

## **Urban operations and their social impacts: physical upgrading, urban well-being, and the social fabric in the case of Agua Espraiada, São Paulo**

Oscar Eduardo Perez Moreno<sup>1</sup>, Lucia Capanema Alvares<sup>2</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>Universidade Federal Fluminense*

*oscareperez@gmail.com*

*<sup>2</sup>Universidade Federal Fluminense*

*luciacapanema@gmail.com*

Urban Operations (UO) are defined in the City Statute (complementary law to the Brazilian Constitution) as instruments coordinated by municipal governments which aim at implementing urban redevelopment projects "[...] with the participation of owners, residents, permanent users and private investors in order to achieve structural urban transformations, social improvements and environmental enhancement in a given area [...]" (BRAZIL, 2001). Despite the apparent interest in improving the urban well-being, some authors consider that the use of UOs in Sao Paulo is strongly associated with the global "financialization" of the economy and the consolidation of the so-called corporate cities, which become easy prey to real estate speculation related to mega-projects. Together, these two contemporary aspects constitute important factors in generating a struggle over resources that oppose – as usual - the urban poor to the construction industry and related investors: residents of slums targeted by these projects fight for a more equitable distribution of urban well-being while capital focuses investments in other thematic/geographical areas.

Considering that urban well-being has a significant role in defining residents' quality of life, and that it is a part of the socio-spatial struggles characteristic of capitalist systems, it is necessary to analyze which aspects define this concept. It can be evaluated according to some objective, tangible and external (to the subject) aspects of quality of life, more precisely, the quality of consumption, patterns of social relationships, general living conditions and the context that nourishes household lives. The Observatorio das Metropoles uses an Urban Well-Being Index that congregates

five dimensions: urban mobility; urban environmental conditions; urban living conditions; urban public services; and urban infrastructure, according to their several indicators (as adopted by this study). Other important aspects refer to the maintenance and development of the social fabric - which can be affected by external factors such as the rupture of kinship and friendship relations and by changes in the spatial organization of housing units -, the presence of adequate organizational structures concerning urban and environmental issues, and of public management installed capacities.

Departing from this study's approach to the unequal distribution of urban well-being in OUs, it seems important to reveal and analyze the contradictions between the supposed social and collective motivations, as stated in the projects, and the private and individual results characterizing both this type of intervention and the instruments it resources to. We seek therefore to understand the role of UO in improving the urban well-being of slum dwellers who have been resettled in the very project areas, eliminating the action of locational variables. We propose to evaluate two working hypothesis: first, that UO implementation with residents removal to the very project area does not result in an improvement of the urban well-being of residents; secondly, that resettled residents' opportunities of acquiring adequate access to urban mobility, collective services, infrastructure, open public spaces, housing, social networks and adequate public management are not improved because investments are targeted at other private priorities, such as different population brackets and other ventures inside the UO project area.

The case studied was the UO Agua Espraiada in the Southern/Western Zone of Sao Paulo, which was approved by Municipal Law No. 13.260/2001 and later modified by Municipal Law No. 15.416/2011, covering an area of approximately 1400 ha.

The methodology included quantitative and qualitative techniques, starting with a brief literature review that led to the research problem and the fieldwork design, divided in two steps: a quantitative survey and an in-depth interview. The research universe is composed by all families resettled due to the UO Agua Espraiada in social housing projects (SHP) within the area covered by the urban operation by May 2015. A total of 515 units are distributed in three housing projects in Special Zones of Social

Interest, which in turn are located in three of the six sectors of the UO. The probability sampling sorted one hundred units out of a list of all 515 transferred families to which we applied structured forms in two working days and two weekend days; interviewees were one family member (18 years-old or older), preferably the household head, of each unit. The statistical package used was SPSS 20. The sample size and the conference with the normal curve made statistical inference possible for some of the studied variables. Finally, we conducted a structured interview with a local leadership in order to contextualize and shed some light over the quantitative results.

As results show and according to residents, the first hypothesis was falsified and the second was partially falsified: there was a significant improvement in most aspects related to urban well-being when comparing the conditions in the slums where they lived before and those in the new SHP. According to them, the urban well-being of the resettled families increased significantly regarding the quality of collective services and urban infrastructure, the urban environment, public spaces and community facilities, social mobility and income, and housing quality. The only variable regarding urban well-being that showed a comparative decrease in quality was the mix of social groups as measured by neighbor relationships and ties. Aspects concerning adequate public management were considered non-existent both in the slum situation and in the resettlements. The major contribution of this study seems to be the evidences pointing to quality of life improvement in the SHP, provided that residents are resettled in the same area. On the other hand, there seems to be a clear need for medium and long term ethnographic studies to better understand the impacts of the social fabric disruption.

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