

Urban Conflicts in Northern Amazon Region: disordered growth of wetlands/ressacas in Macapá

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Introduction

Internationally recognized for its immense wealth of natural resources, the Brazilian Amazon Region and its enormous forest are characterized by significant urban conflicts. The growth of illegal settlements in Amazon cities is a sad reality that has transformed the region's space. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate part of my doctorate investigation in which I present the squatter-settlement development process (called *favelização*) of wetlands in the city of Macapá where there is intense occupation of environmental protection areas for precarious housing construction. Also by virtue of such phenomenon, the Federal University of Amapá, via its extension project called "Planning with the Community," has been seeking to answer some questions relating to informal urbanization processes and their effects on communities living in *ressaca* areas¹.

One might say that there are several Amazons: one consisting of the forest and Amazon River tributaries; the indigenous Amazon, where there are environmental protection areas; the dense forest; and the urban Amazon Region, the subject matter of this article, which is the result of development promises connected to the formation of new territories; this universe includes the state of Amapá.

After 21 years of military rule (1964-1985), Brazil experienced a democratization process that culminated with the enactment of the 1988 Constitution. The Constitution established new states in Brazil, including Amapá. Most of Amapá's population lives in the Capital City of Macapá. In the wetlands (*ressacas*), the low-income population coming from the interior of the state and from other locations build their *palafitte* type houses (homes supported on woodpiles) invading environment protection areas, and living under subhuman conditions. They come from riparian communities that previously lived along the Amazon River surviving from extractive activities. In the countryside, there is precarious access to basic instruments for survival such as healthcare, education and employment, leading riparian people to move to urban locations. For reasons to be discussed in this text, Macapá became a receiver for this population. When getting to the city, migrants face several difficulties, because of their low schooling level. Many of them are illiterate and, as they are not qualified workers, they find it difficult to enter the formal labor market. Risk areas are strategic locations for the poor community, because they are located close to the best infrastructure of the city, and therefore they represent a cheap housing opportunity.

In the invaded areas, riparian people reproduce the way of life they had in the forest, building *palafitte* homes and wood bridges, however under illegal conditions, because they start to occupy areas belonging to the government or private properties, and their workforce is dedicated to informal economy. The dwellers of those areas suffer a great deal of prejudice therefore leading to social exclusion processes.

In 2002, Amapá became a preservation unit corresponding to an area of 38,821.20 square km, the world's largest protected rain forest. However, Amapá has huge urban problems, belonging to an alarming world statistic: half of the world population lives in urban areas, and one third of such population lives in favelas and popular districts, which represented an increase of 760 million inhabitants in 2000 achieving 863 million in 2012 (UN-Habitat, 2013:83).

Owing to those urban conflicts, an extension project was created in 2009 at the Federal University of Amapá, in which students started to develop projects in the urban planning area, involving community participation as an important element in the development of proposals for new public policies: the "Planning with the Community" project, for example, enables surveying the current situation of the population living in wetlands, in addition to contributing to in-depth assessment of informal economy problems in the city. Macapá, a

¹ A popular name of wet areas in the State of Amapá, synonymous with informal housing region

young Brazilian capital, is the starting point for our research study, as well as the intense irregular occupation process.

On Favelas and social exclusion

The state of Amapá is located in the Northern Brazilian Amazon region, with an immense coast on the Atlantic Ocean. The history of Amapá shows that the geographic location of the state has contributed significantly to the migration processes that emerged starting in the 1950s, coinciding with the occupation of wetlands. Amapá is the only Brazilian state that cannot be reached by highway from other federation states; only by ferryboats departing from Belém or other cities without connection to the regional roadway system. For this reason, the only means of transportation available to arrive there are water and air transports (Drumond and Pereira, 2007:68). Even with difficult connection with other federation units, this has not prevented the population's average growth rate from being above the national average, approximately 3.44% per annum, whereas the country's growth rate was 1.17% (IBGE 2010).

Berta Becker (2004) referred to that region of the globe as "Urbanized Jungle," not only for the emergence of new cities, but also for the appearance of spaces where urban violence and social inequality prevail. Those are contradictory spaces, because, amidst the abundance of natural resources, Amazon cities materially express many years of failed public policies to develop the region, contributing to the emergence and growth of extreme poverty and marginality, whose maximum expression are the favelas.

Three Amazon areas may be considered when analyzing this space: 1) The forest represented by all states of the Northern Brazilian region (Amapá, Acre, Amazonas, Roraima, Tocantins and Pará); 2) The territory that includes all the seven states of the Northern region plus the state of Maranhao and Mato Grosso; 3) The South American Amazonia, also a forest (Becker and Stenner 2008:8). Currently the urban population of Amazonia is approximately 25 million inhabitants (IBGE 2010).

The growth of other cities in the Amazon region, with smaller populations and reduced regional and national GDP, led some scholars to classify them as peripheral capitals. Located in the states of Acre, Amapá, Rondônia, and Roraima, they result from institutional needs and adjustments that occurred in those spaces; about 1.32 million people live in those peripheral capitals: Macapá, Boa Vista, Porto Velho, and Rio Branco. For many years, the Brazilian government encouraged the occupation of spaces in Northern Brazil, considering that there was a demographic gap that should be occupied, regardless of the fact that there were local populations such as indigenous and riparian people, and rubber tree tappers living there (Staeve, 2009:33,38).

When discussing the theme of favelas, some issues are extremely important for our debate, such as poverty and social exclusion, which were investigated by scholars who demonstrated that urban poverty in Latin America was revealed through precariousness, informality and few possibilities of exercising citizenship. The first phase of such studies highlight the main theories about marginality, focusing on low-income population, unemployment, favelas, and different social organizations (Machado da Silva and Ziccardi, 1980, in Valadares and Figueredo, 1981:26). In the second phase that took place in the 1990s, during the period when the neoliberal model started to be adopted, the researchers questioned the effects of those transformations on urban workers, because informal and precarious activities were growing (Ziccardi, 2008:3).

To Teresa Caldeira, Brazilian space segregation went through three stages, each one with its own characteristics. The period from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1940s reveals the emergence of a city where different social groups concentrate in the urban area, and segregation can be identified by housing characteristics. In the second stage, from the 1940s to the 1980s, there is segregation in the urban context marked by the center-periphery relation, where different social groups are separated by distance; middle and high classes are located in central districts with access to infrastructure, and poor sectors live in the periphery. The last stage is related with a current urban standard in which fortified enclaves prevail, those being private spaces resulting from fear of urban violence (Caldeira, 2011:211).

The last category of fortified spaces reinforce social inequalities, because in such situation, favelas are seen as synonymous with marginality and violence by some sectors of society, stereotyping them as illegal and informal, never recognizing that they are a product of irregular urbanization of the territory where public authorities and capital control the space in a fragmented manner. The growing polarization of wealth and power in our cities has

generated fragmented and fortified spaces, which are privatized spaces with constant surveillance (Harvey, 2013:36).

When discussing urban segregation process, Mike Davis (2006) considers it to be a mutable *status quo*. However, the State intervenes with regularity in name of progress, embellishment, social justice for the poor, which justifies the redesign of space limits in favor of landowners, foreign investors, the elite with their own houses and middle-class workers (Davis, 2006:105).

Brazil went through important transformations in housing-oriented policies in recent years, facing major challenges as regards precarious settlements, enabling recognition that social exclusion goes beyond the lack of access to material goods consumption, but is related mainly to precarious access to public services, environmental vulnerability and lack of preparation to exercise citizenship. The implementation of public policies oriented to improving the quality of life of low-income people gained visibility during the government of former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and achieved broad dimensions in the government of former President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva through income transfer programs such as the so-called *Bolsa Família* (Rolnick and Klink, 2012:636).

In spite of such efforts, Brazil has demonstrated significant limitations in improving the quality of life of poor people, because inequalities cannot be resolved through programs having income as the main instrument of change in people's lives; there are multiple dimensions in the issues relating to social exclusion processes that affect those people's daily lives. If we take as reference the studies conducted by Amartya Sen (2008), we will see that there are important criticisms in relation to adopting income as the only element to discuss the poverty issue, because he demonstrates that we can better understand poverty through the idea of deprivation of capacities, understanding better the poverty of human lives and freedom, with a different informational base (including statistics, in that the income perspective tends to be a point of reference for political analysis).

Therefore, to discuss poverty in precarious settlements, we can use concepts that go beyond income analysis, such as the "relative poverty" concept defended by Townsend (1970 in Ziccardi, 2012:2), in which the population's standard of living is established according to the society and the time where those people are inserted, i.e., people should have access not only to income, but also to standards of living of the universe available to them. Therefore, income is an important indicator, but it has to be integrated to other elements such as success and deprivation experienced by communities (Sen, 2008:35).

The relative poverty concept is an instrument that helps us understand urban poverty, which is different from rural poverty, considering that poverty levels tends to be lower in the city. Therefore, to apply social policies in the cities, one has to recognize that material difficulties must be confronted with average standards of life, behaviors, social and cultural habits prevailing in the urban space (Ziccardi, 1995:2-3).

The favela became a matter of informal urbanization analysis, such as in the studies conducted by John Turner and William Manguin (Fiori and Brandão, 2012:3462). Architect John Turner considers the action of occupants an important element in house building in Latin America, within an autonomy process, defending the following hypothesis: "When dwellers control the most important decisions and are free to give their own contributions (in the design, construction or managing their own homes), both in the process and in the produced environment, there is encouragement to produce social and individual wellbeing. When people do not participate in key decisions in the housing construction process, dwelling and housing may become an obstacle to personal fulfilment and a burden to the economy (Turner and Fitcher, 1972:241).

The organization capacity of favela communities has contributed to important urban planning lessons, showing that informality is not a society sector or segment, but rather an integral part of the city. Transformations are fast and not accompanied by the formal city; the city is a space in movement with its own culture and identity; more immediate needs determine the space per se, it is a trading arena (Fiori and Ramirez, 1992:28).

Housing as a vested right

During the 1980s and 1990s, the urban poverty issue was absent in national and international policies, but starting from the second half of the 1990s, the problem became a priority for organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations (UN) and several

Development Banks. The interest in poverty origin and growth resulted from comparison with previous decades, generating an important debate about the impact of structural adjustment policies (Fiori, et al., 2004:3). Therefore, one can state that a concern in understanding poverty as a multidimensional process emerged, influenced by cultural conditions and experienced in a different manner by several people, according to sex/gender, age, ethnicity and capacity, including many forms of consumption that go beyond income considerations and the poverty-line concept (International Forum on Urban Poverty, 1998); an example includes Latin American cities where both those with higher levels of education and large contingents of less qualified workers who precariously enter the labor market live and work (Ziccardi,2014:241).

Housing became a very serious problem in developing countries; high population growth became something unprecedented. Therefore, housing came to be recognized as an essential issue in the fight against poverty, becoming a concern in governmental agendas to establish relations with healthcare, personal security, income generation, productivity and educational level. Such recognition also led to changes in how one sees houses located in informal areas. Hernando de Soto (1989), for example, showed in his papers the importance of buildings constructed by informal settlement residents, where dwellers' intention is not to live in an anarchic or temporary manner; in fact, it is a different system that observes the minimum of essential rights, including the right to property, representing a battle for private property on the part of informal settlement residents (Soto,1989:55).

Authors such as Ananya Roy and José Castillo (in Fiori and Brandão, 2012:3560) discuss informal urbanization not as lack of planning, but as a minimum and nonorthodox manner of planning, where decisions and transformations occur simultaneously; therefore, informal urbanization has greater complexity to work with time, hierarchy, space, and users. Paola Jacques Berenstein (2002), when analyzing the esthetics of favelas, revealed that informal urbanization cannot follow conventional urban planning forms, because the informal city is characterized by an endless process of self-production and self-construction, unlike the planning that is always oriented by an end; therefore, the space is in continuous movement (including housing, district, city and territorial scale), transforming the space according to the needs of players involved.

Informality cannot be the greatest representation of deprivation of Latin American cities; Gilbert (2004) proves it giving three examples:1) Temporary work as a manner of survival because the benefits of unemployment insurance not always are paid in those countries; 2) High inflation rates cause low salaries, encouraging the search for complementary income in informal activities, because they contribute financially to the families; 3) Self-construction became a solution for thousands of families in Latin America, which would be in a worse situation if they could not build their homes informally (Gilbert, 2004:41).

Assuring adequate housing for populations became a universal right when the right to housing was internationally recognized by the international human rights legislation as a fundamental component for adequate standard of living: "All human beings have the right to a standard of living able to assure them, and their families, health and wellbeing, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and indispensable social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, illness, disability, widowhood, old age or other cases of loss of subsistence means". (United Nations, 1948)

Urban planner Raquel Rolnick considers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a post-war first-generation document. There was great concern with civil and political rights; only in the year of 1966 there was the voting of a treaty in that the housing right emerged as an essential concept of adequate standard of living for all human beings (Rolnick, 2011:169): the International Pact on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (PIDESC) is a valuable instrument in the preparation of adequate parameters for access to decent housing as one can see in article 11, item 1:

Paragraph 1. The member-states of this Pact recognize the right of all people to adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, as well as continuous improvement of their life conditions. The member-states will take appropriate measures to assure observance of such right,

recognizing, in that sense, the paramount importance of international cooperation founded on free consent. (1966, International Pact on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights)

The article shows that housing is a human right, including official documents, treaties and conventions under which countries sign agreements; and noncompliance with such rules means violation of previously established universal rights as it happens in Brazil. The result of such discussions are the establishment of universal parameters; the measure of a house, for example, cannot be a universal parameter, because this would be something incoherent. Therefore, as from the 1970s, several conferences were conducted for the purpose of finding solutions to improve human settlements on the planet; this is what happened in Vancouver in 1976, in Agenda 21 (1992), the Declaration of Istanbul on Human Settlements (1996), the Habitat Agenda (1996) and Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development (2000) (Government of Brazil, 2013:33).

Those conferences have been and still are of great importance, because they highlight the world urbanization theme, adding issues of non-governmental sectors to the traditional political, technical and academic themes enabling consecration of important issues such as decentralization and local power (Antonucci et al., 2009:4). Although such events do not provide for sanctions in the States for not complying with commitments taken, they create the possibility of building public opinion in relation to themes of interest to the population such as adequate housing for all and sustainable human settlements.

According to the UN, people who suffer the most with the inadequate housing issue are those living in urban areas of the planet that total over 930 million individuals located in developing countries representing 42% of urban population (Government of Brazil, 2013:24-25). The housing theme must be seen from a perspective that includes access to infrastructure, education, human and economic development opportunities such as work opportunities.

In Brazil, housing is a right provided by the 1988 Constitution, Article 6. Housing became a social right, representing a significant legal advancement, which enabled citizens and social movements to fight to have access to decent housing. In the year of 2005, the SNHIS (National Social Interest Housing System) was created, seeking to assist the most vulnerable populations, creating social inclusion policies in the housing area, because it established housing as a right and vector of social inclusion as one of its objectives, principles and guidelines (Government of Brazil,2005).

Favelization Process in the Amazon Region and Understanding the housing policy in Brazil and difficulties of Amapá

The occupation process in the Amazon region is strongly connected with the exploration of natural resources, even if the “defense of Brazilian borders” was used as an occupation strategy. History can prove facts, and we see the foundation of main Amazon cities, where many people came to the capitals of current Brazilian states located in the region. Simultaneously, informal spaces emerged where unqualified workers started to build precarious housing; one might say that such process, in whose construction governmental entities did not participate, is today a significant challenge for the administration of Amazon cities.

Becker (2004) called it “urbanized forest”, taking into consideration the forms of space appropriation, materialized through the appearance and growth of cities, in addition to new life styles and standards of living of an urbanized world. Authors such as Vicentini (2004) see the Amazon region as a large urban frontier where diversity of cities is an answer to occupation incentive policies, but also as manifestation of the cultural expression of the population and new players of urban space production (Vicentini, 2004:35).

The largest metropolitan areas in the Amazon Region are located in the cities of Belém and Manaus², which, together, total almost 3.5 million inhabitants (IBGE 2010); other states, although smaller, grew significantly in demographic terms, being referred to as

² Capitals of Pará and Amazonas, respectively

peripheral states; new demands emerged as well as institutional arrangements resulting from the urbanization process³.

In the peripheral capitals of the Amazon Region (Macapá, Boa Vista, Porto Velho, and Rio Branco), live approximately 1,638,000 people, the result of transformations that emerged in the 1940s to people the region, which was intensified mainly after the transformation of some federal territories into States (Amapá and Roraima) in the 1990s. The growth and development expectation came accompanied by the emergence of urban problems generating poverty and social exclusion.

The housing policy in Brazil gained importance starting from 2003, the year when President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office in Brazil, the housing sector and investments in infrastructure were prioritized contributing to a great revolution in the sector in the country. In that same year, the main instruments for construction and implementation of the Brazilian housing policy were created: Ministry of Cities (2003)⁴, the National Social Interest Housing System and Fund (2005), National Housing Plan (2008), in addition to the launch of the country's greatest social housing program, *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (2009). Those conquests reflect years of popular struggles through urban movements and the fight for housing.

The Lula Administration had the purpose of increasing the private market to assist the middle class and to concentrate financial resources managed by the federal government in the income brackets situated below 5 minimum salaries where 92% of the housing deficit is concentrated involving most of the Brazilian population (Maricato, 2010).

Historically, the beginning of the twenty-first century marks a true concern and action of the Brazilian government in assisting populations with housing deficit; prior attempts are remembered for authoritarianism and participation of middle classes. In 1964, during the military rule, the BNH (National Housing Bank) was created; the country went through an intense urbanization process. Housing had already been considered a serious problem since the end of the nineteenth century. In the period from 1964 to 1986, the BNH financed 25% of new homes built in the country, a small amount for accelerated urbanization suffered by Brazilian cities (Bonduck, 2007:73).

During the existence of BNH, low architectonic quality houses and urbanistic projects were produced. It was a phase of large housing agglomerates built in the outskirts of cities, consisting of architectonic projects that disregarded the physical environment, regional characteristics, and housing quality; those were standardized projects that disregarded Brazilian geographical differences (Bonduck, 2007:74). The BNH was extinguished in 1986, characterizing a period when the right to housing was not a priority for the government. Unfortunately, the theme of irregular settlements was treated as a "police case", "instead of recognizing that most dwellers were workers and, in many cases, such as in São Paulo, Ford industry (car maker) workers" (Maricato, 2011:13).

Activism in the Brazilian civil society emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, in a time of great expectations and need to create public policies that could fight social and political exclusion. New political players applied innovative strategies that led to influencing government employees in the democratic transition process: civil society leaders allied to politicians, elected candidates to public office that could influence public policies (Wampler, 2006:39).

During President Fernando Henrique Cardoso Administration, from 1995 to 2002, after many years of inactivity, housing financing is resumed with FGTS resources⁵. The housing policy started to recognize principles such as flexibility, decentralization, diversity, in addition to rejecting conventional programs, such as the construction of large housing agglomerates, usually built at the time of BNH; those were periods characterized by urbanization and intervention in precarious areas. However, unfortunately, those actions did

³ Peripheral states are those with lower participation in the regional e national GDP, and with small populations. They are the following: Acre, Amapá, and Roraima (Staeve, 2009:33).

⁴ The Ministry was structured to operate in an articulated manner with the states and municipalities, valuing citizen participation through the action of social movements, non-government organizations and the academy, as well as other society segments.

⁵ FGTS is the acronym for **Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço**. This is a monthly deposit, referring to 8% of employee salary that the employer is required to deposit in an bank account in name of the employee that must be opened in Caixa Econômica Federal <http://www.significados.com.br/fgts/>.

not help reduce the housing deficit in the low-income segments, following a tradition of the Brazilian housing policy in prioritizing middle-income class segments.

The creation of the Ministry of Cities in 2003 revolutionized the housing theme in Brazil, because criteria for the new Brazilian housing policy were established. The new Brazilian housing policy enabled the creation of an institutional process that assured its implementation: the National Housing Office, belonging to the Ministry of Cities, was created to implement and organize the current Brazilian housing policy structure. The SNHIS (National Social Interest Housing System) was instituted through Law 11124, of June 2005. The SNHIS is PNH's (National Housing Policy) main instrument⁶; its institutional design enables observing policy principles, objectives and guidelines, in addition to enabling the filling of an institutional gap and establishing conditions to confront the housing deficit; its actions are articulated on the three government levels with the participation of City and State Councils.

The National Housing System is responsible for coordinating all programs oriented to social interest housing, and gathers public administration councils, bodies and institutions relating to housing program implementation. This is a federal system in which the integration with the states and cities was conducted via an adherence process; then the states and cities should observe the federal structure and implement their systems. Difficulties to comply with Ministry of Cities' requirements were felt by small municipalities that, for lacking structure and qualified technical staff, could not participate in the process. In the state of Amapá, of the 16 cities, only Macapá and Santana organized the system and established the council.

Even with the state conducting the adhesion and organizing the State Housing System, there is significant negligence with the social-interest housing sector; there are few projects that may be presented to the Tenders launched by the Ministry of Cities. Those projects would be a great opportunity to improve population's life conditions. The state misses the opportunity of seeking resources, and the population misses the possibility of living with dignity. It was that scarcity of projects that led to the creation of extension project called "Planning with the Community." Since 2009, the wetlands of Macapá, known as *ressacas*, have received assistance from teachers and students.

Social Program *Bolsa Família* and its results

Investigations in *ressaca* areas raised some questions relating to the growth dynamics of those areas and practice of *clientelist* (patronage) actions. According to Souza (1994), in Brazil, keeping people poor is an instrument of power; the patronage policy is the pillar sustaining the Brazilian state that does not accept a distinction between public and private; personal and oligarchic power as well as the practice of *clientelism* are strong bases for political legitimacy in Brazil (Souza, 1994: 13-20); therefore, in Brazil it is common to see politicians involved with corruption scandals being elected for executive positions or holding public offices.

Political *clientelism* is basically a relation of political favor exchange for economic benefits, regardless of scale; it is a relation between the powerful and the wealthy, and no relation between the wealthy and the poor (Souza, 1994: 29). The *clientelist* system is still very strong in some Brazilian states, such as the state of Amapá, where those actions became bigger and more sophisticated, being practiced by a new generation of opportunistic politicians. In interviews, dwellers of *ressaca* areas revealed that their vote is connected to loyalty in the form of paying favors rather than political beliefs.

The Amazon region is strongly subject to rain that rots the *palafitte* type houses and the bridges connecting them; those are wood bridges that enable dweller mobility; consequently, wood replacement is a constant need. Therefore, in times of election, many bridges are built in the *ressacas*, because they are requested to the municipal and state government by dwellers. Bridge edges are painted with the color of the party in power that built the bridges, resulting in two types of warnings: I) serving as a safety measure to highlight the limits of each bridge and II) reminding dwellers of the party that built the bridges. *Açaí*⁷

⁶ In 2004, the PNH (National Housing Policy) prioritized the low-income population defending an integration with urban policy. The PNH led to mobilizing and structuring resources for the SNHIS (National Social Interest Housing System).

⁷ *Açaí* is a fruit consumed daily by Amazon people. It is rich in antioxidant properties and iron

machines and carts to sell food on the streets are also donated by political candidates. In an interview conducted with dwellers, they said they received up to R\$ 30,000.00 to work as electoral supporters. All those actions interfere with the city's growth dynamics and the occupation of environmentally protected areas.

Doria (2015) sees *clientelism* as the branches of a *patrimonialist* tree planted in the Brazilian territory since the times of colonizers, where the top is *coronelismo* (political machine use), nepotism and the so-called *physiologist* policies. The phenomenon is rooted in Brazilian society behaviors, being an instrument at the service of the change negotiation table, a driving element of power. The same author believes that the *Bolsa Família* Program helped 12 million beneficiary families to overcome poverty, but is also benefitted the PT (Workers' Party) and consequently president Lula. In spite of such help, the program does not lead individuals to be independent from such resources contributing to personal and financial growth, because the program does not qualify people to improve economic conditions (Doria, 2015).

Zucco (2014), a World Bank coordinator, believes the income transfer program (*Bolsa Família*) has been very important as a social policy in Brazil, favoring *clientelism* reduction, but his investigations show a tendency for families that receive *bolsa família* to support the government. In the 2014 elections, there was an electoral impact since the creation of the program, because one out of five votes obtained by Dilma Rousseff was associated to the most famous income transfer program developed by the PT government; the researcher analysis takes into account variables such as city economy, GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and the HDI (human development index) (Zucco, 2015). In that same survey the author makes a correlation between receiving *Bolsa Família* and the tendency to vote for the candidate representing the party in power, considering that there is a government supporting trend. To Souza (1994:33), the relation between society and the State is made difficult in the political representation institution, which induces all people regardless of social class, a relation of exchange of favors with politicians.

The country's most significant income transfer program is still much praised; the World Bank (2005) shows the program's influence in over 20 countries, including the United States; it is also undeniable that the *Bolsa Família* is part of a series of programs whose main purpose is to support low-income families; however, the government has to do much more, enabling public policies to evolve, inserting and qualifying people for the labor market, because income transfer programs cannot replace the social role to be performed by governments. Work is a core component in the society we live in, where personal achievement, creation of self-esteem and formation of community organizations are important to build citizenship; assuring physical subsistence is very important, but insufficient (Ziccardi, 2012:748).

Planning with the community

The absence of public policies oriented to popular urbanization areas in the city of Macapá has contributed to increasing precarious settlements and consequently to worsening urban poverty and social exclusion processes.

Since 2005, the Federal Government has made resources available for the construction of social housing; however, it is necessary that the states and cities be organized and prepare projects in advance for social-interest areas. In view of such scarcity, extension project "Planning with the Community" was created, in which the Architecture and Urbanism School of the Federal University of Amapá, through the disciplines of urbanism and popular housing, go to the *ressaca* communities to develop urbanization projects for those areas, together with the local communities.

The project seeks to answer some questions that are important for student's learning process, but also to create social inclusion processes. Those questions include: 1) Would it be possible for the participative design to produce greater social inclusion?; 2) Can we design better homes for *ressaca* dwellers; 3) Can we build better social housing units?; 4) What is the stage of *critical housing* today?

The first year of activity was 2009 in the *ressaca* area of District Perpétuo Socorro, former Igarapé das Mulheres. The area was very dangerous, but in the community center it was possible for us to contact district leaders and establish an agenda for meetings including visits to bridges and *palafitte* type houses. Owing to the violence existing in those areas, it was necessary for us to request authorization of groups connected with drug distribution in

the location, which forbid the presence of teachers and students after 5 pm and weekends. The result was very positive, because the students not only applied knowledge outside the classroom, but also overcame prejudice and created a dialog with the community that led to the creation of proposals oriented to the local reality. The studies were gathered in a single proposal and donated to the Infrastructure Office of the State do Amapá, but unfortunately the public authorities did not show any interest in giving continuity to the project.

In 2010, the State of Amapá's Department of Justice, jointly with IEPA⁸, pioneers in studying *ressacas* areas, requested support of the University project to investigate those areas; there were months of work that resulted in the publication of a technical report called "Ecological and Economic Zoning of *Ressaca* Areas in Macapá and Santana". The study identified a significant demographic growth in *ressaca* areas, in addition to the lack of implementation of public policies, and families living under subhuman conditions. The survey was an attempt to implement an instrument to map those *ressaca* areas, considering that they had been established as a responsibility of the State of Amapá in the promulgation of the State Constitution, Article 311.

For such report to become a reality, a methodology was established involving the application of socio-environmental questionnaires in all *ressaca* areas of the two largest cities of Amapá: Macapá and Santana. During the months of April, May and June 2010, 30 questionnaires were applied by the students in each *ressaca*. Therefore, it was possible for researchers to obtain important data on the population of informal areas: dwellers' income, population characteristics, housing, infrastructure, sanitation, infrastructure conditions. The study concluded that the current problems in those areas result from the absence of public authority initiative, including non-implementation of the City's Master Plan and its supplementary laws (Department of Justice, 2012:60).

Although those are illegally occupied areas, 91% of respondents consider themselves property owners, being 4% rented properties and 3% assigned properties. A very important item is related to property construction: 46% of respondents hire labor to build their homes, 39% use family taskforce to build their homes. Hiring labor to build houses shows that there is a market of specialized autonomous workers to build *palafitte* type houses, generating informal work in those areas (Department of Justice, 2012: 61).

In 2011, the "Planning with the Community" project was registered and selected for the PROEXT program⁹, obtaining financial resources to give continuity to the research studies, considering that the previous year had enabled us to obtain information on the real conditions of *ressaca* area populations, and the extension project was taken to other cities in the Amazon Region, which had been mentioned in the questionnaires as the origin of the population interviewed in 2010.

The visit to Archipelago of Marajó, belonging to the State of Pará brought the understanding that in the area of the Amazon Region, the cities' infrastructure is more precarious than in Macapá; there are few universities, schools and hospitals, and scarce work for the population. To dwellers of those areas, it is easier to move to Macapá than to Belém¹⁰, owing to the long distances in the region. In Macapá, the same type of housing (*palafitte* type) is built in the *ressacas*; however, in the city, the countryside life style ends by creating conflict with small spaces that dwellers dispute in the city, such as the garbage that is thrown directly in the wetlands bringing drainage problems and flood. The Capital of Amapá became a receiver for the poor population of Pará.

Between 2012 and the end of 2015, the extension project became part of my doctorate investigation at the Autonomous University of Mexico. During the field research that included the application of 187 questionnaires in 4 *ressacas*, the same reality of the 2010 surveys was detected; however, other variants were included such as issues of habitability and community leadership. In the four areas investigated, only one had community mobilization; although very disorganized; such variant indicates that the absence of leaders results in immense difficulties for those populations to have right to living in the city, because it makes difficult for people to exercise citizenship and reduces possibilities of debate with local governments. Community mobilizations in Brazil have served as model for other Latin American countries; however, in Amapá, the behavior is *sui generis*.

⁸ Instituto de Pesquisas Científicas e Tecnológicas do Estado do Amapá.

⁹ University Extension Program, Ministry of Education.

¹⁰ Capital of the State of Pará.

In 2016, the extension project was resumed; disorganization or inexistence of community leaders led to the inclusion of other activities that go beyond the urban planning project; educational lectures came to be conducted including varied themes presented by the students themselves. Those themes are already familiar to the students; the important thing is to share knowledge with the community and raise their interest in exercising citizenship. However, resuming an urban planning project was not easy, because the crime rate in those areas increased; the area of Congós, where we worked recently, has the highest rates of violence against women. On weekends, murders are frequent and, for security reasons, a microbus was rented to transport some community members, project collaborators, to complete the semester's activity at the university facilities.

The project was gradually transformed, because the speed in which the city grows requires adaptations, but its essence remains: integrating students with the community, designing homes based on the existing reality, transforming spaces, creating debates, exercising imagination. The key challenge is to create knowledge exchange processes making social inclusion a true instrument for personal and collective growth.

Conclusions

The Amazon region has an enormous reserve of natural resources, but most people live in poverty in the capitals of the region. Those are fragmented cities, marked by inequality and social segregation. In Amapá, irregularity, informality and public policy failure are materially represented in invasions of wet areas for home building.

Disordered growth of wet areas in the city of Macapá has been the solution for low-income families in need of homes in the city. Those are riparian origin communities that reproduce in the *ressacas* the same type of housing built in rural areas: wood *palafitte* homes.

The lack of public policies oriented to assisting such population has been one of the most significant obstacles to improve those people's quality of life. Recently, the Federal Government built some housing agglomerates in the city, but those projects disregard the regional reality, ignoring the culture of Amazon populations. As a result, the families contemplated with such housing units eventually return to the *ressacas*.

The Federal University of Amapá has generated new opportunities for debates and reflections through "Planning with the community," a university extension project. The communities participating in the project know that this is an academic effort, however, projects are available to the community, and may be a rights claim instrument towards local governments.

The participative design practice has had good results, but other agents must be involved in the process of building new ideas and possibilities. Unfortunately, the communities in the *ressaca* areas are weakly mobilized, their schooling level is very low, and most of them are not acquainted with basic social rights claim tools such as the Statute of the City and Human Rights.

Macapá is a city where *clientelist* practices are present, urban poverty has been important to keep unscrupulous politicians in power. In times of election, tiles, woods and bridges are exchanged for votes in the *ressacas*. The community is forgotten after elections. Amapá has serious scandals connected to corruption, which negatively affect people's self-esteem. Politics eventually get apart from citizen's lives, especially young people who see politicians as thieves.

The *ressaca* areas are also marked by violence destroying the freedom of families living in them; those are groups of young offenders involved with drug traffic. Recently a young female dweller participating in the project was killed by two adolescents while she walked to pick her child at school. It was a very sad and devastating experience, because it makes us question about the lack of commitment and irresponsibility of our political leaders; there is significant passivity in relation to crimes occurring in those areas; violence and Government indifference towards citizens are routine.

Community engagement in the design preparation process is something positive, because it helps building citizenship. However, people need education for the process to be actually called a participative practice; an action involving several sectors of society is

needed, where knowledge about participative practices and citizenship is present. Public and private institutions must go hand-in-hand in search of a better city.

Brazil became a global reference in social mobilization and participative process in public decisions; however, Amapá is not yet part of such reality. The University may plant the seeds, but it needs favorable conditions for us to reap good fruits.

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