São Paulo, center and periphery: The environmental rhetoric and the limitations of urban policy

Maria Lucia Refinetti Martins

THE FIRST results of the 2010 census show a population of 19,672,582 in the Metropolitan Region formed by São Paulo and another 38 municipalities.[1] In 1940, the population of the overall region that makes up this cluster was 1,568,045.[2] The difference between the two figures shows that a new city of over 18 million people was built in 70 years. The highest annual growth rate was recorded in the 1950s. Since then, rates have been falling. However, the 0.97 percent of the last decade[3] represents more than 190,000 new residents annually. A new medium size city each year!

This scenario, which is consolidated in a predominantly precarious and informal settlement, has generated significant urban-environmental tension in the region as well as in the group of large Brazilian cities. National conditions are not, however, different from those of Latin American cities in general, where poverty is growing and the urbanization pattern is becoming increasingly unstable in large parts of the urban territory. In 1990 there were about 111 million informal housing (slums and informal settlements) in Latin America. In 2001 there were 127 million.[4] In Brazil, the number of slums increased 22.[5] percent between 1991 and 2000. While the number of households grew 1.01 percent across the country, households in slums rose 4.18%.[5]

In Brazil, although the situation has improved in recent years and access to consumer goods by the poor has significantly increased, the insufficient supply of adequate housing by either the market or public programs has deprived most Brazilians, especially in large cities, of their of citizenship as a result of both their economic condition and urban and environmental restrictions. Thus, the population is occupying irregular settlements, informal housing and slums, precisely in environmentally fragile areas "protected by law" - therefore out of the formal real estate market - as well as buildings that become obsolete, lose their rental value, end up abandoned and transformed into poor quality, unstable tenements.

In these terms, the urgent need emerges not only to discuss the concept

and specificity of the urban environment, with a focus on the tension between the urban settlement and the environment in all its dimensions, but also to deepen the understanding of the relationship between man (society) and nature, with the aim to find, in the theory, the foundations of the public rules and policies dichotomized between "natural" and "artificial", according to which human activities necessarily destroy nature. This analysis will enable exploring the role that "urban" has been playing in the relationship between man and nature.

It is in this context that the need emerges to both deepen the debate on the configuration of the twenty-first century city and the density and environmental conditions of settlements in large urban clusters, and develop urban design alternatives urban that include environmental and social objectives.

For this purpose there are, indeed, some principles provided for in urban development guidelines and master plans. However, these guidelines do not translate into urban form and design and have not advanced enough towards a better understanding of the link between the economy and urban space production and, consequently, urban form. Set out in the current "planning" and "urban reform" instruments, they focus on urban development objectives, but are far from coming close to any urban image of urban configuration. The city, in its physical form, remains with few utopias and without a physical form to express and materialize these objectives.

The urban environment

The persistent presence and increased irregularity of urban settlements, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas, lead to the clear realization that the urban environmental issue - the occupation of environmentally sensitive and protected areas - is intrinsically linked to the housing issue and to the lack of opportunities and alternatives.

Addressing the environmental topic in large Brazilian cities implies discussing the issue of development model and urban development. It is essential to assume that without strong investment in and priority on social development it will be impossible to achieve minimally reasonable environmental conditions, even if industrial pollution is strictly controlled - which is already happening gradually, specially due to international market demands for quality certification. Anyway, the scale of the problem requires a serious reflection on standards, minimum levels, densification and intensification of land use or horizontal extension, as well as on the distribution of the burden of the options chosen.

By focusing on the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, this paper seeks to address the urban environment issue, in which the environment is not just about dynamics and natural processes, but includes the relationships between these and social dynamics and processes.

So the debate starts with the assessment of the environmental aspect in cities. The city is one of the most significant creations of civilization and represents one of the most striking forms of appropriation and transformation of nature, of which it is even the very nemesis.

Social urban problems, particularly poor housing in risk areas, unhealthy living conditions, floods and overflows in Brazil - and in our case in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (MRSP) are currently being considered environmental issues.
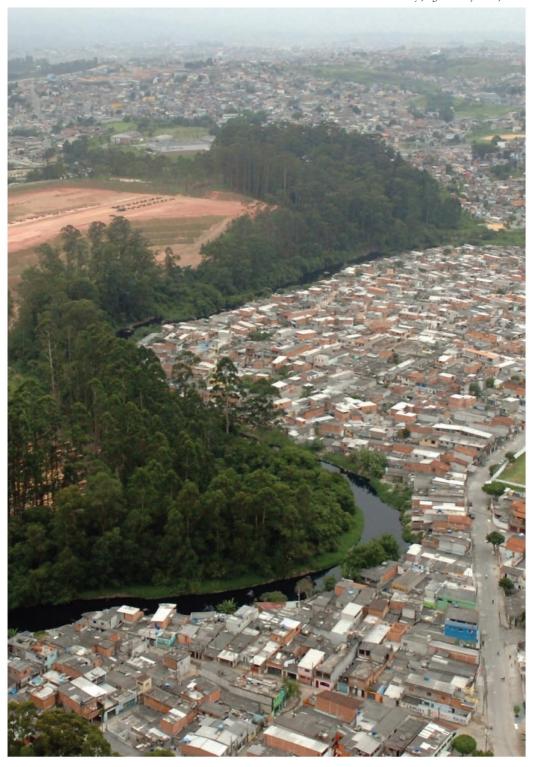
This "feeling" could be interpreted as the expression of a tendency towards the mediation between an extreme preservationist vision and that which advocates unrestricted urbanization. It could express recognition of the overlapping between social, environmental and urban aspects and therefore of the need to adopt new policies, technologies and forms of space production and management that are different from current practices. But the similarities end here. If environmental disasters on the local and global scale are perceived as a consequence of inadequate action in the treatment of nature, the link between this form and the form of production and standards determined by the consumer society is not evidenced.

In view of the current urban-environmental conflicts, what is seen in the MRSP is that if on the one hand urban policies seem to incorporate the environmental issue, on the other the environmental discourse has been frequently used by governments, businesses, institutions and even public opinion to support practices and projects that rather than properly addressing the environmental issue have stirred social conflicts and environmental injustices. This has occurred particularly in watershed protection areas and protected areas in general as well as in risk areas.

Understanding relationships in society and the relations between the city and nature, certainly includes coordinating political ecology with the production of urban space in order to relate social practices to forms of appropriation and the use of urban spaces and nature. It implies bringing the field of social sciences close to that of architecture and urbanism, so that concrete urban space situations can both incorporate and contribute to theoretical and practical formulations.

New paradigms are needed to guide the practice aimed at reconciling space interventions with environmental quality. This construction, in turn, should consider the specificities, contradictions and conflicts of the Brazilian social context, and in this case of the spatial reproduction process of São Paulo's outlying and central areas, where underutilized properties, precarious areas and loss of population prevail.

On the other hand, it should be noted that from the functional standpoint of the city, the spatial order of the industry is no longer valid. Likewise, climate change shows that the physical environment of the "drizzle land " no longer exists, having given place to high temperatures and rainstorms, alongside harsher winters.

Occupations in the lowland alongside the Tietê River in the neighborhood of São Miguel, East Zone of São Paulo.

Center and periphery

The great social inequality in Brazil assigns the difficulty of access to the city and social housing a central place in addressing cities and metropolises. Two situations, albeit with different characteristics, highlight the issue: the metropolitan center and the settlements on the fringes along water supply areas and environmentally protected areas (banks of streams and hilltops). The resulting tension is seen in the periphery as a clash with nature; in the centers, as a clash between society and the market.

In distant, precarious outlying fringes, which are depreciated in the real estate market, the conflicts occur between environmental preservation and the demand for urban settlement for the poor population that has no access to the housing alternatives offered by the market or the state, and therefore resort to the precarious and irregular occupation of areas along watersheds and protected areas, with consequent environmental damage.

In the equipped, valued center, where the supply of jobs is greater, territorial disputes are associated with a built scenario that becomes obsolete for some types of uses and subject to decay due to ageing without maintenance and abandonment. It is in this context that the confrontation between the closed, unused property awaiting appreciation, the possibility of low-cost housing, and renovation projects that force out the local lowest income population occurs.

Promoting the repopulation of central areas with privileged infrastructure and location and that have experienced population loss in recent decades has been a recurrent topic of discussion, as an important alternative to peripheral expansion. In the case of São Paulo, different types of initiatives and incentives have been proposed and partially implemented since the 1990s, without, however, succeeding in promoting the urban repopulation or rehabilitation of the region.

Undoubtedly, the central issue of social housing and rehabilitation of decayed urban areas is related to both land and economic factors. However, in both cases - center and periphery – the urban design and form are able to both promote social and environmental gains and enhance the precariousness and dispossession conditions determined by the socioeconomic structure.

Previous studies by the author or under her guidance have sought to further understand the legal and institutional issue and the conflicts between urban and environmental legislation. Conduct adjustment and regularization alternatives have been discussed and environmentally sustainable urban solutions proposed in the case of occupations already consolidated - poor, inadequate and environmentally irregular housing in outlying and environmentally sensitive areas. In relation to these areas, the investigation of drainage and risk containment issues is currently under way. In the central areas, there is the need to study alternatives of urban spatial clusters for sustainable human settlements that promote densification with environmental quality (of buildings and public spaces).

The purpose is to offer positive inputs to governmental intervention plans that promote the qualification of precarious urban areas, through the implementation of Social Housing with mixed-use functions.

In this regard, the urban environmental issue has two foci: 1. the conflict between urban settlements and nature observed in urban fringes and environmentally sensitive areas; and 2. the social conflict within the urban sprawl and particularly in more central areas.

There is common understanding that the processes that take place in the outlying fringes and in the center, respectively, are coordinated and express the same logic of accumulation and exploitation of man and nature. This condition is expressed in a conflict that faces nature directly and visibly in the periphery, and society in the center. As an urban form, it represents the emptying of the center and the occupation of natural areas in the periphery.

From the empirical point of view, each of the two foci represents a specific research currently under development: "Management of rainwater in urban areas" (with the support of FINEP) and "Building and urban design with density and environmental quality: social housing in the rehabilitation of precarious urban areas "(with the support of CAPES).

Social Housing as a key element

If on the city scale environmental disasters are perceived as a result of the improper treatment of nature, especially in areas of urban sprawl and environmentally fragile areas, due to informal settlements, the expansion of outlying areas and the depopulation of the center need to be considered as related factors. Using abandoned areas and buildings in central areas that are crumbling for lack of maintenance for housing purposes can be an opportunity, which should be considered from this same environmental perspective.

In São Paulo, the various plans and proposals for rehabilitating the downtown area of the city have been very limited if not disastrous. The market always seeks areas of expansion and innovation; traditional areas are being abandoned by the most dynamic economic activities as well as by middle- or high-income housing. When there is no maintenance, the built park falls into physical decay, with part of the buildings vacant and even abandoned. These are areas with great quality locations; those who could occupy them have no interest in doing so, and those who would like to occupy them have no access to them for economic reasons and lack of adequate supply.

The real estate sector shows interest only in processes involving complete redesign; "scorched earth" actions in which the entire built heritage and real estate properties are replaced. The many proposals with very low response involving the center of São Paulo and particularly the New Light project are paradigmatic examples of this condition. Much public resource is invested and the area is not – and will not be - attractive to the market. Everything shows that the rehabilitation of these areas will only be possible through intensive government action. It is

what would be known as Public Investment Planning, as characterized by Brindley et al. (1987), as the only way to rehabilitate depressed areas of no interest to the market. And in this case public investment, if appropriate, should focus on the promotion of a policy of social interest - as is the case of housing.

It is from this perspective that the aforementioned research aims to develop and give visibility to alternatives that promote affordable housing with higher density and environmental quality, seeking the best use of the good location and available infrastructure. In this regard, it seeks to associate the advancement of knowledge in the fields of urban planning and built environment technology. It also seeks to integrate technology use, building design, urban and design management procedures, in order to provide input to the public debate and the formulation of urban policies as well as contribute to meeting housing needs on a larger scale.

The research mentioned above that studies densification with environmental quality, considers as areas of case study perimeters defined as Zone of Special Social Interest 3 (ZEIS 3) in the 2002 Strategic Master Plan for São Paulo. The ZEIS 3, which are confined to the central portion of the city of São Paulo, represent priority areas for the promotion of Social Housing (HIS) or of the Popular Market (HMP). They have significant amounts of underutilized land or buildings, which represent potential for housing production and therefore for densification.[6]

Although noteworthy for its mass of tall buildings, the city of São Paulo displays in the whole, and especially in certain districts of its expanded center, negligible average densities. In turn, the peripheral expansion driven by self-construction or large housing clusters has for long demonstrated its environmental and social inadequacy.

Since the passing of Law 6766/79 prohibiting the promotion and sale of precarious, low-cost land, and the subsequent greater control over settlements in areas that are environmentally fragile and protected by law, the density in slums has increased steeply. Informal vertical growth without technical conditions and with an increasing number of household members is the reality that today accommodates the housing demands of an increasing population. Where and how to accommodate this growth is the big challenge, while entire neighborhoods progressively lose their population and have their properties either degraded by lack of maintenance or abandoned.

Creating economical, spatial and legal alternatives for better using these areas is essential. The Zoning Law (1972) and its specific provision on incentive to the production of isolated tall buildings in the center of the lot, known as "Adiron Formula"[7], have created a depleted space.

This pattern, combined with images produced by the real estate marketing and the escalation of urban violence, has developed a housing pattern that denies the public space, urbanity and the diversity of urban centers.

The ideological transfer of these "values" to all social classes, coupled with the urban and building legislation reinforces this typology and engenders the abandonment of formal alternatives that could lead to better urban and environmental quality. In turn, the prospect of translating concepts, assumptions and underlying principles into designs and urban form which, once materialized and visible would make it easier to assess the impact and the formal and environmental significance of the choices of urban principles, concepts and indices, is an urgent contribution.

The research under way adopts as study areas two ZEIS 3 perimeters in the downtown area of the city of São Paulo. This type of zone was included in the Master Plan of São Paulo as a housing policy instrument, in that it highlights portions of the municipal territory that become priorities for the production and regulation of Social Housing (HIS), seeking to interfere in the land dynamics and resorting to mechanisms aimed at reducing land or real estate prices, making them more interesting for both public and private production.

What is observed, however, is that the urban regulation operates under urban parameters that do not articulate with form and design parameters, whether in terms of ground plane, simple template or the conditions of housing units. The application of these parameters, considering the use of the maximum coefficient of use permitted for the zone, can lead to a net density of 2,500 to 3,000 inhabit./ha, which is very high if applied to a continuous and large area. This highlights the inconsistency of the regulation that becomes visible when parameters are translated into design. Thus, the potential economic feasibility translates into urban unfeasibility.

Promoting the urban and environmental rehabilitation of these regions through Social Housing is essential to articulate criteria for architectural design, type of settlement and technology. The Statute of the City proposes instruments to promote the social function of both the city and the property. The Master Plans, and among them the Strategic Master Plan for São Paulo, seek to apply these instruments by establishing foundations and regulations that, while on the one hand operate concepts and principles, on the other fail to materialize them in terms of both urban design and the resulting spatial product.

Finally, we conclude by reiterating that the environmental and urban rehabilitation of decayed central areas in São Paulo will only be feasible with the promotion of Affordable Housing by the state in these areas. In turn, this type of housing should have high density, so as to take the best possible advantage of the good location, and an urban design that provides a stimulating and diverse environment, with typologies that build on the condition of centrality.

This implies, in turn, adopting a concept of metropolis that trusts the city as a dynamic national center, the expression of a domestic market and installed capacity that ensure it economic consistency and the highest economic specialization and unity. It therefore opposes an assessment that the dream of

a "globalized space", glamorized and identified with a higher tertiary sector (consulting firms, financial institutions and headquarters of large companies), considered as global insertion, whose power, however, is fragile and remote.

The city center and the city as a center - urban design and economic integration

As shown thus far, the repopulation of downtown areas is a relevant aspect in the debate on urban environment. But this implies looking at the historic center of the city together with the condition of centrality of the metropolitan economy in the Brazilian context, alongside the peripheral condition representing the global economic game. This double articulation that represents the practices currently in force is what is expected to be shown and questioned with regard to future and transformation prospects.

Hereinafter we will seek to develop a discussion about the urban projects formulated for the core of the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, the downtown area of the city of São Paulo.

São Paulo grew slowly until the nineteenth century. The establishment of a second center of tertiary sector activities (particularly the financial area) began in the mid-1950s, with the first buildings on Paulista Avenue. This movement, however, was not enough to produce a great impact on the main center, which remained solid in the financial and judicial sectors.

However, the new outbreak of accelerated population growth in the city in the 1970s and the mobility pattern based on the use of the car and on an urban road transport system, with a radio-concentric logic, has reinforced the center as a passageway, congested with cars and pedestrians.

The construction of the subway as a solution to improve metropolitan mobility has maximized the center as an area of transport junction, greatly increasing the flow of people in the region.

The transfer of higher-income housing, trade and services toward the southwest increased, and the center began to concentrate more popular trade and services. That was when projects began to flow toward the center, with a view to its rehabilitation.

Silva (2004) grouped three sets of actions that were implemented during the 1970s in the downtown area. The first was the construction of subway stations, accompanied by works in adjacent public spaces such in the Sé and São Bento. The second group consisted of the implementation of pedestrian streets (large sidewalks) and restoration of buildings and public spaces - Patio do Colégio, Martinelli Building, Santa Ifigênia Viaduct. The third group of interventions was the inventory of buildings of historical, architectural and cultural interest.

From the early 1990s, the last period of the Luiza Erundina government, whose proposal was the " inversion of priorities" and investment in the periph-

ery and poor areas of the city, São Paulo experienced a reaction that began to give rise to an image that combined the concentration of urban transport and streets busy with people and consequently with peddlers, based on the idea of urban "degradation" of the downtown area and the need for "revitalization".

Launched after the Erundina administration, The Procentro program ("Urban and Functional Rehabilitation of the Center of São Paulo", 1993-2000), initially outlined during the municipal government of Paulo Maluf (1993-1996), introduced the idea of international loans (Inter-American Development Bank - IDB) for intervention in the downtown area.

In the field of housing movements, the city experienced an increase in the occupation of abandoned buildings. The housing issue in the center became an explicit demand, and a confrontation of projects clearly emerges, from the functional standpoint and as a symbolic reference, in relation to the city and its center.

It could be said that the Luiza Erundina administration (1989-1992) was guided, both in practice and symbolically, by "inclusion" and the expansion of opportunities for the poor, an attitude that was immediately opposed by the subsequent government of Paulo Maluf, which pointed towards a center to be redesigned.

Starting from 2001 (Marta Suplicy administration), the Living in the Center program began to take shape, based on the opportunity to build a housing policy in the central area. However, as it was embedded in the Center Action program, the Living in the Center program also needed to include the requirements of IDB, such as real estate appreciation and the effective transformation of the economic and social profile. This made the action somewhat ambiguous, as it advocated simultaneously the attraction of activities and middle and high income layers to the center, while maintaining the low-income population already living in the area.

The following administrations resumed the view of an elitist center, in a more symbolic-ideological way in the period (2005-2006) and in a more pragmatic way and with a market focus from 2007.

In the political and symbolic milieu and even in part of the technical milieu, the discourse on the "revitalization", "renewal" and "rehabilitation" prevails, in line with international ideas about the "global city". There is a clear intention behind the urban projects to bring activities of the higher tertiary sector and the middle class to the central area while, according Kara-José (2010), the concentration of uses and activities (housing, jobs, trade and services) aimed at low- and middle-income layers has been present in the central area since the 1950s.

This aspect is well expressed by proposals and actions in the Luz area, a paradigmatic case among the new projects for the center. The proposals appear to have been guided by the attempt to readapt it to the global standard of economic activity.

The project has been skidding for years due to a total assessment error. The "center of all" is rejected, in principle, by an activity that seeks to be different and claims to be "exclusive".

The Nova Luz Project explains this mismatch. The internationalized tertiary sector would only seek that space if it were entirely remodeled. However, if entirely remodeled, it would lose its historical and symbolic dimension as a center.

The urban policy and its limitations

The inclusion of environmental issues in the urban sphere leads to the reflection on the nature of the urban policy and its scope.

Since the 1980s, urban social movements have spearheaded counter-hegemonic and claim actions, as a form of protest aimed to establish new ways of doing things that could be both participatory and self-managed. Forums and networks were articulated in the 1990s, and the task of formalizing the participatory public management structures secured in the 1988 Constitution gained momentum.

The beginning of these movements organized in the late 1970 was followed by a long period of almost thirty years, when whatever was protest, resistance or claim was partially incorporated as public policy, at least in its formulation thereof.

This propositional experience, within the scope of collective consumption, has been to some extent incorporated into national sectoral policies - health, child and adolescent, social assistance and even housing policies, which began to rely on specific public funds of municipal application and management, with elected parity councils.

It originates in participatory experiences of public policy democratization, based on a practice adopted in some municipalities from the 1970s to the 1990s, which combined the existence of organized movements and municipal governments open to the implementation of these proposals.

In Brazil, this condition assumes particular, peculiar and perhaps circumstantial aspects. Despite the military period that lasted for more than twenty years in the Union and the States, the municipalities remained free to choose their mayors and councilors. This allowed municipalities to become forums of opposition, which in fact occurred, especially in the municipalities of metropolitan peripheries, since the core municipalities of the Metropolitan Regions (state capitals) had appointed their mayors until the end of 1982.

The presence of local organizations in the neighborhoods triggered protest movements for water, health and childcare, which gave impetus to public policy drafts forged and formatted in the popular milieu, in terms of both content and the form of participatory management of democracy in everyday life.

It happens that, in the organization of the Brazilian State, the Union is essentially responsible for regulating the production sphere - guidelines for the economy

and major infrastructure, with the states and particularly the municipalities responsible for day to day social life and public policies related to the reproduction of the workforce. It was in this sphere that social urban movements emerged and grew, and public policy proposals were developed. Subsequently, the movements were structured into national organizations, but their focus continued to be the sphere of public policies that respond to the reproduction of the workforce.

Alongside advances in the areas of health, child and adolescent and social assistance, something new has emerged in the management of many Brazilian cities through a set of urban practices and programs aimed to rehabilitate precarious housing areas and produce new spaces of social and political inclusion. There have been unquestionable gains in this field, but the process as a whole did not contain elements that contributed to the sphere of production and the design of a development model. The discussion about the city's production, partially expressed in the Statute of the City, has not led to controversy with regard to production as a whole.

Since its inception, the Urban Reform Movement has raised a central issue, which resulted in the inclusion, in the 1988 Constitution (Article 182), of a guideline for addressing the issue. Real estate appreciation - understood as the appreciation of urban locations - is a product of society: public and private investments; therefore it should return to that same society in a shared way, guided by the public interest. Concepts such as the Social Function of the City and the Urban Property were consolidated; instruments like the progressive urban property tax for underutilized properties were created, as well as the onerous grant of the right to build.

The possibility of applying these instruments required thirteen years of disputes and proceedings, until the approval of the City Statute in 2001. But the deconstruction of key ideas began, however, already in the Statute of the City, with the incorporation of the Urban Operations instrument, which rests on the same foundation of the onerous grant but which, when applying it in the area in which is generated, it increases the value of this area, thus giving to the owner with one hand what was taken with the other.

But, in addition, the appreciation of property in an urban location is not the product of the investment made in the area alone, but also of scarcity, due to non-reproducibility. And when a product is scarce and poorly reproducible (good location with infrastructure, close transportation and employment, appropriate environmental conditions) and there is more money in the market (as with the availability generated by the My House My Life Program), prices increase. This increase eventually restricts access. And no effective instrument has been created to reduce the damage caused by this process.

Including the environmental issue in the urban sphere involves ensuring adequate housing conditions for all. It implies showing that the improper way of treating nature is part of the relationship of these conditions with the pro-

duction model and the pattern that guides consumer society. Consequently, it implies recognizing the limitations of urban policies.

Notes

1 SEADE, Demographic SP, Jan. 2011. Available at: <http://www.seade.gov.br>. Access on: 14 Feb. 2011.

2 Prepared by the author from SEADE – *Memória das Estatísticas Demográficas*. Available at: <http://www.seade.gov.br.> Access on: 14 Feb. 2011.

3 SEADE – *System of Information on the Municipalities of São Paulo*. Available at: <http://www.seade.gov.br.> Access on: 14 fev. 2011.

4 According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – ECLAC. *The millennium development goals: A Latin America and Caribbean Perspective*. Fact Sheet. Santiago: ECLAC, 2004.

5 According to IBGE data, 2000 Census.

6 The research project is a result of integration and production activities developed jointly by Labaut (about Urban Environmental Comfort) and LabHab (about the various forms of Social Housing and access to the city and housing).

7 The provision determined that buildings that reduced the occupancy rate (OR) should enjoy a greater use coefficient, free of charge for the developer, with no consideration for collective interest. The reduction in OR was not a technical option with environmental implications - since garages could occupy the basement by waterproofing the lot area - but rather the result of the establishment of an urban pattern.

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ABSTRACT – The text, referring to the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, puts a focus on the urban environmental issue, in which the environment consists not only of natural processes and dynamics, but also includes the relations between them and the social processes and dynamics. Two extreme situations highlight the matter: i) the outlying settlements on the fringes along the water supply areas and environmentally sensitive areas; ii) the decrease of population at the central and consolidated areas, which have a potential to increase density. From this point, the urban projects made for the central area of São Paulo, the core of the metropolitan area are discussed. It becomes evident then that the inclusion of the environmental dimension in the urban issue, in a sense that is not just rhetoric, brings to light the intrinsic limitations of Urban Policies.

KEYWORDS: Urban environment, Urban design, Socio-environmental conflicts, Urban policy.

Maria Lucia Refinetti Martins is an associate professor at the Project Department, School of Architecture and Urbanism, University of São Paulo (FAU-USP). @ – malurm@usp.br