

Land ownership in the production of urban space: the consolidation of the land market in Fortaleza/CE and the role of unbuilt lot

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Keywords: unbuilt lot, Fortaleza's land market, land ownership

The possibility of capital reproduction through the commercialization of land has spread among the capitalist world cities, making the construction industry a profitable business. The ground rent plus the profits of capital allowed the holder of both the accumulated extraction of surplus value fractions, obtaining significant gains that would be impossible by conventional industrial production. Over the years, the construction industry has been complicating, modernizing, dialoguing with individuals and companies and creating new ways of working, always seeking to increase the wealth of a particular social class. The amount of variables and actors involved in the commercialization of the land surface ends up legitimizing culturally and camouflaging the process base, which remains constant: the *treasuring* of the earth. The changes in society and the local conditions also contribute to dimming, including to researchers and technicians of urban planning. Quoting Lefebvre:

“The practical and ideological pressure of private property (of the earth, if attached to the capital) blind leaders, intellectuals themselves; it obscures the imagination of architects, urban planners. This blindness has a dual origin: the images coming directly or indirectly from the ownership – the coming of the business rationality” (LEFEBVRE, 1999, p.168, our translation).

Regarding the unbuilt lot, blindness is noticeable. The disregard for its role in the land market structure generates distorted interpretations that can result in a significant waste of time, human and financial resources for their coping. The different

designations applied to the same phenomenon may also contribute to its incomplete understanding, as denounces Pereira (2012), separating the quality of the object (the unoccupied lot) from itself (land ownership). For example, commonly the unoccupied lot is seen as a mere wasteland, where the absence of a construction would imply the absence of a function. In technical and academic community it is seen, in many cases, as an urban empty, result of a predatory and an unfair practice of speculative retention from what supposed owner would unduly appropriated collective benefits. Supported by these speeches, many public policies resort to induction, regulation and control instruments of real estate activity (urban and legal instruments of the *Statute of City*) with intention to revert to the collective good an element that was incorporated into capitalism to serve particular interests. The limitation on the scope of the results of some of the instruments, such as *ZEIS (Special Zones of Social Concern) of Empty*, is partly a reflection of the lack of knowledge of the meaning behind the unbuilt lot in planning of urban spaces. Although there are successful cases of *ZEIS of Empty* in some municipalities, this performance will hardly be the rule in the country while staying in the blind field.

In order to enlighten the problem, this study sought to approach the unbuilt lots from its origin, during the 50s, until its treatment by the current urban policies, particularly *ZEIS of Empty*, considering the case of Fortaleza/CE. The main objective is to identify the role of the unbuilt lot in the context of Fortaleza's land market. The option of this Brazilian city is related to its reality of exploitation and socioeconomic inequality, in which the urban space plays a key role in facilitating the visualization of the capitalist dynamic that want to address. The choice of the period has a strategic character because it corresponds to the appearance of that practice in the city, with the retention of unbuilt lots, many of whom still remain in this situation.

Through critical reading of academic texts and consultation of legal documents, will be reflected on how land ownership reproduces the capital (from the perspectives of Marx and Lefebvre), which were the modalities of capital accumulation adopted by the real estate entrepreneurs in the Fortaleza's land market process of expansion (from 1950) and the role of the unoccupied lot in this historical moment of the city.

The text concludes that the role of vacancy is “earning income, decrease risks with

investments, stimulate business and to prevent the fluctuations in property prices” (PEREIRA, 2012, p.14, our translation). So, the unoccupied lot would represent another form of exploration of the monopoly of land, suitable for the investment strategies and capture of income undertaken by its owner at a particular historical moment. Such strategies would vary over time and space as the external conditions present there. Therefore, the unoccupied lot must be seen as an essential part of a more complex process of social relations of capitalism production and overcoming it implies the very questioning of the urban space production logic.

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