



Imaterial production of space and urban desires accomplishment

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the public space immaterial production triggered by the performance of the urban social movement “A Batata Precisa de Você” in its various forms of appropriation and emancipatory political actions. The city, discussed here as its spatial characteristics and the transformation social power of these symbiosis, provides to population self-managed urban manifestations a resistance instrumental dimension, and beyond, instigate hypotheses about the future of spaces and urban life. It was observed that spontaneous action conditions of urban social movements allows collectives collaborative actions that, although ephemeral, are able to reinvent new senses to space and arouse new perceptions of the city. Aware that small daily actions or punctual appropriations do not promote immediate urban transformations, it's considered that promote collective of social imaginaries creation; or long-term transformation processes. Finally, the emergent demand for cities construction process revision, involving and creating expanded participation spaces, where training processes are created for collective practices production, public participation, and access to decisions that effectively produce the urban space.

Keywords: Public Space. Urban Public Policies. Associative Practices.

In the last century, cities that developed in a capitalist way used architecture and urbanism as important instruments of structuring the land matrix in a dynamic speculative production (GOTTDIENER, 1996). Favored by the cities spectacularization pressure, these processes stimulate a continuous search for new spatial bases reconstruction through preexisting structures substitution, renovation or rupture. The public resources low availability coupled with the private sector convenient interest in construction culminated in another urban planning instruments, which test new mechanisms of flexibility in urban legislation. Formulated for specific sectors of the city recovery and reactivation, allow a better and free market performance (DEÁK, SHIFFER, 2007; SILVA, 2014). These instruments have proved to be one of the most profitable strategies in the last decades for the real estate sector, because investments made are much higher than the amounts repaid (FIX, 2007; FERREIRA, 2003). In the same

way, these instruments contribute to reinforce the urban development logic that restricts the opportunities of access to the city in selective socio-territorial plots.

The emancipatory social power of everyday life

However, to the same extent that the current public-private partnerships are moving forward to acquiring or reacquiring regions of potential real estate exploitation, they face urban social movements as new forms of reaction and urban resistance. They are inserted in space dispute as popular resistance organizations, representative of their needs and of access to their rights, constituting a civil society emancipatory experience. Once a tradition of non-representativeness has been instituted in Brazilian institutional politics, collective social reactions of a political nature enable alternative ways of organizing and expressing their demands (MARICATO, 2011).

Therefore, it is understood that the social articulation is above all a constitution of citizenship symbolic question: the movements propose transform the means in ends, by the daily experience re-creation in resisting driven by the new adversities continuous emergence. The civil society organizations institutionalization process, for example, has significantly advanced the achievement of the official recognition of their demands, now decentralized in public mediation channels (like councils created in the state structure itself).

From the 1990s, some changes were observed in urban social movements articulation by the new technologies advances. Increased automation of production processes and informal economy, unemployment and outsourcing proceedings weakened labor unions – greater reference of industrial proletariat organization since 20th century beginning (SANTOS, 2008). If this condition set the social movement as a new instance of struggle, more prone to particular interests than to universal causes, on the other hand it enabled the movement to reach a wider range of mobilization and action through new technological tools.

(...) new technologies, especially Internet and community radios, are a facilitating element in the narratives and ideas under construction by the subjects diffusion, networks nodes, but generally are not the only or main mobilizing element in a network of social movement generation (...) it allows a traditional media's view break

that sees in the movement a denial of society legal order. For them, a social movement strength remains their ability to organize and mobilize (SCHERER-WARREN, 2005, p. 513-514).

Scherer-Warren (2005) states that the new way of acting as a subject is through social and democratic empowerment, of different people and causes that aim at combating exclusion in its multiple faces. For example, although substantial differences between housing movements (occupying private areas or buildings with the purpose of contesting ownership) and occupation movements of public spaces (which usually challenge their use) exist, both performances tends to essential guidelines: discriminations introjected in the society by the dominant powers deconstruction; cultural roots redeem; new forms of associative practices creation, building new ethical logics and emancipatory social processes; the experiences exchange between collectives in networks; and grassroots mobilizations participation, thus empowering itself towards a social movements broad network.

The internet, especially social networks, shows cities beyond the simple stage of inequalities and automated life. The virtual connection makes the information approach the places and create new formats of sociability, identity and values (SANTOS, 2008; HARVEY 2014). The networks enable an unprecedented phenomenon in social movements articulation and mobilization, called

by Scherer-Warren (2005) as transposition of different types of borders: i) territorial, evidently, by the connection between the most diverse scales of resistance, regional, national and transnational ; ii) temporal, fighting for the indivisibility of human rights in an unprecedented way of historical generations and their respective platforms; iii) social in its broad sense, through the understanding and respect for multiplicity of identities, pluralism of worldviews and radicalization of democracy through an population expanded emancipation.

Network and streets interpenetrate as an expression of the public space and create a collaborative policy, fed in real time. The sociability increase generates approximation and identification of subjects between themselves and in relation to the environment they are inserted. The instant reproduction dynamics evidence even further this process and strengthen political militancy and claims actions. Crossing the physical place flexibility as a mobilization support contributes significantly to streets reconquest, giving public spaces one of its main functions, the political performance (SANTOS, 2008). It can be said that urban social movements of spatial transformation represents that the management of collective ideal life is not limited to emerging issues fulfillment, but also concerns the appropriation of space and urban life rights.

Sansão (2013), for example, defends the spontaneity of activities as a typology of architecture, because it gives shape to urban spaces (p.132).

Its contribution is awaken reflections about open destiny of urban design importance, which builds conducive morphologies to the unforeseen, where people are responsible for space vocations. Aware that everyday small actions or punctual appropriations certainly do not promote immediate urban transformations, it's considered that promote a contemporary reality detachment; that foster the collective social imaginaries creation; or that trigger long-term transformation processes (CERTEAU, 1998). They are desires and utopias like these, for example, that structure the activism of "A Batata Precisa de Você" (The Batata needs you) collective.

The Batata Square Region

If Batata Square historically developed as the rural commerce centrality throughout the nineteenth century, at the end of twentieth century was the vertiginous increase that favored a retail trade activities, services and street vendors, installed mainly at Square's border. In 1995, the region entered in an uninterrupted public and private actions cycle, to real estate valuation and expulsion the working class of low salaries presente at the moment, initiated by Operation Faria Lima, that lasts until the present day. Villaça (2012) affirms that the valorization or devaluation process of each part of urban territory happens by a power exercised or consented by the State, in benefit of private interests. It represents a strongly process characterized by its privatization and commodifi-



Figure 1. Batata Square newly inaugurated in 2013. Source: catracalivre.com.br/, 2013.

1. Urban reconversion for the PMSP is understood as “a certain set of interventions and actions in urban space that, referenced in the fundamental characteristics of this space, aim to make them compatible, associating the technical requirements of equipment (or modernization) of the territory with the imperatives of improving the environmental condition and valuing social practices” (PMSP, 2001, p.1).

2. Project available at: <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/projetos/02.017/2143?page=2>. Access: may 30 2018.

cation of public assets tendency towards through the crises manipulation and State redistribution.

What is called growth control and regulation of free market speculation now, in fact constitutes the administration of growth after market decisions (GOTTIDIENER, 1996). Thus, profitability of urban land pressure stimulates the restructuring of a new spatial bases production process, through a frantic mobilization of space in self-destruction, renovation or replacement of preexisting structures (HARVEY, 1992). In 2001, the National Urban Reconversion Competition of Batata Square¹ was organized by the Municipal Planning, Budget and Management Secretariat (SEMPA), the Municipal Urbanization Company of São Paulo (EMURB) and Pinheiros Local Administration, under the organization of Brazil's Institute of Architects (IAB-SP). The winning Project by Tito Lívio Frascino architect and team², was finished in 2002 and inaugurated unfinished in 2013. Among the reasons for the delay are: the municipal management exchange (2004); the issuance of the bid for the executive project development and the execution and follow-up of the work delay process (2007); the conditioning of the works to the line 4, yellow of the subway schedule (responsibility of different public instances, which greatly hindered the slightest synchrony); the severe collapse at the construction site of the Pinheiros subway station (2007) and the IPHAN estoppel on excavation and analysis of archaeological material found at the site (2009).

Nevertheless, the Batata Square finally inaugurated presented an endless list of incompatibilities with the public concourse winning project. After the extensive period of troubled works on the region, the sidings that surrounded the Square were finally removed and what could be observed were 29 thousand square meters of pavement. Without the urban furniture, pedestrianized streets and other public facilities foreseen in the project, a wide aridity was created replacing a territory symbolically associated with large flows, mobility, retail dynamics and popular presence (Figure 1).

The resistance

In 2013, when the process of sidings dismantling in Batata Square began, there was a general commotion. For many traders and regulars in the region, the newly inaugurated plaza resembled a desert that repelled the presence of people and everyday uses (CALDEIRA, 2015). Residents and workers from the region mobilized a meeting with the Pinheiros Public Local Administration and, due to lack of answers, it was decided by the attendees that there would be organized an event in Square in November 2013 with many cultural attractions called “Não Largue da Batata” (Do not leave the Batata). They wanted to raise attention of the region's visitors for two purposes: jointly discuss the urban transformation process imposed to the Square, what were the real intentions of the Urban Reconversion project; and build hypotheses of potentialities that the place, now absolutely transfor-

med, could represent. Each person present at that meeting mobilized to invite their network to exhibit themselves, to attend and thus occupy the square.

Although it was a small event, participants already had ways of identifying themselves as a community articulated around this issue. In this context came the collective “A Batata Precisa de Você” (The Batata Needs You), that for a year and a half occupied the Square regularly on Fridays in the late afternoon. The meetings initially had no programming and were organized with the purpose of showing that the space had not been annulled, that the presence and popular occupation should resist. Various events were organized as talkings, lectures, workshops, artistic performances and shows. The space was furnished by the people themselves with umbrellas, beach chairs and tents for rainy days. The periodicity of the resistance gave legibility and credibility to the movement, because it was agreed that on that day of the week and hour, people would be there occupying the place and open to dialogue for those who also wanted to participate of it.

Many people after we started the occupy asked: how can we organize a show in Batata Square? How can we organize an outdoor yoga class? People do not understand that they can do this at any time, not just at Batata Square as anywhere else, so self-consciousness as a possible actor in space would already completely change the dynamics of the city (SOBRAL, 2015).

The main characteristic of the movement was the spontaneity of the action, without much planning or tools of resources raising. In any time was there a call for collective financing so that the actions could be carried out in a more permanent way, or had more infrastructure. On the contrary, the occupation and spontaneous presence of voluntarily collaborating people characterize the activities of Batata Square. In other words, represented people who were at first disarticulated, but who had common aspects: they went through this space, witnessed it aggressive transformation, were significantly disturbed by the precariousness and public power lack of interest and involvement, and decided transform it in an inviting space with its own resources.

Gradually, the movement began to gain visibility, and another cultural activism groups spontaneously came forward to contribute to the occupation. Examples of this are: the collective needle, which organized a crochet and knitting workshop; or Rios e Ruas (Rivers and Streets), an organization that carries out activities to raise public awareness of the invisible rivers of São Paulo, and promote an urban space use reflection, drawing attention to the hidden landscape of the rivers that live under the city ground.

We need more vivid public spaces, that people are more present in them, to build this collectively. The city is not given ready to you, it is by using that you build it. We believe that by being regularly in a territory, you create ties with it, you create



Figure 2. Urban Furniture built by the Construction Batatas. Source: largodabatata.com.br/a-batata-precisa-de-voce/, 2014.



Figure 3. Urban Furniture built by the Construction Batatas. Source: largodabatata.com.br/a-batata-precisa-de-voce/, 2014.

care, and thus you improve the urban dynamics (...) it would be a testing ground for some things that could be applied in the whole city or in other cities, another relationship with the city, more present in the public space (SOBRAL, 2015).

As the occupancy increased in size and visibility, it became increasingly evident that urban furniture was needed, with structures that made the square more comfortable, such as benches and roofs. As a new form of protest and denunciation of the negligence with Batata Square, the initiative appeared to be promoted of workshops of construction of furniture with pallets. The movement was becoming a complex articulation of countless collectives, each with a specific orientation. For the furniture, in this case, the “Batatas Construtoras” (Construction Batatas) were articulated.

The carpentry workshops in Batata Square became the space’s great attraction. A small fee was charged for the materials cost and people learn to build urban furniture with pallets. The popular articulation, in this way, allowed the knowledge production and diffusion in a non-institutional spaces, as in a non-formal education process (GOHN, 2011). The collective learned that it provided a mutual education with this activity, where it offered the promotion of these events and people contributed with the ability or knowledge they had to pass and empower the others involved: “sometimes there were some gentlemen who wanted to help and saw or hammered something

very fast, they were very skillful people for that” (MARCHESI, 2015). With tables and benches, the square had its dynamics completely altered (Figures 2 and 3). People already recognized it as a place of living, of coexistence, and the banches were quickly appropriated by people who were not of the collective, the furniture showed to have a significant capacity of agglomeration.

Care for a common thing in public space blurs public and private perspective, showing that people can invest time, energy and affection in a collective thing, which is not only theirs, which brings benefit to all (...).

It is clear that a more occupied square is safer, especially if the occupation is not selective nor propagate any kind of prejudice and exclusion, everything that we experienced in excess in the city. It would restrict a benefit that is everyone’s why there is a use that some people disagree with. But that is absolutely legitimate; the question of where the homeless person sleeps is a social issue, that is, of society as a whole (MARCHESI, 2015).

The various forms of deprivation experienced daily in the public spaces make the confrontation with the unknown increasingly intimidating (INNERARITY, 2010). In this context, the urban habitability emerges in the city inhabitants encounter and the space that surrounds them, human and humanized. The perennial temporality character of the performance impacted with much expres-

siveness the already present dynamics in the Square, even though they were still in a moment of consolidation after its inauguration. However, the movement set out to work exactly within a prototype logic through experimentation and learning with the process and with the square use itself. As the movement was there every week, it was possible to keep up with the opinion and occupation of those who was there in the Square, with better performance than some drawing strategies that are far from the reality.

At the beginning there were few people who came here every Friday and the idea was just occupy and see what could happen in this place (...) we did not inaugurate this discussion, we inaugurated the fact of being here weekly and propose it otherwise, somewhat more practical, physical care (SOBRAL, 2015).

In 2015, after a year and a half of Batata Square regular occupations, the collective signed up and has won the “Redes e Ruas de Inclusão, Cidadania e Cultura Digital” (Inclusion Networks and Streets, Citizenship and Digital Culture) course, organized by the Municipal Secretary of Culture of São Paulo city. According to the edict, would be chosen projects that propose actions of culture and digital inclusion and promote initiatives of occupation in the public spaces (PMSP, 2014). Thus, the movement committed itself to maintaining the weekly occupation of the square, organizing thematic conversations and digital in-

clusion workshops, carrying out a project video, promoting workshops in other territories and producing a publication. The point was register officially the actions and transform them into pilots of an experimental and participatory construction that could be disseminated and constructed in other ways or other spaces of the city.

The commitment with the activities foreseen in the edict intensified significantly the calendar of workshops and events, since there were now resources to enable it. The premise of digital inclusion has given the collective new social technologies to deploy and mobilize on a larger scale. The largodabatata.com.br website was developed, a public, open and collaborative platform for scheduling Square activities where anyone can include the event they want to perform in space, determining the time and adding some communication contact. This digital system provides citizens autonomy to use the space regardless of any cultural production type to happen. Autonomy that generates a relation of belonging and respect with the place. According to reports from people in the square, the dimension and the collaborative action that was proposed there made it possible for simultaneous activities to occur in a way that does not interfere with each other.

Finally, the publication set out to be a how to make regular public passenger seats manual. A collection of data of Batata Square history was carried out and as one of the following stages: the elabo-



Figure 4. Third phase of Urban Reconversion of Batata Square. Source: piseagrama.org, 2016.



Figure 5. Third phase of Urban Reconversion of Batata Square. Source: piseagrama.org, 2016.

ration of a beliefs and objectives of the movement manifesto with theoretical references, to anyone can choose their concepts and interpret them, in their own way; References of contestation urban activities around the world; a presentation of the legal instruments that address the issues of demonstrations in public contexts with a publication of the guidelines on “passos para dançar” (steps to dance), elaborated by “Festival Baixo Centro” (Downtown Festival); and the manual of public spaces activation, which includes instructions for the furniture with pallets construction.

Considering that the edict “Redes e Ruas de Inclusão, Cidadania e Cultura Digital” (Inclusion Networks and Streets, Citizenship and Digital Culture) concourse was na iniciativa by municipal management, the movement had the possibility of dialogue with this instance. The direct and regular proximity with the Square real demands made the movement press the Pinheiros Local Administration to know the problems and dialogued with people directly. Thus, a participatory planning process was developed in Batata Square through government workshops and some new claims were integrated into Urban Reconversion Project third phase (Figures 4 and 5). Shrines were installed in metal structures that provide shade, a series of benches, gym equipment and a children’s playground in front of the church. Although most of the demands were not met, an unprecedented process was created with the Pinheiros Local Administration of collective management between

population and public power.

Currently, the collective “Batatas Jardineiras” (Batatas Gardeners), which emerged from the movement first formation, is the only active collective remaining in the group in meetings and works in the Square (Figure 6). Its activities continue to have a weekly frequency, mainly due to the specificities of gardening, which require constant and regular care and maintenance. Marchesi (2015) further states that:

The planting action also symbolizes roots in the figurative sense: you build the soil, take care of what is being born and growing (...) besides not being an exclusive activity of the garden, you end up watching the environment too and it is a relationship of very different from just using or passing the square.



Figure 6. Batatas Gardeners action in Batata Square. Source: Personal archive, 2017.

This collective shows the importance of green presence in the city for health and environmental comfort, as well as of resistance to concrete. In Batata Square became evident how the issue of green in the urban environment is neglected in urban spaces planning and management. It was observed that, although the projects contemplate trees, gardens and flowerbeds, as it is the last elements to be implanted, there is a risk of neither coming to exist or not being properly executed.

This is linked to a movement called tactual urbanism, that is completely opposed to the older vision of urbanism as planning. It isn't the urbanism science, it's the technocratic spirit reverse, that moved much of modern urbanism with the economic-based planning idea. It's more based on the notion that you create equipment for use, it is linked to immediate use and on a small scale because it depends on the action of people (...).

These groups have been very active in São Paulo much by a traditional relationship of politics exhaustion. People are realizing that they can no longer expect politicians to do things that are demanded. It is necessary for society itself to make this pression (WISNIK, 2015).

Final Considerations

The urban social movements of supersurvival represents a consolidation of the meaning of urban struggle perspective extension. They represent

an order subversion emanating from projects that oppress the free use of urban spaces and, as a rule, use of creativity related to public spaces uses for activation of it.

For the collective "A Batata Precisa de Você" (The Potato Needs You), the greatest achievement of its performance was to officially characterize Batata Square as a public space of free occupation, which is increasingly providing autonomous initiatives from various origins and with the most plural claims. The aim was activate the Square and get people to recognize that they can use and promote independent cultural activities without authorization or any kind of bureaucracy. It's interesting that people perceive that the city and the public spaces are theirs, not a "private space of the public power" (TELLES, 2017)³. Activities that emerged initially from the meetings organized by the collective began to become more permanent in the cultural agenda of the square as the Forró dos Amigos project, for example, which started as a one-off event and then settled monthly. The Square also presents another morphological specificity that enhances the activities carried out there: its dimensions with very wide visual permeability allow simultaneous activities to occur that don't interfere each other.

It's thirty years of desert from the making city point of view, but it's five years of much hope from the use side. What we realize is that this activist use is perhaps going to force other pro-

3. Lecture note by Profa. Dra. Vera da Silva Telles, held at Forum Right to the City - Challenges for a Metropolitan Agenda on April 04, 2017 at the State University of Campinas - UNICAMP.



Figure 7. Manifestations against political coup of 2016. Source: Paulo Pinto (fotospublicas.com/manifestacao-contra-o-impeachment-de-dilma/), 2016.

jects, it doesn't exhaust itself. The best way to think about tactical urbanism is that it will not be tactical urbanism forever. It is a tactical urbanism that will force public power to understand that a Project is needed. That public space is a complex thing and that people want it (...).

Now it is clearly stated that population recognizes the public space as a legitimate place of their right to be a citizen. Now how will the city hall and state government react to it? People need answers (WISNIK, 2015).

These initiatives have further influenced the Square's characteristic as a place of living and permanence, not just passing through. The intense popular presence during the street carnival, which has been repeated for three years, the installation of official stages of Virada Cultural (waked up night of cultural events) by the municipal administration and the expression of Square's occupation during the most progressive manifestations related to the political coup of 2016 (Figure 7) also reinforce the immaterial and symbolic construction of this space as a support for contemporary urban struggles.

It is believed that the collective "A Batata Precisa de Você" (The Potato Needs You) intervention contributed to the evident expression of social power for two reasons: firstly, the morphological and spatial question that the Square presents. Although it has had its contours, pro-

portions and materiality many times reconfigured, morphologically it remained as a square in its symbolic sense and, therefore, of place marked in the territory by the permanence. Second, the condition of intense periodicity and scale that characterized all the action of the collective have the benefits of a closer relationship and the greater involvement among the people inserted in the process. The joinery workshops in Square, according to reports, have always been the events that most attracted people for having dynamics very conducive to this. People with skill, knowledge or simple interest in helping in the process. It is observed in practice that the movement provides a non-formal education where the collective is responsible for promoting these events and people contribute with the skill or knowledge they have to pass and empower others.

The care of a common thing in public space blurs the public and private perspective, showing that people are willing to invest time, energy and affection in something collective, that brings benefit to all. The Batata Square experience, among other issues, highlights the positive aspects of offering the city a wide open and public space, which presents real occupation possibilities. In a neighborhood where a large part of the uneducated spaces are still surrounded by public property, it emphasizes the strength of urbanity in public spaces associated with social power, the people reception. In the same way as in the peripheral neighborhoods or popular housing promoted by

the State, where public or open spaces could be used for activities and culture, however, on the contrary, spaces are often found that accumulate garbage and debris or private appropriations.

Finally, it is observed that the sequence of unfinished works, uncertainties and impasses of the investments and public works of the Urban Reconversion project of Batata Square was shown averse to the discourse of qualification, presenting itself as harmful to microeconomics and a catalyst for the emptying of public spaces in the region. On the other hand, it's possible to suppose that even the limbo of uncertainties and impasses of investments in this group of public works that lasted for so many years may have been one of the reasons why private interest moved away from the area, investing in other regions along the Urban Operation Faria Lima. That is, the inefficiency of political and economic management, in this case, may have guaranteed some possibility of permanence of residents and traditional commercial activities of the neighborhood, mitigating effects of speculation advance and gentrification process.

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