

URBANS DYNAMICS AND ENVIRONMENT: REFLECTIONS FROM THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

DINÂMICAS URBANAS E MEIO AMBIENTE: REFLEXÕES A PARTIR DA AGENDA 2030 PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL

Dweison Nunes Souza da Silva
dweison@gmail.com

Abstract

Considering the current debate on urban issues, in particular linked to the challenges and prospects of urban growth with the right balance and respect for the environment, this paper seeks to reflect on the environmental imperative allied to the urban dynamics of cities and human settlements, contextualized to what the 2030 Agenda proposes towards sustainable cities. Therefore is discussed in the first chapter the right to the city contextualized to the contemporary economic and social imperatives. The second chapter has considerations about the environmental issue integrated to the urban sphere aligned with the goals contained in the objectives for sustainable development. It is observed that the urban planning adopted by the public and private agents has been guided by an inversion, by which the use value of dwellings becomes submissive to the exchange value in the contemporary capitalism, which therefore uses environmental imperatives as a form of marketing, with merely market objectives. Therefore, it is concluded that the effectiveness of the right to the inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable city required by 2030 Agenda depends on political (re)orientations and engagement - in the sense of resistance - of the excluded social classes who experience the consequences of the environmental impacts resulting from the process of contemporary neoliberal urbanization.

Keywords: Neoliberal urbanism; Right to the city; Sustainable city.

Resumo

Considerando o debate atual sobre as questões de ordem urbana, em especial, vinculadas aos desafios e perspectivas de expansão das cidades com o devido equilíbrio e respeito ao meio ambiente, busca-se nesse ensaio refletir sobre o imperativo ambiental aliado a dinâmica urbana das cidades e dos assentamentos humanos, contextualizados ao que se propõe a agenda 2030 rumo às cidades sustentáveis. Para tanto se discute em dois capítulos, o direito a cidade contextualizado aos imperativos econômicos e sociais contemporâneos. E, no segundo, são tecidas considerações acerca da questão ambiental integrada ao urbano e aliada às metas contidas nos objetivos para o

desenvolvimento sustentável. É observado que o planejamento urbano adotado pelos agentes públicos e privados vem sendo orientado por uma inversão, pela qual o valor de uso das habitações torna-se submisso ao valor de troca no capitalismo contemporâneo, que por conseguinte se utiliza dos imperativos ambientais como uma forma de *marketing*, com objetivos meramente mercadológicos. Logo, conclui-se que a efetividade do direito às cidades inclusivas, seguras, resilientes e sustentáveis requeridas pela Agenda 2030 dependem de (re)orientações políticas e do engajamento – no sentido de resistência – das classes sociais excluídas que experimentam as consequências dos impactos ambientais resultantes do processo de urbanização neoliberal contemporâneo.

Palavras chave: Cidades sustentáveis, Direito a cidade, Urbanismo neoliberal.

Introduction

The urban order issues are subject of great reflection and debate in the contemporary world, especially those related to prospects and challenges of urban growth and its balance or respect for the environment. On global scale, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ requires in its objective 11 (eleven), among others: inclusive, secure, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements; an aspect apparently incorporated to urban planning objectives at local scale, considering the Brazilian national territory.

In fact, this consolidated document that aims to ensure housing access for all citizens in a sustainable way is more like a *desideratum* far from objective reality due to the environmental crisis presents on nowadays development basis. The rapid urban growth under the patronage of development discourses by public and private agents set the pace and therefore the degree of socio-environmental impacts that plagues urbans societies in a historical way, like deforestation, atmospheric pollution, climate change and its consequence greenhouse effect, contamination of water resources and associated diseases.

This is not by accident. Cities are in a general way confronted with a historical need to address, satisfactorily and equitably, the wishes of the world population at all scales. On the other hand, they tend to respond - and thus they are being directed - to the demands of a small portion of the society in

¹ This document originated at a UN member countries meeting in September 2015. It stipulates 17 objectives of Sustainable Development and 169 goals based on a global scale ambition. The signatory nations, including Brazil, are committed to develop actions at local scale for sustainable development (ONUBR, 2017).

order to obtain surplus value, therefore used as an exchange value and not an use value². It is from this statement that major real estate developers acts in the process of capital accumulation. This logic ultimately engender socio-spatial segregation in urban environments (such the coming of gentrification and gated communities).

The environmental question, as noted by current researches about gated communities, has been built and composed by a biased "*discursal*" to the extent that real estate agents use nature as a form of environmental marketing. Large ventures are mostly named upon the green of forests, rivers and seas (when situated on coast). The names are, in fact, strategies of appropriation of natural resources and the public environment remaining by private agents for market purposes, whose specific objective is to reach the society share with economic power and impregnated with exclusionary social welfare ideologies. This is about segregation and degradation, not sustainable socio-environment.

Thus, the objective agreed and signed by political agents towards the sustainable and inclusive cities coexists with the global contradiction of a historic shift. The city (or those who build it), which has significant growth trends until 2030, needs to withdraw from the profit-making role in pursuit of a form of urbanization that prioritizes citizens and the environment as a whole.

From this initial observation, to what extent the right to the city has been contemplated in urban planning? Who in fact the city has favored in objective terms? Is it possible to conceive what the 2030 Agenda and its goals represents to sustainable cities in a local level? Considering these question as a starting point, this paper seeks to reflect on the environmental perspective linked to the urban dynamics of cities, contextualized to what is proposed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Therefore, the paper is divided into two chapters. The first seeks to reflect on the right to the city contextualized to contemporary economic and social imperatives. The second elaborates some

² David Harvey asserts in 17 Contradictions and the End of Capitalism that cities (or houses) were constructed without monetary cost and resorted to the own work or the help of others, hence based on reciprocity and value of use value. However, in the advanced capitalist world, housing is built for speculative and makert purposes for any person who can afford for it, therefore based on exchange value (HARVEY, 2016, p. 29).

considerations about the environmental crisis in its the urban face, mainly linked to the 2030 Agenda goals for sustainable development.

The Right to the City and Life

The right to the city is, beforehand, the right to acquire minimal services and assets from the society, without which the existence would not be worthy. It is the right to participate in a excluded society from the historical urban development guidelines for marketing purposes. This right is too a part of a global conscience embedded in human rights that aims to surpass the liberal and neoliberal logic, where the right to private property and money prevail over the essentials rights of life (BATTAMUS, 2016). From this perspective, the right to the city dialectically assumes the rupture between modern thinking, which fundamentally follows industrialization premises through urbanization processes that only aim surplus capital and / or surplus value, and, the population's insurgency, mainly due to the resulting socio-spatial segregation.

Lefebvre (2001), in criticism to positivist thinking upon the city, affirms that "the right to the City, that is, to urban life, a condition of renewed humanism and democracy" (p. 07) is only or will be possible - in the sense of concreteness - by an engagement between sciences, and above all, if the major society share has the possibility to determinately break the *modus operandi* of contemporary capitalism. David Harvey in his essay "The freedom of the City" clarifies this point of view by noting that "The freedom to do and redo ourselves and our cities in this way is, I sustain, one of the most precious rights of all humans" (HARVEY, 2013, p. 28).

When the city's dynamics are analyzed in a historical way, we see that its genesis is inextricably linked to the presence of a surplus product. This involves control (by few people) of that surplus, and consequently the withdrawal of the product from one place to another (the majority of the population), causing the emergency of Class phenomena. In Harvey's words "This general situation persists under capitalism, of course, but as urbanization depends on the mobilization of surplus, a close connection between the development of capitalism and urbanization emerges" (Harvey, 2012, p. 74), whose characteristic is the urban soil being used as a commodity. This fact which greatly exacerbates social inequalities and, in addition, the weaknesses of the Brazilian State in

its attempts to guarantee every citizen the "right to the city" present in the Federal Constitution of 1988, the Statute of Cities and other global documents.

As a result, urban revolutions are a phenomenon that is repeated in the brief history, especially of that "modern" capitalist society that is in a constant "becoming" and / or continuous process of modernization. In this context, some facts and events are undress when we revisit the history, as the populations struggle to assure a place in the city. Indeed, they are result of failed urbanization projects, since them aim only surplus value and generates, above all things, spatial segregation and social fragmentation. The 1848 and 1968 revolutions in Paris and the 1964 revolution in the United States are examples of revolutions against the imposed urban expansion models by the capitalist development.

Recently, this segregation phenomenon is shown through the aggravation of the capitalist social life mode, since cities become and / or are increasingly, in Lefebvre's opinion:

[...] a work, and this characteristic shows with the irreversible orientation in the money, commerce, exchange and products directions. Strongly, the work is use value and the product exchange value. The main use of the cities, this is, of the streets and squares is the party (which unproductively, with no other advantage, besides pleasure and prestige, large sums of wealth and money) (LEFEBVRE, 2001, p. 12).

This lifestyle turns urban life a commodity or the city itself a commodity, which therefore alienates people at high stakes. This characteristic gives birth to a neoliberal urban policy (worth noting, to the privilege of a few), which aims to meet the needs and dreams of this new lifestyle based upon galleries, malls, etc. This new and redesigned city is in Harvey's view "indelible caustic about the spatial forms of our cities, which consist progressively in fortified fragments, gated communities and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance" (HARVEY, 2012, 81).

The absorption of surplus within the market and commerce configuration of the neoliberal city is a basic aspect of the current urban process of restructuration, which brings power to the elites. Consequently, usually the poorest and marginalized populations experiments deterritorialization and / or dispossessions, catalyzing social conflicts.

The contradictions that dictate conflicts of this "nature" have been and are almost entirely the offspring of the planetary-structuralist world-system. In addition, social movements - be they fighting for territory and / or against a given reality - become salutary and at the same time obligatory, especially those linked to the less fortunate populations, less favored by the way and / or lifestyle of the current society.

In this perspective, Harvey (2013) points out in his essay "Rebels on the street: The Wall Street party meets its nemesis", that "the movement must above all, reach out all the alienated, dissatisfied and unhappy, all who recognize and feel in the guts that something is very wrong..." (p. 62), and "the collective bodies in public space remain the most effective instrument of opposition when access to all other means is blocked" (p. 61). The author's thinking reiterates the importance of resistance social groups whether in the perspective of a struggle against the modus operandi of advanced capitalism - for example, the events of 2011 in Greece and the Occupy Wall Street in United States against the economic crisis, the concentration of power and income in the hands of the so-called 1%; the Chileans who demanded free education, as well as in the case of the city of Recife/PE, Brazil, namely: "Brasília Teimosa", the "Occupy Estelita" Movement and the Coque RExiste Movement.

Therefore, it is understood that for the effectiveness of the goal until 2030, to increase **inclusive and sustainable** urbanization, the capacities for the planning and management of participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlements in all countries (ONUBR, 2017), among others, depend on organized resistance movements to the current praxis of the urbanization process, so they urgently need to become more effective and courageous within the reach of their common targets. Because, as Harvey states (2012, p. 58), "the problem is systemic rather than individual," thus the desire to construct a more egalitarian alternative for all humans involves, through the engagement of social groups of resistance, an opportunity which is inescapable - as an obligation - as none of us would not want to avoid.

Urban Growth and Environmental Integration

The United Nations estimates that world population will rise from a current 7.6 million to 8.6 billion by 2030, out of which 60 percent will be living in urban environments. The announcement was

made at the 2016 United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, Habitat, in Ecuador. It shows a scenario of growth in which by the 1970s the urban population was approximately 38 per cent or 1.6 billion, is expected to be 55 percent in 2016 or four billion with the prospect of more than five billion by 2030. In short, the quoted meeting sought to present and alert about the emergency of city participation (policy and its residents) in the resolution of environmental issues and social inequalities that societies currently faces in the way to sustainable developments (O GLOBO, 2016; EBC, 2017). These data are reflected in a heterogeneous way in cities, as Silva and Oliveira (2010) reveal, urbanization levels are high and

[...] differs according to the country concerned; as an example, Monaco has 100% of city dwellers, reaching 92.7% in Australia, 90.6% in Argentina, 80.8% in the United States and 60% in Algeria. It is not for us here to list the urban percentages in each of the countries of the globe, however, the numbers show that, by migratory route or the simple growth of urban areas, there is a clear global trend of urban population increase. Tendency - and reality - that is not distinct in Brazil, where 86.12% of the inhabitants are city dwellers (SILVA and OLIVEIRA, 2010, p.29).

Regarding these high numbers and the challenges with which human settlements are confronted, a number of international meetings have been held, in particular, since 1976 at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements; later in 1996, with the Habitat Agenda - it is possible to infer its influence, in 2001, for the creation of the Statute of City at national level, Law n. 10,257 of July 10, 2001; resulting on the aforementioned conference in 2016. All these documents and meetings are linked to the formalized environmental Agenda since Stockholm (1972), at the United Nations Conference on Environment, through Rio 92 and the current 2030 Agenda, whose imperatives are to design the so-called Sustainable Cities.

Thus, nationally, the ecologically balanced environment, as well as accessible and sustainable cities, are rights, which are respectively foreseen in the Federal Constitution of 1988, Article 225 and Art. 2, I, of the Statute of City, therefore, presuppose political and collective interventions for its effectiveness. One of the challenges is to overcome the fact that cities are today "an image of discomfort, of illness, as well as an image of concentration of the great evils of our times: violence,

exclusion, poverty, pollution, marginalization, insecurity, stress, abandonment, loneliness "(SILVA and OLIVEIRA, 2010, p. 32).

For clarification, it is stated in objective 11 mentioned in the introduction of this article the intended goal of:

Until 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements by adopting and implementing policies and integrated plans for inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, disaster resilience; and developing and implementing, according to the 2015-2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, holistic disaster risk management at all levels (ONUBR, 2017)

As we read, the above goal with political pretensions and plans integrated with mitigation purposes, adaptation and resilience to environmental impacts, is shaped almost like a utopia, since the projected urban growth is linked to social and environmental problems arising from this process, according to data delivered by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE):

The occurrence of environmental impacts in the country increases as its population increases and presents different nature when analyzed from the clipping range of population size of the municipality. Among the municipalities with up to 50,000 inhabitants, the prevalence of occurrences is of burnings, deforestation and silting. Among municipalities with more than 50 000 to 500 000 inhabitants the prevalence is of water body siltation, water pollution and deforestation. Among municipalities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, the most frequent occurrences are water resources pollution, water body silting, and air pollution.

This is not a simple question. At local scales (municipalities), sustainable urban planning depends on the implementation of a master plan, based on what is foreseen in the Statute of City and the federal constitution; and, (re)directed to the available documents for sustainable development, currently the 2030 Agenda. And, in addition, that in practice they are implemented by the rulers and internalized - in the sense of claim and praxis - by their dwellers. However, what is perceived in the current Brazilian context is the fact that

[...] it is not a question of simple facts, but of events that take place every day, given the conjunctural absence of real policies and public actions to support each of the urban functions already mentioned. The lack of decent housing leads to the occupation of public, private and risk areas; The lack of decent housing leads to the occupation of public, private and risk areas; the lack of work leads to informality and even marginality; the absence of leisure options does not encourage or guarantee citizenship; Finally, poor public transport systems, coupled with the infrastructural privileges accorded to private vehicles, often lead to the total chaos of a city. The usual examples of the city of São Paulo, present in more and more Brazilian cities, do not need additional comments (SILVA & OLIVEIRA, 2010, p. 37).

A factor of essential understanding is the fact that real estate corporations act in a hegemonic way in the process of making housing available in the national territory, and consecutively in the municipalities, in many cases, under the State's support regarding urban planning policies. In other words, whether the roles are reversed, instead of the private initiative being subsidiary to the public, occurs the the reverse. For example, public infrastructure policies (housing, mobility, water or sewage networks, rain gutters, squares, parks, signposting, industrial sites, bridges, viaducts, new avenues, etc.) routinely form part of "created" needs, That is, instead of responding to the interests of the public, with a view to socio-environmental sustainability, seek to respond to the demands of contractors to carry out a particular work or real estate corporations in speculative terms.

The above statement is corroborated by Brites (2017). When analyzing urban dynamics about South American cities, the author reveals that regardless of the adopted scale, strategies of urban intervention and revitalization are embodied by the minimal state at the service of contemporary capitalism, which the author calls neoliberal Urbanism and / or market-centric tactics. The textual fragment below clarifies the thought:

The city presents a view in which the investment in public works and intervention programs do not reach all, they are focused, selective and excluding (urban acupuncture), they beautify and revalue areas making the private investment (properties) located there more profitable. In other words, urban neoliberalism depends not only on land speculation, injection of capital and market strategies, but also from state intervention and policies to generate economic conditions for private investors to invest in urban degraded areas (BRITES, 2017, p.576).

Thus, present and future sustainable cities that address the goals of 2030 Agenda should: (a) By 2030, increase inclusive and sustainable urbanization, and the capacities for planned, participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlements in all the countries; (b) Support the least developed countries, including through technical and financial assistance, for sustainable and resilient construction using local materials; it seems to be still in the theoretical and discursal field, since the exchange value attributed to urban dynamics in contemporary capitalism does not include in their planning words such as: sustainable, social inclusion, assistance, etc., unless they can be incorporated into their movement of accumulation of capital or profitability.

An example of "incorporation" dynamics of environmental issues can be seen around the environmental marketing made by real estate corporations used to promote gated communities as an essential housing solution to the contemporary urban context³. This fact seals and adjusts these housing complexes to the market's logic needs and real estate capital; converting them in a highly profitable exchange value. Brites (2017) notes precisely a contradiction related to inclusion (so sought by the 2030 Agenda), as these gated communities do not carry on their promised collective space and favorable community life, but rather "a private appropriation of spaces that once served as the meeting place of social diversity "(p. 74), thus encouraging processes of segregation and socio-spatial inequality.

In the Northeast region of Brazil, some examples confirm the assertion above. The research of Souza e Silva (2012) on the Ecoville Condominium, in the city of Mossoró - RN - Brazil, shows that the name given to the project is contradictory in its praxis. For the construction of its 224 housing units in an area of 560.55 m² were removed riparian woodlands without compensatory mitigation; there was no sewage treatment and no water reuse; no garbage recycling or use of alternative energy sources (renewable) etc. Another example is in the Brazilian municipality of Serra - ES. Bricalli (2010) reveals that of the seventeen (17) analyzed projects, only one of them makes no mention of

³ Souza and Silva (2012) define the gated community as a modality of dwelling generally constituted by groupings of housing units protected by fences, walls, private security system; with infrastructure of leisure and entertainment of collective uses. In addition, they advert that these housing projects ordinarily occupy large portions of land, consume significant volumes of water, electricity and produce disturbing amounts of waste. This housing modality requires environmental planning that can minimize the outcome impacts (pp. 68-69).

nature in its marketing, which means that sixteen properties (94% of the total) used in some way the idea of nature in their advertisement. However, they have a praxis similar to the previous example.

In the state of Pernambuco, the Paiva Reserve is an example of a public-private partnership, by which the State acts as facilitating agent of the financial accumulation of space by real estate agents. The location of the housing complexes near the coastal areas, gives rise to the privatization of access to public spaces (beaches) and the use of environmental marketing (appropriation of "natural" environmental), end up adding speculative economic value. As Barbosa and Gomes (2016: 344) point out, "these elements of a natural order come to integrate real estate through the aesthetics announced in advertising". And, the examples of impacts and appropriations of the natural as a form of advertisement of these dwellings multiply in the Southeast region of Brazil, with the denominated Alphaville⁴, in particular, in the cities of São Paulo and Espírito Santo (ZANOTELLI and FERREIRA, 2012).

Therefore, in a general way the gated community (its owners) that uses a discourse of apparently commitment to sustainable facts, often does not present the minimum required to its applicability. In the end, what is seen is the incorporation of the environment, by which the sustainable thinking is converted - under what the market calls real estate companies - into an appropriation of nature, which would be expected to be preserved. It has notably contributed to what is perceived and lived daily in urban environments by most populations, considering what permeates the agreements signed since the 1970s and the current 2030 Agenda towards sustainable cities.

Conclusion

The contemporary challenges to the effectiveness of sustainable cities are presented as a viable alternative to the social and environmental problems currently experienced by the urban population. However, there is a need to reflect on several points in the documents that address the goals for an

⁴ The company created in the 70's, based in São Paulo and branches throughout Brazil, has its activities focused on the construction of closed condominiums. Absent projects of social and environmental studies (EIA / RIMA), with priority in public-private relations of functional character, are observed that feed the political dependency of the favor practices between the representatives of the State, farmers and real estate entrepreneurs.

urban planning that grants the status of sustainable city - existing since 1976 in government agendas, currently 2030 Agenda. Among these points, it is believed to be central de debate around how the urban maintainers think, create and recreates spaces, when they require inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable settlements. It seems to be coherent today, as we read throughout this paper, to discuss urban planning whereby th use value of housing is submissive to the contemporary capitalism's exchange value.

In relation to the initial questioning of who actually has the right to the city, it is written in the various national and international documents, that this is a right belonging to the collectivity with equal bias. However, urban dynamics are market driven, and consequently aim at profit and ultimately encourage exclusion and environmental degradation. Therefore, it is noted that for the effectiveness of collective and egalitarian view, it is necessary to engage - in the sense of resistance - the excluded social classes that experience the consequences of the environmental impacts.

The question of whether is possible to conceive sustainable cities as in the goals of the 2030 Agenda on a local scale is complex. The public policies whose functions should be oriented to the public sphere, in which urban planning would be integrated to the environment as a sustainable praxis; in nowadays advanced capitalism, is increasingly consolidated as a utopia of sustainability, since under the support of the State, strategies that dictate how homes are sold, especially how gated communities end up appropriating nature - by environmental marketing of real estate corporations - rather than conserving and / or preserving it.

In addition, the contradictions presented in this paper are not new. They seek to reiterate and make explicit - at the same time suggests future researches - that the writings and discourses present in 2030 Agenda, although salutary, need to (re)consider the economic factor for which neoliberal urban planning has been based: the exchange value aimed to surplus value which claim does not include - as they would want us to believe - the environment as indispensable for sustainability purposes.

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