressive replacement by an informal settlement, partly inhabited by the former workers of the port, went hand in hand with the abandonment of the adjacent old town by the social upper classes and with the expansion of the city towards the Atlantic coast, along the the Avenida Presidente Epitácio Pessoa.

Until the 1990s, the presence of the community has been ignored, along with the lack of interest in the conservation and rehabilitation of the historic centre, in favour of a rapid urban expansion, of the “modernization” of the city and of the estate speculation in the new residential areas. So the inhabitants of Porto do Capim were able to maintain a relatively passive attitude and lack of interest in political and urban issues to which they did not take part except in periods of political campaigns. During this time the community consolidated and occupied the entire area between the two physical margins of the Rio Sanhauá and the railway, sharing the space with the storage deposits of the local lumber industry. These are elements of a strongly dichotomous character. On the one hand, they are sources of danger to the

³ The Porto do Capim Community includes the inhabitants of three adjacent areas: Villa Nassau, Porto do Capim and Frei Vital; for an amount of about 1.000 inhabitants.

safety of the inhabitants (flooding, bank unprotected, unprotected rails, trucks crossing the settlement to reach deposits); On the other hand factors of employment for the inhabitants (fishing, controlling the passage of the train, employment in the lumberyards as laborers) and “protection” of the community from external sights (the railroad serves as a clear break with the urban tissue of the historic center, while from the river side the presence of the flourishing vegetation with mangroves hiding the settlement).

The Spain, signed the Cooperation Agreement Brazil in 1987 and with the purpose of the revitalization of the historic center of João Pessoa, bringing to its attention the old city and to the Porto do Capim highlighting their historical and architectural value. Cooperation had fluctuating results between success and failure⁴ but defining and delimiting the perimeter of the historic city centre for the first time marked the beginning of two decades of projects and initiatives for its analysis and promotion that are the basis of the facts that happen after 2012. Despite this the community has not changed its passive attitude mainly in function of two aspects. First, the lack of information and participation; and second, the forecast that none of the projects would be really implemented due to lack of political interest and utility and scarcity of funds.

The conclusion of the Cooperation in 2007 coincided with the promulgation of the PAC and with the inclusion of João Pessoa among the cities receiving the substantial funding under the Programme (reconfirmed in the second phase program - PAC2 - and in the expanding program “PAC - Cidades Historiccas”).

Thus the revitalization projects for the city center and the Porto do Capim were back on the municipal agenda. They brought back the same old dynamics in which the State, favoured by the citizens’ passivity and lack of adequate information demonstrates authoritarian behaviour. It plays the role of guardian and guarantor of the wellness of the community. It unilaterally establishes when and how to intervene, without involving the community, with no analysis of its structure, values and needs, but at the same time is very careful to maintain disempowerment.

An element that can change the course of planned events is the intervention of an external agent in the community that fosters the organization of the community and promotes initiatives and appropriate action, “[gli attori esterni] Intendono essere una ‘scintilla’ per il cambiamento endogeno ‘dal’interno’ senza farsi carico dell’esecuzione del programma di cambiamento che è una responsabilità delle comunità organizzate..”⁵ (Friedmann, 1992:144).

⁴ For more information see Scocuglia, J. B. C., 2004a, 2004b, 2010.

⁵ “[external actors] intend to be a ‘spark’ to the endogenous change ‘from the inside’ without take charge of the execution of the program of change that is a responsibility of the organized communities”

In the case of Porto do Capim the breath of insurgence came from the entry into the community of the Foundation Cia da Terra, through the educational project for children and youth called “Subindo a ladeira”. The project, with its activities, allowed members of the Foundation to gain the confidence of the part of the community more open and participative with an external intervention. As told by Regina Célia⁶, when the “Subindo a Ladeira” project entered the community, she and the other members of the Foundation did not know of the possible and imminent removal of the same. It was one of the children, asking what would happen to the project once the community was relocated, to put them on alert and to activate them. They decided to make the community aware and encourage them to defend their territorial identity by an unwanted and unnecessary eviction.

Therefore the beginning of an activation of the community of Porto do Capim can be considered 2012, to 2013 when the struggle for the defence of their settlement and their cultural identity linked to the territory actually took shape.

PARTICIPATION, EMPOWERMENT AND IMAGINATIVE RESISTANCE

The awareness-raising campaign by the Foundation Cia da Terra led to the activation of the most receptive and motivated part of the community. In 2013 the Comissão do Porto Capim em Ação was instituted, consisting of a group of women - mothers, aunts, grandmothers of the children who participated in the “Subindo a Ladeira” project. They asked for the recognition of the historical and cultural value of the Porto do Capim community, the preservation of the territorial identity and the defence of their children’s future. The main goal of the Comissão is to obtain the permanence of the settlement: preserving the historical nucleus of homes and relocating those who live in unhealthy and precarious shanties or in floodable areas close to the river bank to urban void spaces next to Porto do Capim.

Struggling to achieve this goal, the Comissão and its members initiated a process of empowerment that transformed themselves and the relationship with public institutions. Adapting the Measurement Empowerment (ME) Framework developed by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) it is possible to schematize some basic and fundamental steps that show the empowerment of the Comissão. In the ME Framework, Alsop and Heinsohn, illustrate how to get a measure of the degrees of empowerment considering ① the existence of a choice ② the use of the choice ③ the achievement of choice. In the Framework the ability to make a choice is affected by two set of aspects: agency, as the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), to envisage an outcome, desire it and want to get; and opportunity structure.

⁶ Regina Célia Gonçalves is one of founders of the cultural foundation Cia da Terra, she teaches in the Historic Dept. of the Universidade Federal da Paraíba - UFPB

“Agency is defined as an actor’s ability to make meaningful choices; that is, the actor is able to envisage options and make a choice. Opportunity structure is defined as the formal and informal contexts within which actors operate. Working together, these factors give rise to different degrees of empowerment.” (Alsop e Heinsohn, 2005:6).

Within the context of the case study, “the choice” is the will to not leave the favela and, consequently, to pursue a fight to counteract the removal intentions of the Local Administration. “Asset endowments” are identified as indicators to assess agency (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005). Five dimensions related between them were examined, of these, three correspond to the three types of power (social power, political power, psychological power) theorized by J. Friedmann (1993) as steps for a household to achieve empowerment.

In consecutive order, considering the influence of one on the development of the other, these asset are: informational, organizational, social (social power), political (political power), psychological (psychological power). The analysis of them has been made in relation to the opportunity structure, the “rules of the game”, of the referred context (Brazil - João Pessoa). In the formal component, like federal regulatory framework, urban policies and planning instruments adopted at the local level, with emphasis on aspects related to the intervention in informal and precarious settlements was taken into account. Particular importance was given to the aspects of protection of the consolidated settlements and of promotion of the participation of civil society in decision-making sanctioned by the Federal Constitution and the Statute of the City. Likewise the informal component: institutions (uses practices, habits, conventions) that influence opportunities, mainly inhibiting them was taken into account. Among these:

- the dimension of disempowerment of the poor embedded in Institutional relations. Referring to the consideration that poverty has traditionally been defined by individuals who consider themselves socially superior to the poor (Friedmann, 1993: 72), this dimension can be divided into two components. One exogenous, induced by the context, by the dominant relations of power which benefit from maintaining the social subalternity. The other endogenous, due to internalization by the poor of the negative image that is projected upon them and that limits the development of their aspirations.
- The pressures of construction lobbies. Arising from economic and speculative interests, they take advantage through the spread of clientelistic practices common in all levels of government.
- The rootedness of the idea of public power as an elitist power, memory and heritage of the *coronelismo*. This idea can be found both in political spheres and among citizens due to the habit to indulge in practices to use power for private interests.

INFORMATIONAL ASSET

When the Foundation Cia da Terra has become aware of the threat of removal pending on the community of Porto do Capim, they began to document and gather information, both by institutional channels and by asking the residents themselves. On one hand they found numerous projects to revitalize the area, the first dating back to the early 1990s, and the existence of funds to finance a new project already allocated and ready to be used. On the other hand, the Foundation echoed in the community a widespread passivity regarding the future. This passivity was, in part, the result of a deficiency of information and knowledge. In fact, the inhabitants did not have full knowledge of their rights, such as the possibility to take part in decision-making processes regarding their future, either through involvement promoted from above either, in the absence of this, demanding a direct hearing with the various entities involved. Moreover, the absence of transparency in Administration' proceedings that, using the tactic of showing the community revitalization and relocation projects after the elaboration (i.e. at the starting of the implementation phase), aims to amplify the perception of the inevitability of the decisions from above in disempowered subjects. This is combined with the widespread belief that no project would be implemented for lack of funds and real interest in the area, as it was for the projects succeeding each other in the last twenty years. In this situation, the Foundation's role was to provide the necessary support to encourage residents to take conscience of the expectations of others for their own future. The community activated itself responding with an initial interest which was then partially diminished, as often happens when dedication, time and energy are required in the pursuit of an uncertain aim. Instead, a group of a dozen women understood that the threat of removal was actually looming. The women, now aware, were able to envision the consequences that would have resulted by the materialisation of this possibility, such as loss of social neighbouring networks, traditions, cultural identity linked to the place. They decide to take up the cause and to organize to face the public institutions.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSET

The access to information necessary to understand their condition, to see the limits and possibilities, led to the development of a "will to re-act" to defend their rights. Through the habit of weekly meetings they formed a fixed (but open) group, who took the name of "Comissão do Porto Capim em Ação" (Commission Porto do Capim in Action). The Comissão has structured itself through daily experience. Firstly by setting up charge and dividing the tasks; then by convening general meetings to update the rest of the community about the problems and the progress in dealing with public institutions, promoting events and markets to finance themselves, presenting themselves as open and involving other residents to embrace the struggle to defend the Porto do Capim.

The Comissão's first formal act was the invitation to the new Mayor, Luciano Cartaxo, to personally visit the favela and then the request a formal meeting with members of the Comissão as representatives of the community. For the first time with these actions the Comissão has made its voice heard, letting the institutions know that the Porto do Capim was alive, arranged and organized and did not need to be revitalized.

SOCIAL ASSET (SOCIAL POWER)

Appropriate information and the ability to organize socially are two of the eight bases of social power indicated by J. Friedmann (1993). About the other 6:

- defensible living spaces;
- leisure;
- knowledge and skills;
- social networks;
- work and subsistence tools;
- financial resources

here it is possible to consider the first as a promoter of the development of the others. In fact the risk of being deprived of living space, in which they identify both as a community and as individual subjects, resulted in a strengthening of the other aspects in order to defend it. It is an increase that leads to finding free time in their daily lives to dedicate to the Comissão and the pursuit of its objectives; increase their knowledge and skills overcoming inhibition and mistrust in their own abilities; build social networks to support the activities of the Comissão, in which they were favoured by the presence of the Foundation Cia da Terra, the University (research and study on the area of Porto do Capim and its inhabitants, thesis, extension courses, workshops, etc.), cultural activist from the associations and movements of the historic city centre. It is an impulse to achieve a specific goal, but it is also a change in the conception of their possibilities. The women come together to form the Comissão because of the changes in their vision of the future: from the already written (by others) and imposed, to the still open and over-writable by the community itself.

POLITICAL ASSET (POLITICAL POWER)

This change in the vision of the future, of their potential and the increase of their social power, have a direct influence on the rise of political power. The ability to organize a structured group, to make their voices heard, to vote and to elect a spokeswoman/president are the first steps towards the exit from the small and protected reality of the community and the beginning of a direct confrontation with public institutions. The growth of political power of the Comissão can be recognized in the actions they carried

out through institutional channels. In fact, the first months of 2013 were marked by a series of meetings with the various institutional actors involved in the projects of revitalization and relocation. Along the formal channels, through requests for an institutional meeting, the Comissão first obtained a meeting with the mayor and then the convening of a public hearing in which the two departments directly involved in the project, Secretaria de Planejamento - SEPLAN and Secretaria de Habitação - SEMHAB, showed the plans for the Porto do Capim and outlined the projected expenditure of funds from PAC and MCMV.

During this meeting the spokeswoman and president of the Comissão, Rossana Holanda, intervened and refuted the words of the councillors, who assert to have involved the community and found with it an agreement for relocation. Politicians, struggling to deal with a partner who was no longer passive but instead conscious and combative, were forced to mediate and to concede to a private meeting between the Comissão, the councillor and technicians of SEMHAB. In the following months the Councillor, Maria do Socorro Gadelha Campos, systematically postponed the meeting, citing various reasons and reducing the number of representatives of the community that could take part to the meeting.

In these meetings the Comissão tested its ability to be on the same level of its interlocutors. The access to information, the favour of the community, the capacitation occurred thanks to its social network which introduced in the weekly meetings different skills from the academic and cultural world (architects, geographers, historians, activists, artists, etc.) and which offered points of view, ways of reading and different approaches, are just some of the factors that allowed the Comissão to feel politically strong enough to make their voice heard. Moreover, the awareness of being in the legislative parameters as a community of high historical and cultural value, in addition to responding to the characteristics necessary for the exceptions granted to the settlements close to rivers, has given a further boost in the raising of the conflict with the institutions. In fact, during the “institutional” meetings the Comissão itself had an opponent that was aware both of the situation and of its rights, no longer passive but strong and firm in countering every non-articipative action of the Municipality. The Comissão had the ability to understand not only what was assumed (the political will to not act in a participatory, sustainable way and with a transparent use of funds) but also the very limits of the instruments of institutional participation. The Comissão, politically empowered, read in institutional channels that which Mirafab F. (2009) defines invited spaces of citizenship. In these spaces the rules of the game are still dictated from above, and the voice of the grassroots movements can still be silenced and reduced to a whisper when inconvenient.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSET (PSYCHOLOGICAL POWER)

Some assets are easier to measure than others; assessing and explaining the development of psychological power is more complex. Therefore there is no intention here to sustain objectivity or evidence. J. Friedman describes it as a "...feeling of individual power. When it occurs it manifests itself with a self-confident behavior. The psychological empowerment is often the result of a successful action in the social or political field, though it may also result from an intersubjective work"(Friedman, 1993: 55). In the case of the Comissão, this growth is also evident in the ability to support and guide the direct confrontation with the institutions; the determination to continue the struggle for the defense of their community despite the ineffectiveness of attempts to build a dialogue through institutional channels; in the ability to reinvent its strategy of struggle in front of the closure of the institutions. The Comissão has maintained its position facing the defeat in the battle to get the cooperation and the creation of a new project. Without abandoning the struggle, the Comissão has shifted the arena of discussion in the favela, rewriting the rules of the game by inventing a new space for participation and forcing the local government to face it.

IMAGINATIVE RESISTANCE

*"L'esercizio responsabile della cittadinanza si apprende quando le persone trovano coraggio, scoprono nuovi orizzonti, e gradualmente divengono coscienti dei loro diritti come membri di libere comunità politiche (Freire, 1973, 1981). Ma finché manca lo spazio politico per gli incontri comunitari, e per la mobilitazione – cioè, non c'è spazio d'azione per il soggetto politico – la cittadinanza resta solo un diritto virtuale."*⁷ (Friedmann, 1992:91)

Since May 2013, the Comissão set up a different strategy to struggle with the community relocation. The limits of institutional spaces of citizenship, with their rules imposed from above, do not allow an equal dialogue, power remains in the hands of the Institution. Citizens participation is controlled and managed by a hierarchical structure. It gives voice to "consonant" participation and silences all forms of insurgency. Notwithstanding this, these invited spaces are the formal channel to talk with institutions. It is therefore necessary to move across these spaces. It needs to set up insurgent practices, which destabilize the hierarchical system and compel the Institution to reorganize to face insurgent citizens' claims.

When the SEMHAB remitted the meeting once again, the Comissão decided to not go to the institutional space to meet the Institution: they invited the Councillor to go to the Favela. During the meeting the SEMHAB architects showed the revitalization project of the area. In this project the relocation of the community was planned in some areas close to Porto do Capim, but subject to overflow, and it was funded using financial resources from Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program. The Comissão was aware of SEMAHB expectation, thus the Comissão spokeswoman told the Councillor that the Community wont

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accept the relocation proposal and she introduced to them some alternative and more sustainable projects. Some students of Architecture showed their studies and projects designed under the guidance of Prof. Elizabetta Romano, who is a friend and a supporter of the Comissão. Afterwards the Comissão showed an institutional document which was strictly confidential at that time. The Comissão came in possession of that important dossier on the renewal of the area, developed by some interns of IPHAN - Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage, thanks to its networks of support. The dossier confirmed the legal possibility for the Community to stay in the existing settlement and it proposed a renewal project for the area socially and environmentally sustainable and in contrast with the project of the Municipality. After this the Councillor, destabilized, closed the dialogue. During the ensuing weeks the Municipality organized some meetings with IPHAN and other Institution to create a tactic to face the *insurgent* Comissão.

The Comissão understood that the struggle would have no chance of success if the community has remained invisible to the public opinion. The Comissão, supported by its social network, became aware of the necessity to create a relation with the formal city. The goal was to open the Favela to the city and break down the prejudice of crime and hazard against Community. They programmed a series of cultural events, workshops, markets, religious and traditional celebrations from June to December. Some of these addressed to the Community: to create cohesion, to inform the inhabitants who did not participate actively about the struggle and to prevent an alienation to the struggle. Others intended to involve the city, as the events #Ocupe Porto do Capim and the Arraiá do Porto do Capim, during the celebrations for São João. The Comissão never forgot to invite the Municipality that has declined every invitation, showing its hostility towards a community no longer obedient.

The space of the favela has been reinvented as a political space of action and discussion. During each event it was scheduled a time of discussion about the future of the Community. The Comissão redefined the rules of the game and put in place an unconventional strategy. This led the Institution to show its limits. The Local Government chose to not implement the planning instruments and laws complying with their spirit of sustainability and participation.

The will to not change the institutional way of thinking, that is to not change institutional and institutionalized practices and behaviours, turns into a lack of learning. It is a missed opportunity for the institutions to empower, in the sense given to the word "power" by J. Friedmann: *"...in a benign sense, not as the power to "oppress others" or "inflict pain" but in the sense of capacity, as in the ability to read and write, whic is empowering"* (Firedmann, 1996:162). On the contrary the Comissão increased its awareness, it empowered, and made the imminent removal *a possibility to be discussed and evaluated*.

In 2014, the Comissão do Porto Capim em Ação legally became an association: Associação de Mulheres da Comunidade Porto do Capim. It is an important step to formalize their position and to carry out the struggle against the expectations of the Local Government.

CONCLUSIONS

*“Per avere successo i movimenti di protesta devono poter contare su una leadership, tempo da dedicare, impegno e, soprattutto, una struttura organizzativa in grado di portare avanti la lotta per tutto il periodo di tempo necessario, che può essere anche di molti anni. Le lotte di rivendicazione portano i cittadini ad un confronto diretto con le autorità statali la cui prima risposta è spesso ostile. Le agenzie direttamente interessate, cercheranno sulle prime di tentare la strada di ignorare la domanda popolare, poi faranno false promesse impegnandosi in azioni simboliche, ma spesso del tutto inutili, tentando di dividere la leadership della comunità e usando la forza fisica per domare il movimento. Ma se i residenti persistono nelle loro richieste, alla fine, spesso, le loro lotte otterranno un successo almeno parziale: continueranno a vivere nelle loro case autoconstruite nei terreni contestati e i servizi pubblici cominceranno ad essere erogati”*⁸(Friedmann, 1992:48).

The case study of Porto do Capim and its Comissão is probably one of many similar but it is significant for its experience. It shows that the struggle to claim and to defend citizens' rights has to be reinvented every day in small communities, where it is more rare to meet enlightened and innovative administrators and where speculative and lobbying interests are so entrenched in the society to not affect deeply the public opinion.

The possibilities of the new democratic and innovative Brazilian law were limited by *fast-populist-policies*, that are rapid solution for punctual problems but don't have a strategic, long-term, approach to urban development issues and social problems. The struggle of Porto do Capim and of all the small informal communities, which claims for their rights and for the recognition of their territorial identity, challenges the attempt to erase rights and to restore a subordinate social system. It shows an example to be followed, by starting again from the small scale.

8

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