

Renewal of central areas and restoration of hotel buildings for low wage houses : Hotel São Paulo (São Paulo, Brasil)

The decline of urban centers and its contradictions

The cities' centers were originally the places where the most valued activities were installed. At some point, they started to experience a «deterioration of urban quality», as well as «the dissolution process of public space decay»¹. This «decadence» or «deterioration» of central areas conveys not only their abandonment by the high-income layers but also their taking-over by the popular layers, manifested in several degrees of intensity in many contemporary metropolis due to a variety of interests.

However, the contradiction is that the new «worldwide cities» or «global cities», prototypes of post-modernism, depend upon adequate image and structure, which may assure them a place of honor within the global competition. This «other dimension of spatiality in contemporary society», according to Harvey², determines that urban spaces should be altered in order to become «more appealing to capital».

¹ MEYER, Regina Meyer Proserpi. "O espaço da vida coletiva". In: AL-MEIDA, Marco Antonio Ramos (ap.). *Os centros das metrópoles : reflexões e propostas para a cidade democrática do século XXI*. São Paulo : Imprensa Oficial do Estado, 2001. p. 29.

² HARVEY, David. *Condição pós-moderna : uma pesquisa sobre as origens da mudança cultural*. 10 ed. São Paulo : Loyola, 2001. p. 266.



A just housing policy

In Brazil, these invasions have been coordinated by formal social movements which claim the «right to the city» of the so-called «homeless». Among the most recent achievements of these movements is the handing over by the government of one of the many invaded buildings - the old Hotel São Paulo, granted to 152 homeless families in 2006 through the Residential Leasing Program (RLP), by which they pay a small amount to rent the house that belongs to a State Bank. At the end of the term of 15 years at most the tenant has the option of buying it through a special credit line.

Hotel São Paulo, famous until 1970, which hosted Nat King Cole, Indira Gandhi and Emperor Hirohito, had been abandoned and deteriorating for years. Although well located in the central area, it lost its main use because of gradual and continuous transfer of urban hotels to other areas. Its conversion to a residential building shows the real possibility of synergy between different contemporary movements of urban space production – urban renewal practices, politics of historical patrimony restoration and real state development. And it's a good example of spatial justice, since it reflects the social responsibility of housing policies for the benefit of the less favored people.

Renewal of central areas and resistance of the low-income

Thus, cities strive to build differentiated spaces and remarkable images also in the central areas that regained respect for «their strategic role in the re-ordination of urban structure, their space of community life and citizenship, and their places of metropolitan and regional connection to the worldwide web of so-called global cities in the twenty-first century». Central areas become the focus of urban interests because of (a) their privileged location compared to other city areas, (b) the quality of infra-structure installed and (c) the availability of buildings with historical and cultural value – which constitutes a patrimony of significant appeal.

One of the consequences of urban renewal movements of central areas is the phenomenon called gentrification and the attempt to expell low income families to less valued areas. However, there is a social fight of these people for their staying in central areas, where it is possible to enjoy all existing infra-structure. This fight has *the invasion* as one of its acts; illegal appropriation of abandoned and empty (public or private) buildings – among them, old hotels.

