Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Together with the state, *despite* the state, *against* the state

Social movements as 'critical urban planning' agents

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Curiously, even progressive planners usually share with their conservative counterparts the assumption that the state is the sole urban planning agent. This paper outlines that even if the state is sometimes controlled by more or less progressive forces and even influenced by social movements, civil society should be seen as a powerful actor in the conception and implementation of urban planning and management. Drawing on examples from urban social movements in Latin America, in particular favela activism, the sem-teto movement and participatory budgeting, it explores how civil society can conceive, and even implement, complex, radically alternative socio-spatial strategies. This can be seen as part of a genuine attempt at 'grassroots urban planning'.

Even progressive professional planners and planning theoreticians usually share with their conservative counterparts the (tacit) assumption that the state apparatus is the sole urban planning agent—for better or for worse.[1] However, even if we accept that the (local) state apparatus *not always* plans for residential segregation, for the interests of enterprises and against those of working-class residents (although the state does it very often, and although it is part of its *structural essence* to assure the reproduction of capitalist and heteronomous status quo as a whole), we must try to overcome the intellectual (possibly also ideological) prejudice which prevents us from seeing that civil society does not only *criticize* (as a '*victim*' of) state-led planning, but also can directly and (pro)actively

conceive and, to some extent, implement solutions independently of the state apparatus. These solutions often deserve to be understood as '(grassroots) urban planning'.

Progressive urban planning led by the local state but *consistently* open towards popular participation and committed to the reduction of inequalities in the framework of a favourable political conjuncture corresponds to a very uncommon situation, but it is far from being impossible.[2] *However, it is by no means the only possibility in terms of 'critical urban planning'.* Since the state is a heteronomous structure in itself, even so-called left-wing, progressive political parties have to find a compromise and adjust themselves in order to govern in the general framework of a capitalist society—especially at the local

level. Seduction by power is considerable, pressures from powerful lobbies are tremendous, some compromises and concessions seem to be unavoidable, so that commitment to social change frequently begins to diminish over time. If civil society cannot organize itself autonomously, the risk of *co-optation* by the state is big(ger) and the political–pedagogical worth of 'participation' small(er). Moreover, the best help which social movements can offer to social change does not consist in turning into mere 'assistants' to the state apparatus, but in constructively criticizing the state and putting it permanently under pressure—which is always necessary, even in the case of progressive governments. In doing so, social movements can more effectively act as 'counterpressuring forces' in relation to conservative lobbies.

Civil society *as such* (especially social movements) should be seen as a (potentially or de facto) relevant agent in relation to the conception and implementation of urban planning and management strategies. This interpretation probably sounds strange, for even left-wing planners are almost always quite 'state-centred' ('*estadocêntricos*': Souza, 2002). The main purpose of the following account lies precisely in discussing and exemplifying this second, theoretically neglected variant of 'critical planning'—a radically bottom-up, genuine 'grassroots urban planning'.

What is 'urban planning' ultimately? *Planning* means that a collectivity (or a single person) prepare themselves to avoid problems and to take advantage of developments which can be more or less foreseen as likely or very likely 'scenarios'. Urban planning is, as an attempt to change spatial organization and social relations in the city, the same thing at another level of complexity. Different social groups (classes etc.) have different, sometimes antagonistic interests, so that the 'best case scenario' for a group can be the 'worst case scenario' for another. The state apparatus tries (by means of persuasion, co-optation and if necessary repression) to

'coordinate' these various interests—in fact, state intervention is the 'result' of these different 'vectors' of pressure, some of them being of course normally much stronger and effective than the others, even if those can be more or less 'neutralized' under special circumstances.

Why do people give so much importance to the state apparatus in regard to planning? There are both 'good' (importance and centrality of the state apparatus as a regulatory institution, access to public resources) and bad (ideology, 'state-centrism', the myth of the state as a guarantor of 'common good' and 'public interest') reasons for that. It sounds 'natural' to most people to think of the state apparatus as the sole planning agent, since it possesses some privileges de facto and some prerogatives *de jure*, such as the power to regulate land use in the whole city through urban law (zoning ordinances), as well as the formal power to enforce its determinations ('legal monopoly of violence', police). However, one can see that under the influence of 'urban neo-liberalism' (to employ Harvey's expression [1989]: 'entrepreneurialism'), the local state often abdicates or has to abdicate (as an imposition of the central state) part of its power to regulate the production of space in favour of private companies, developers, and so on (land use deregulation, sometimes called euphemistically 'planning flexibilization'). The old mask of the state as a 'neutral and just judge' has fallen in connection with the 'entrepreneurialistic turn' in urban planning (in the 1980s particularly in Britain and the USA, since the 1990s in other countries as well). Conservative planning is often even more conservative today than it was at the time when classical regulatory planning was ideologically hegemonic and the 'Keynesian state' was at its zenith. Not only in the face of this, but especially under these circumstances, it seems to be quite obvious that social movements must try to propose and implement their own alternative solutions.

Social movements have to *plan alternatives*, they cannot be restricted to criticism and demands towards the state. They must be able

to *offer proposals* and *conceive concrete alternatives*—and, to some extent, to *realize* them *despite* the state apparatus and (at the end of the day, and not only when they face a particularly conservative government) *against* the state. In fact, they often do it sometimes in a spatially complex and comprehensive way, not only demonstrating knowledge and interest in relation to plans and reports prepared by the (local) state, but also developing actions which can be interpreted as an alternative approach to land use, housing, traffic, environmental protection, and so on (see examples in the following section). It goes without saying that social movements are not free of contradictions; they operate inside heteronomous societies, that is, in the middle of a more or less hostile environment, and in terms of political culture and political practices one can find quite often problems such as imitation of statecraft and state-like structures at the microlevel (or to remember Foucault [1984], at the level of the 'microphysics of power') on the part of personalized and authoritarian leaders, ambiguities, and so on. However, civil society and even the poor are not only or entirely 'powerless' people who need to be 'empowered'; 'empowerment' can of course mean revolutionary changes sometimes, but it is also a *process*. A process of conquering *autonomy* and overcoming *heteronomy*.

Radical social criticism under globalization is better known in the form of transnational networks of civil society as a response to neo-liberal economic policies and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This kind of anti-globalization movement and its organizations are 'urban' only in a very broader sense, because they are mostly (but not always) concentrated in cities, which are privileged stages for protest and many kinds of popular mobilization. However, they are not organized according to 'territorial identities'. Nevertheless, there are also several social activisms which are urban in a strict sense and which can be seen as *movements* in a proper sense.[3] They oppose 'urban neo-liberalism' and the pressures from big business over weak and

conservative local governments, they react to unemployment, evictions, lack of appropriate housing and land speculation in cities. In Brazilian metropolises such as São Paulo and to a lesser extent in Rio de Janeiro, as well as in some cities in other countries, the squatters' movement is playing an interesting role. In several cities in Argentina, the *piquetero* movement, which comprises a lot of specific organizations, can also be seen as a type of *stricto sensu* urban movement; its basis comprises unemployed people, who interrupt traffic on streets and railroads as a form of protest (so-called *piquetes*), but also organize squatting and a whole alternative life at the neighbourhood level, from alternative economic circuits (including taking possession of mismanaged factories which went bankrupt) to forms of alternative culture.[4] To this kind of movement, territorialization (at the level of the settlement or of the *barrio* [neighbourhood]) is not a matter of 'territorial corporatism' (Souza, 2000a, p. 160) or of 'politics of turf' (Cox and McCarthy, 1982), but the concrete expression of a non-parochial, genuine 'militant particularism': the *dissident territories* which are created by the *insurgent spatial practices* of those movements are bastions of an economic, political and cultural resistance in the framework of which local and regional particularities are highly valued and at the same time a universal message (freedom and solidarity) is sent.

1. Urban activists as 'grassroots planners'

1.1. 'Autonomy': a new 'paradigm' for social movements theory and praxis?

Etimologically, *autonomy* (Greek *autós*: self, *nómos*: law) means 'living according to one's own laws', while heteronomy means the opposite: external law, a law imposed from outside or above. The concept of *autonomy* has been discussed by philosophers since the 18th century, from Kant to contemporary liberals, who typically overemphasize its individual dimension.

Graeco-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis (1922–1997) understood much better than the liberals the interdependence of the two aspects which autonomy embraces: *individual autonomy*, that is the capacity of a particular individual to make choices in freedom (which clearly depends both on strictly individual and psychological circumstances and on material and political factors) and *collective autonomy*, that is conscious and explicitly free self-rule of a particular society, as based on concrete institutional and material guarantees of equal chances of participation in socially relevant decision-making processes. An autonomous society 'institutes' itself on the basis of freedom both from metaphysical constraints (e.g. religious or mythical foundations of laws and norms) and from political oppression (Castoriadis, 1975, 1983, 1985, 1990b, 1996, 1999).

Especially in the philosophical work of Castoriadis and in a way closely related to (but at the same time different from) classical anarchism and 'council communism', *autonomy* was understood as an alternative both to representative democracies (which are, according to Castoriadis, in reality 'liberal oligarchies') and Marxist 'socialism' (by virtue of its authoritarian dimension).

While adopting Castoriadis' interpretation of the 'autonomy project' as a major source of politico-philosophical and ethical inspiration, I have also argued in several works that it is necessary to make this politico-social project more 'operational' for purposes of action *hic et nunc*—for instance, by means of finding a compromise between, on the one hand, a *very ambitious level of thought and action* ('utopian' dimension, 'radical horizon'), *and more or less modest tactical victories here and now* (tactical, local gains in terms of reduction of heteronomy which can have important politico-pedagogical cumulative effects in the long run) on the other hand (Souza, 2000b, 2002). In this light we can evaluate the performance of both institutionalized participatory channels and social movements, and it is interesting to see that *autonomía* (Port.: *autonomia*) is a word which is often used by several social movements in Latin America, particularly by the *Piqueteros* in Argentina and the *Zapatistas* in Mexico (see Barrio, 2005; Chatterton, 2005; Zibechi, 2005). It is surely not accidental that some intellectuals linked to the *zapatistas* and *piqueteros* have cultivated a dialogue with Cornelius Castoriadis' work (see, for instance, Zibechi, 1999).

Since 'knowledge is power', even oppressed groups can exert some kind of power on the basis of their knowledge, as already stressed by Foucault (see, for instance, Foucault, 2005, p. 239). For social movements it means that the more they use their 'local knowledge' (knowledge of the space, of people's needs and 'language') in terms of planning by means of combining it with the technical knowledge produced by the state apparatus and universities (in order both to criticize some aspects of this knowledge and to 'recycle' and use some other ones), the more *strategic* can be the way they think and act. This kind of knowledge (and of power) should not be underestimated, even if social movements obviously do not (and cannot) 'plan' the city as the state apparatus does it.

Beyond both 'state-centrism' (a usual 'sin' amongst progressive planners who were influenced by Marxism) and 'we-don't-want-to-have-anything-to-do-with-the-state' (the traditional anarchist position), it seems to be necessary to search a mix of autonomy of civil society ('*la mirada horizontal*': 'the horizontal look' [Zibechi, 1999]) *and* very cautious cooperation with genuinely non-conservative parties which eventually come to state power (even if this cooperation is a 'risky business' for social movements. I will turn to this point in Section 2). The international literature furnishes examples of a successful combination of 'non-institutional' ('direct action', often even illegal actions albeit commonly accepted as legitimate by the population such as squatting) and institutional tactics (for instance, by means of taking part in official participative schemes or negotiating with the state) by some social

movements, such as squatters in Amsterdam (Pruijt, 2003). As far as urban planning—in the present broader sense—is concerned, some Brazilian experiences are very interesting. I will explore these examples in the following section.

1.2. Brazilian examples: favela activism and the sem-teto movement

Brazil provides many interesting examples of social movements' attempts to change the socio-spatial status quo.

Favela activism demonstrated already in the 1960s that even the poor segment of civil society can sometimes be (pro)active (and creative) in terms of (alternative) urban planning. The roots of shanty-town upgrading lie in the mid-1960s, when *favela* residents in Rio de Janeiro (particularly in a *favela* called Brás de Pina, in the North Zone of the city) opposed eviction and demanded to stay at the same place, while developing the approach which is nowadays known throughout Brazil as *urbanização de favelas* (literally 'urbanization of *favelas*', in fact *favela* upgrading). The slogan created then by the *favela* residents became famous: '*urbanização sim, remoção não*' ('upgrading yes, eviction no') (see Santos, 1981). That is precisely the reason why the crisis of traditional urban social activisms (neighbourhood activism, *favela* activism) which can be observed in most Brazilian cities since the second half of the 1980s is surely a problem. In Brazil, both neighbourhood and *favela* activism played an important role in the 1970s and 1980s (as I said, as far as *favela* activism is specifically concerned, already in the 1960s) in putting the local state under pressure—improvements such as basic infrastructure for poor neighbourhoods have occurred in the course of generations not only by virtue of populism, but also as a result of protests, mobilization and riots. But they are no longer very relevant actors in most cities: neighbourhood associations are usually nothing else than clientelistic, serving as bastions of 'terri-

torial corporatism' for middle-class residents or as structures for political bargaining (exchange of votes for petty favours) on the part of the poor—or even (and increasingly) as instruments in the hands of *favela*-based drug traffickers, especially in the case of Rio de Janeiro but also in São Paulo and with less intensity in other Brazilian metropolises and big cities as well (see about this latter problem Souza, 2000a, 2001, 2005).

Nevertheless, if one considers the global context, it is easy to see that Brazil has been strongly present in the contemporary world in terms of civil society's proactive resistance against oppression and injustice, from anti-(capitalist) globalization protests in São Paulo to the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*/MST (Rural Landless Workers Movement) to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. Surely the general context in the present-day world is very much that of an '*époque du conformisme géneralisé*', as Cornelius Castoriadis stressed (Castoriadis, 1990a), and Brazil is not an exception. Furthermore, many of these protests and activisms are not 'urban' *stricto sensu*, since they are not organized according to 'urban territorial identities' and space as such does not play a strong role (as it plays, say, in conventional neighbourhood activism), even if most of them are concentrated for many reasons in (big) cities. However, one can also experience the rise (or an increasing importance) of new urban movements in a strict sense since the 1990s, such as the *sem-teto* (literally 'roofless') movement.[5] *Géneralisé* is far from meaning *absolute* …

There is still not the kind of highly complex, 'multidimensional' urban movement like Argentina's *piqueteros* in Brazilian cities, but *sem-teto* organizations such as the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* (Homeless Workers Movement), MTST for short, are growing and trying to widen the scope of their action in a more or less similar way.[6] For MTST in particular (which is the biggest organization of Brazil's *sem-teto* movements, mainly active in the metropolitan area of São Paulo), the main source of

inspiration has been the Rural Landless Workers Movement, which was in fact responsible for structuring MTST in order to build a bridge to facilitate dialogue with urban populations and gain more popular support in the cities (a strategic goal, since the majority of the country's inhabitants live in cities—82 per cent in 2000 according to the Population Census carried out by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).

MTST's 'rurban settlements' is a more recent example of a socio-spatial strategy[7] towards urban development from below. At the beginning of the present decade, MTST, clearly under the influence of the MST 'model', developed (along with another organization, *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados*/MTD [Unemployed Workers Movement]) a proposal called '*assentamentos rururbanos*' ('rurban settlements'). The core of this strategy lies in an attempt to build settlements for urban workers at the periphery of cities, in which people could cultivate vegetables and breed small animals, thus becoming less dependent of the market to satisfy their alimentary basic needs. There was even the expectation that this kind of settlement could be attractive not just for future migrants, but also to *favela* inhabitants who presently live in shanty towns dispersed throughout the space of metropolises such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Even if this strategy did not prove itself very promising, since it would be unrealistic to expect that those residents of *favelas* situated close to the CBD or sub-centres where they can find most jobs would have much interest in changing their homes for locations far away at the periphery (so that it was eventually criticized and abandoned by MTST itself—according to oral information by a MTST leader; personal talk with the author in September 2005) it is as a recent example of civil society's vitality and (pro)active role in relation to urban planning related issues.

'Rurban settlements' is to some extent an interesting idea, with ancient roots (one can think on Kropotkin's ideas about the overcoming of the opposition between city and countryside [Kropotkin, 1904]), but poorly articulated in MTST's discourse, although it remains as a topic which could be important for public debate. Anyway, it is by far not the only contribution of the *sem-teto* movement in general, and of MTST in particular, to a 'critical urban planning'. The strategy of 'rurban settlements' mirror a certain 'intellectual dependency' of MTST in the face of MST, which has been an interesting but partly problematic connection. However, MTST has tried to become intellectually more independent since 2004, and it has made (along with other organizations of the *sem-teto* movement) several contributions to an alternative spatiality for the sake of social justice; newer proposals and strategies have been developed in the last years.

MTST's ordinary praxis shows an increasing ability to combine different approaches and methods. On the one hand, squatting as such as a challenge for the capitalist 'order' of private ownership of land, along with attempts to develop new social relations (more solidarity, alternative culture, etc.), which is a remarkable aspect of the *sem-teto* movement in other countries as well (from the German *Autonomen* in the 1980s and 1990s to the famous Dutch experience [see, for instance, Pruijt, 2003]). On the other hand, we can also observe a smart use of some possibilities offered by the existing legal framework in order to 'stabilize' the possession of vacant land and buildings by *sem-teto* and avoid short-term evictions—although the formal legal framework (from the Constitution to the Federal Law of Urban Development, or 'City Statute', passed by the Congress in 2001) obviously does not challenge private property, except to punish explicit land speculation and to protect the rights of *favela* residents under some special circumstances (regularization of adverse possession).

State-led 'participatory planning' is necessarily restricted by existing laws, and even the relatively progressive 'City Statute' merely restricts some privileges of private propership owners (though it means undoubtedly a considerable progress in terms of legal

framework for a country such as Brazil). In contrast to this, MTST along with other organizations of the *sem-teto* movement has developed a radical and ambitious approach to socio-spatial change. Nevertheless, *sem-teto* organizations sometimes try to take part in broader discussion forums (for instance, in those related to housing or to urban reform in general, mainly supported and influenced by more or less established non-governmental organizations—NGOs), and they also take into consideration existing plans and zoning ordinances—not always to just criticize them, but sometimes in order to consider certain limits to action (i.e. areas of environmental protection) or obtain different types of useful information.[8]

Another interesting example of today's complexity of MTST's socio-spatial strategy is furnished by its attempt (since 2005) to look for political support in *favelas*, by means of organizing discussion groups ('political capacity-building') and even stimulating critical forms of popular culture. However, MTST knows that the problems of a *favela* are quite different from those of an *ocupação* (*sem-teto* settlement). As a MTST leader told me (in September 2005), they know very well that *favelas* are contested spaces: already existing (and often clientelistic) residents' associations, Pentecostal churches … and drug traffickers, all of them at the same place, side by side. Drug trafficking is an important challenge, not only for the state and for state-led urban planning (see Souza, 2005), but also for social movements and social activism in general (see Souza, 2000a, 2005). As far as the MTST is concerned, this challenge is not only related to its attempt to develop actions in *favelas*, but also due to the fact, that drug dealers or drug trafficking organizations can try to 'territorialize' *ocupações*: at the periphery of Guarulhos (metropolitan region of São Paulo) MTST militants were already threatened and expelled by drug traffickers in 2004 from one of the biggest settlements grounded by MTST, Anita Garibaldi. MTST leaders say they are trying to find a way to 'coexist' with drug traffickers since they cannot fight them,

however, without risking demoralization as a likely consequence of any form of 'cooperation' (as has been the case of some *guerrilla* movements in Latin America).

Of course, the *sem-teto* movement is not going to change things radically *alone*—and we should not forget that it has its own problems. One of these problems is precisely the challenge represented by long-term mobilization of people who often do not correspond to 'working class' in a strict Marxist sense, but rather to '*Lumpenproletariat*': very poor, quite often unemployed or underemployed people. Another problem is the real extent to which the *sem-teto* movement is and will be able to develop a new 'political culture' in terms of 'horizontal', non-hierarchical, genuine self-management practices. Many present-day social movements worldwide have in common a strong commitment to *autonomy*. 'Horizontality' seems to be a very important characteristic of a large part of the Argentinian *piquetero* movement, although this movement comprises many organizations with different political and ideological profiles. There are some organizations and *ocupações* clearly inspired by a 'horizontal', non-hierarchical approach in Brazil as well, such as *ocupações* Chiquinha Gonzaga and Zumbi dos Palmares in Rio de Janeiro, closely linked to the organization *Frente de Luta Popular*/ FLP (Front for Popular Fight). Precisely in this regard MTST shows some ambiguities, largely due to its 'genetic' links to MST (which is to some extent a contradictory organization, which combines some clear hierarchical elements with grassroots discourse and praxis); however, these hierarchical elements are not so evident in the case of MTST.

2. Cooperation yes (or *maybe*), co-optation no: state–civil society partnership and its limits

2.1. When 'participation' turns into a trap

That 'good intentions are not enough' is demonstrated by the fact that not only

deliberate intentions to 'domesticate' civil society can harm social activism but also some forms of participation, which at first glance seem to be more than just co-optation, but can create new problems by virtue of ignorance regarding local cultures, local particularities in terms of power structures, and so on. In a book published a couple of years ago (which has provoked some irritated reactions), whose authors are not swayed by the almost magical power of words such as 'participation' and 'empowerment', partici-pation was considered even as a 'tyranny' (see Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

However, even if the limits and dangers to which authors like Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari point out (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; see also Cooke, 2001; Kothari, 2001) cannot be underestimated, the kind of situation they are dealing with presents some similarities but also important differences in comparison with the challenge of 'participation' in a metropolis such as São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. While they are discussing a situation which could be described as a classic 'culture shock' ('we, westerners, you, natives in this small African [Asian, Latin American] village'), I am talking about the relations between urban poor and governments, NGOs and 'their' experts in the big cities of a largely industrialized *and to a large extent Western* country, but socially highly unjust and unequal.

The existing literature tells us that consis-tent large-scale participation is possible in spite of many obstacles, and the best example worldwide has been Porto Alegre's 'partici-patory budgeting'—or at least it was till 2004.[9] In terms of organization, Porto Alegre's 'participatory budgeting' consists of a series of meetings in the course of which the city hall firstly explains its actions and accounts for the previous year, submits to the attending citizens its investment plan for the current year and projects the potential financial resources for the next year (March/April); later (April/May), the number of delegates of each of the 16 areas (*regiões*) in which the city was divided for the purposes of the participatory process (as well as the delegates of so-called 'thematic plenary sessions', which define sectoral priorities) is determined, and the Council for Participa-tory Budgeting (*Conselho do Orçamento Participativo*/COP) is elected. COP is formed by two councillors elected by each *região*, two councillors elected by each 'thematic plenary session', one representative of the civil servants' trade union, two others representing the city officials in general, another one appointed by the municipal federation of neighbourhood associations and two representatives from the govern-ment—who do not have the right to vote, their task is to act as advisors to the council-lors on technical questions. While the dele-gates contact ordinary people through smaller, informal meetings organized by the population itself and discuss their needs in the face of a possible investment capacity informed to them by the local government, the Council's task is the preparation of the formal budget proposal which has to be sent to the municipal parliament for approval (see, for details about Porto Alegre's experience: Abers, 2000; Souza, 2002).

Nevertheless, even in relation to such successful experiences we have to be cautious, considering what I suggest is '*struc-tural co-optation*'. 'Structural co-optation' is a Damocles' sword over *every* social move-ment which accepts to take part in institu-tionalized channels of participation. Classical criticisms regarding participation, such as those addressed by Arnstein (1969), notwith-standing its importance, are insufficient, for they usually deal with what could be understood as more or less *deliberate* (and 'individualized') attempts of co-optation and manipulation. Not only as a result of manip-ulation by politicians, but also by virtue of the 'subtle' influence of the state machinery on civil society's organizations (for instance, *a gradual 'adjustment' of the agendas and dynamics of social movements to the agenda and dynamics of the state*) and their militants ('seduction of power'), social movements' critical sense and energy can diminish—and

in extreme cases even perish. The recognition of this 'corruptive' effect must not necessarily lead to resignation or cynical behaviour (even if at a very high and complex level, as in the case of Robert Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' [Michels, 1989]), but the problem should not be underestimated.

Paradoxically, the great danger for true social movements in terms of co-optation does not lie in conventional populism, but in the consistent openness of some left-wing parties to dialogue and popular participation. We have to put the question of 'participation' at the local level into a broader context, in order to understand some limits and dangers. At least for some observers, capitalist globalization is not just a 'new phase' in the history of capitalism and capital expansion, but a central aspect of a *deep crisis* of capitalism (Kurz, 2005). In this framework, and in an age of mass unemployment, eroded welfare states in the so-called 'developed countries' and state collapse in the (semi)peripheral countries, 'participation' is becoming more than a useful tool for social integration (as it was till the 1980s): *it is becoming increasingly a necessary 'tool for crisis management'*. On the one hand, privatization, deregulation, unemployment and 'precarization' of labour (and 'structural adjustment' programmes at the periphery and semiperiphery of the world-system); on the other hand, attempts to bring people to 'take part' in the management of local-level state crisis (along with other measures like repression and 'state of emergency', as long as they are necessary and feasible). I am not suggesting that participatory planning and management can be reduced to 'crisis management', especially not in the (very uncommon) case of truly consistent left-wing governments. However, 'crisis management' as a dimension of contemporary participation practices (and of 'governance' discourse) is an almost omnipresent feature of the *general* societal context in which we live. Not even in the case of Porto Alegre has this dimension been completely absent (Souza, 2002).

Be that as it may: there is no reasonable alternative to involvement with institutionalized participatory channels—*provided they are really consistent the material and politico-pedagogical gains for the population can be substantial*. The classical anarchist point of view ('direct action' despite and against the state, but *never* any kind of 'partnership' with the state) does not seem to be very realistic nowadays, although anarchists have always cultivated a critical approach towards the state apparatus *as such* (that is, not just against the *capitalist* state) which proved itself wise in most circumstances (including against Marxism or, to use Bakunin's words, 'authoritarian communism'). Anyway, even a *neo*-anarchist like Murray Bookchin has recognized in the context of his 'libertarian municipalism' that at least at the local level anarchists' participation in elections with the prospect of reshaping administration on a largely direct democratic basis could and can serve the purpose of educating the masses for freedom (Bookchin, 1992).

Taking part in institutionalized, state-led participatory processes is a 'risky business', and the more the ruling party (or parties) is efficient in providing effective participatory channels and forums, the bigger is the risk for social movements. However, it can be worthwhile under certain conditions to combine institutional and 'direct action' practices for tactical reasons: not only because of material gains (access to public funds, for instance), but also for political–pedagogical purposes (participatory arenas as 'direct democracy schools'). 'Washing oneself with dirty water', to employ Nietzsche's words,[10] can be unavoidable or necessary for social movements under certain circumstances. It is no easy task, but the 'learning by doing' function of consistent institutionalized participatory processes may make that combination very useful. Anyway, it is crucial that the movements never abdicate of pointing out the limits even of promising institutionalized participatory channels. If they cease to be critical, 'dirty water' has already contaminated them.

2.2. Lessons from Brazil: participatory budgeting and the 'urban reform'

Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting, with its several positive outcomes (see Abers, 2000; Souza, 2002), demonstrates that institutionalized popular participation *matters* and that it is *worthwhile* under certain circumstances. However, the vulnerability and some weaknesses of this experience can show us another 'lesson' as well—namely, that social movements must try to conceive their own strategies and implement their own agenda, as autonomously as possible in face of the state.

On the one side, Workers Party's politicians and militants always defended that it could be dangerous to bound 'participatory budgeting' through a municipal law—which would have to be voted by a largely conservative Municipal Parliament, so that any proposal in this sense presented by the executive could be strongly modified for worse. Moreover, one of the most important virtues of Porto Alegre's 'participatory budgeting' was always its flexibility, so that it was possible for delegates and councillors to improve the 'game rules' many times since 1989. On the other side, the electoral defeat of a political party (in this case, the defeat of the PT at the elections in 2004) can threaten even an experience which seemed to be consolidated and which became a source of inspiration for many others throughout the world. From my point of view, the solution for this kind of vulnerability does not lie in formal laws, as I already stressed in an earlier work (Souza, 2002). The best (though of course not perfect) 'immunization' against an interruption or a weakening of this kind of process is in the hands of civil society itself, which must be able to demonstrate that it will not tolerate a political regression in this matter. However, this is not sufficient. If civil society adjusts itself to official, institutionalized participatory arenas to the point that social movements do not have an autonomous life outside these arenas (as this has been more or less the case in Porto Alegre, even if not

entirely), civil society becomes a kind of 'hostage', not only of a government (which can blackmail civil society sending messages such as 'if you do not elect the party once again, this wonderful experience can cease to exist'), but of the state apparatus as such.

As far as Porto Alegre is concerned, we have to wait to see what the next years will teach us in terms of more concrete or specific 'lessons'. It is still too early to know to what extent local civil society can defend its conquests. Anyway, the first conclusions outlined above have a general character.

A similar, but at the same time different, 'lesson' can be extracted from the fate of the struggle for '*urban reform*'. Even if perceiving the limits of the representative democratic regime which was reintroduced in 1985 after more than 20 years of military rule, a pragmatic left-wing approach to planning emerged in the mid-1980s in Brazil, when some scholars began to advocate a *reforma urbana* ('urban reform'). This expression does not mean, in the contemporary parlance of Brazilian social movements and progressive scholars (whose roots lie already in the 1960s), just a reshaping of the space through 'spatial surgery' and zoning— that is, the search for new spatial forms and a new spatial order which contribute to 'optimize' urban functions (traffic and mobility, compatibility of land uses, and so on) as well as to the beauty of landscape. The primary purpose of the 'urban reform' strategy is *to change how the production of space is regulated* (on the basis of a new balance of power), and it aims concretely at overcoming, or at least at a substantial reduction of, certain typical problems of city life in Brazil, such as land speculation, residential segregation and lack of affordable housing for the poor.

Many of the master plans which have been prepared since the beginning of the 1990s in Brazilian cities show at least some degree of influence by 'urban reform' principles. Whereas technocratic planning aims at a 'well-ordered' and 'efficient city' (from a capitalistic point of view, of course), 'urban

reform' has quite different goals: tenure regularization and physical upgrading in poor residential areas (shanty towns and other irregular working-class settlements) and reduction of residential segregation and land speculation, among other priorities related to social justice. In this context, a useful tool is the utilization of property tax progressively over time. As far as zoning—which is surely planning's best-known instrument—is concerned, technocratic planners work with it primarily to reach 'order', while 'urban reform'-oriented professional planners use land use management tools for purposes such as identification and classification of specific spaces according to their social situation and public interest (for instance, zones corresponding to areas which need physical upgrading and tenure regularization, zones of special interest for environmental protection purposes, and areas where land is kept vacant due to speculation).

Technocratic master plans follow by definition a 'top-down' style; they express a more or less authoritarian balance of power as well as an authoritarian mentality on the part of professional planners, who are under these circumstances not committed to any popular participation in the planning process. From the technocratic point of view, the involvement of laypersons in planning is not desirable, since planning is seen to be a *technical* matter which has to be undertaken on the basis of '*rationality*' and which cannot be usually understood by ordinary citizens. In contrast to this view, 'urban reform'-oriented urban planning has been presented by left-wing professional planners as a 'participatory' one.

However, the 'urban reform' mainstream is characterized today by what I called '*left-wing technocratism*' (Souza, 2002). 'Left-wing technocratism' corresponds to a contradiction in the context of which 'too much' attention is paid to technical instruments and exaggerated expectations are raised in relation to the possibilities and potentialities of the formal legal and institutional framework (such as the national

Ministry of Cities created in 2003 under president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and with which several 'urban reform'-oriented planners were or still are involved), while much less attention is devoted to subjects such as the relatively new challenges for popular participation (for instance, territorial control of many *favelas* in cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo by drug traffickers), the 'microphysics of power' and the cultural embeddedness of state-led planning interventions. Furthermore, even reflection about tools and schemes for popular participation in planning has received much less attention on the part of most 'urban reform'-oriented planning theoreticians than other technical instruments, and it is disappointing (but nevertheless symptomatic) that the concrete space dedicated to dealing with popular participation in the framework of many progressive master plans is very small, and sometimes it is mentioned in rather vague terms or even in the sense of a mere consultation (that is, the kind of 'participation' which Arnstein [1969] correctly considered in her famous article as 'tokenism').

The fate of the struggle for an 'urban reform' in Brazil teaches us about what can happen if a progressive strategy is developed and supported mainly by scholars and the (middle-class) staff of NGOs, while the poor and their grassroots organizations only play a very secondary role in terms of strategy-building and intellectual elaboration (as far as 'urban reform' is concerned, this was a problem already in the 1980s, see Silva, 1990; Souza, 2000a, 2002, but only in the 1990s did it become more evident, as the academic mainstream became increasingly divorced from social movements). 'Urban reform' still is an important strategy, and many ideas and instruments are surely very valuable, but it is largely unknown among most Brazilians and many of its formerly more or less radical supporters (both scholars and NGO people) have turned into 'left-wing technocrats' in the last 15 years—although most of them probably believe they still embody a genuinely progressive approach (by the way,

some of them have been working for the Brazilian Ministry of Cities in the context of the 'wannabe-left-wing' but in fact centrist Workers Party government since 2003). Fortunately, the *sem-teto* movement is also committed to an 'urban reform'—one of MTST's 'war cries' is precisely *'na luta pela reforma urbana'* ('fighting for an urban reform'), and the *sem-teto* activists represent the real grassroots side of this strategy, trying to overcome the limits not only of the legal framework itself, but also those of 'left-wing technocratism' by means of pressures from below as well as independent initiatives and direct action.

The main 'lesson' from both the experiences of 'participatory budgeting' and the struggle for an 'urban reform' seems to be the following: social movements remain vulnerable in the face of the state apparatus as long as they abdicate to think and to act autonomously—and that includes concrete proposals regarding urban planning. Participation in institutionalized participatory channels can be useful under certain circumstances, but even if the partner is a 'truly progressive and open government' social movements have to be cautious and cultivate their capacity of (self-)criticism. Technical help from progressive intellectuals and professional planners can be very welcome and necessary, but social movements cannot abdicate control of the agenda of discussions to middle-class academics and NGOs—or the state apparatus. Even if the 'partner' is a progressive party (that is, one which is at least at the beginning consistently committed to social change and empowerment of civil society), this cannot prevent civil society from being co-opted, in fact because every political party is already a 'state-centred' structure, and every progressive political party must itself fight against the corruptive forces which emanate from state power in terms of a trend to conservative adjustment and 'conflict management' rather than to the overcoming of deep social contradictions and structures. It belongs to the nature of a lion to devour other animals, even if it was tamed.

3. Conclusions

Criticisms have been addressed against classical regulatory urban planning on the part of non-conservative scholars (mostly from a Marxist perspective) since the 1960s and especially since the 1970s, and on the part of neo-liberal analysts since the 1980s. While conservative scholars nowadays attack classical regulatory planning because it would be too 'rigid' and it would lack 'flexibility' in order to contribute to the 'competitiveness' of the city in a globalized world by means of attracting investments, left-wing scholars used to put planning and planners under suspicion because it would serve the interests of the ruling classes. As far as the neo-liberal criticism is concerned, it is a heavily biased one which has been largely used as an argument to obtain more and more concessions and advantages for private business interests of all sorts. In contrast to that, the non-conservative criticism seems to be generally correct; however, it was often 'forgotten' by many radical geographers and Marxist sociologists in the past not only that even state-led planning can be sometimes genuinely progressive (what some radical scholars finally began to acknowledge: see Harvey's opinion about Porto Alegre [Harvey, 2000]—and Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting is at the end of the day nothing else than participatory urban management and planning), but also that civil society can and shall develop its own alternative plans and (socio-spatial) strategies.

Planning *as such* is neither conservative nor progressive, at least not a priori. Of course, planning is never 'value neutral', but its ethical and political commitment depends on the contents and the nature of concrete actors, historical circumstances, proposals and actions. As a comparison we could say that, although most state-led schools and educating systems are inherently conservative and authoritarian, nobody would come to the idea that education as such is something bad, since we know that (for instance) Paulo Freire's well-known 'pedagogy of the

oppressed' also belongs to the domain of 'education'. Since urban planning is an attempt to change spatial organization and social relations in the city, and since the state apparatus is far from being a 'neutral judge' which always acts to defend the 'common good' and 'public interest', social movements have the necessity to develop and (so long as it is possible) to implement their own alternative solutions.

The German writer and essayist Hans Magnus Enzensberger used the expression 'molecular civil war' (*molekularer Bürgerkrieg*) at the beginning of the 1990s (Enzensberger, 1993) in order to describe the situation of increasing conflict and violence which can be observed in big cities both of the 'First' and of the 'Third World'. Another German author, the sociologist Robert Kurz, wrote also at the beginning of the last decade a book whose title is *The Collapse of Modernization* (*Der Kollaps der Modernisierung* [Kurz, 1991]), and we can see that Enzensberger's 'molecular civil war' is particularly true in relation to the countries in which the ideological promise of 'development' in the framework of global capitalism was frustrated and 'economic modernization' was aborted and/or accompanied by terrible 'collateral damages'. However, semiperipheral countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and South Africa have interesting peculiarities precisely regarding the magnitude and complexity of 'urban crisis': these countries are neither 'consolidated representative democracies' (more precisely, 'consolidated liberal oligarchies') nor 'quasi-states' (in contrast to many typical peripheral countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa). In the big cities and metropolises of those countries we can see a kind of 'low-intensity state dissolution' at the local level (due to widespread corruption, from politicians to the police, as well as by virtue of the formation of 'criminal territorial enclaves' for example: 'territorialization' of *favelas* by drug-trafficking organizations in Rio de Janeiro—or the emergence of alternative economic circuits); however, the state was not simply replaced through 'warlords' (although it is often challenged by 'warlords' at the 'microlocal' level, as it is the case particularly in Rio de Janeiro).

In spite of the many problems which can be observed in metropolises such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, there are not only problems there, but also solutions which are being proposed and to some extent also implemented both by the state and by social movements (sometimes *together with* the local state apparatus, sometimes *despite* the state, sometimes *against* the state). Probably it is even easier for social movements in countries such as Brazil (at least to some extent) to conceive and implement alternative strategies regarding spatial organization, not only because absence and inefficiency of the state apparatus makes engagement of civil society more necessary than in Europe or the USA, but also because urban law is not so effective or respected as, say, in Germany or the UK—apparent 'chaos' also means bigger room for manoeuvre for the people on the ground. Hence, in the middle of a swamp of violence and despair we can also find little, exotic and delicate flowers. Nowadays, some Latin American urban social movements such as the *sem-teto* movement in Brazil and the *piqueteros* in Argentina are demonstrating that social movements can and shall conceive and to some extent even implement complex and radical socio-spatial strategies, thus carrying out a kind of 'alternative', 'grassroots urban planning' which is quite often committed to the development of truly 'horizontal', non-hierarchical self-management structures.

Notes

1 *Making the Invisible Visible*, a thought-provoking book edited by Leonie Sandercock, demonstrates that important exceptions of course exist. In this book, and particularly in Sandercock's 'Introduction: Framing Insurgent Historiographies for Planning' (Sandercock, 1998), one can find a 'de-statization' of the idea of planning in favour of a broader approach which is similar to my own

proposal. However, this book offers a discussion of 'insurgent historiographies' of planning as narratives of reactions against (and alternatives to) state-led planning on the part of minority groups of civil society in very general terms, whereas the proactive role of *social movements* in terms of conception and implementation of planning strategies (which is the central concern in this paper) is not necessarily emphasized.

2   The state apparatus is not a kind of monolithic structure free of contradictions, but a 'material condensation of a relationship of forces' (Poulantzas, 1980, p. 153), that is, the expression of different pressures—from above and from below. Surely, since the state is *structurally* 'committed' to the reproduction of the status quo (in other words, to oppression), state intervention *tends* to privilege the interests of the ruling classes; however, the state can be under special circumstances, that is in specific *conjunctures* (as a particular government) controlled by more or less progressive forces and even influenced by social movements—especially at the local level.

3   It is convenient to differentiate between social *activism* and social *movement*. Social *activism* corresponds to a much broader concept—a type of largely 'organized' and essentially public collective action, and thus different from, say, plundering or parliamentary lobbies—while social *movement* is a special kind of social activism: namely, one which is particularly ambitious and critical. Although several relevant authors also reserve some kind of 'special *status*' for the concept of social movement (see, for instance, Castells, 1983 and Touraine, 1973), many authors use the word 'movement' in a rather indiscriminate way. However, different from a 'parochial' local activism which operates more or less as a mere pressure group in order to preserve certain privileges or obtain some gains in the general framework of the economic and political status quo, and without criticizing status quo as such, social *movements* act as 'militant particularisms' which are at the same time imbedded in place-specific experiences and committed to more general, 'universal' ethical values and broader political goals: a specific question (racism, unfair distribution of land, gender oppression, and so on) may define collective identity and the primary agenda, but beyond this specificity the general societal context or at least some of its aspects ('modernization', the myth of capitalist 'development', representative 'democracy', globalization, etc.) is always under fire (Souza, 2000a, 2002). The conceptual boundaries between a 'mere' activism and a 'proper' movement are surely not very precise, since reality itself is quite 'fuzzy' in this regard, but

some distinction can be useful anyway, for the sake of conceptual clarity.

4   See, about the *piquetero* movement: Kohan (2002), Massetti (2004) and Chatterton (2005).

5   From a socio-political viewpoint, there is a difference between shanty-town residents (*favelados*) and *sem-teto*. Although they are all squatters in a broader sense, historically *favelas* emerge either 'spontaneously' or sometimes under guidance and protection of populist politicians looking for future electoral support, while the *sem-teto* movement is highly 'politicized' from a critical standpoint. In the remaining of this text I will use the Portuguese expression *sem-teto* instead of *squatters*, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

6   In contrast to squatters in many European cities, who are usually young people, quite often university students, in Brazilian cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro the majority of *sem-teto* comprise poor people—similarly to the Argentinian *piqueteros*—although squatting by *sem-teto* is normally supported and co-organized by students with a middle-class or lower middle-class background.

7   *Socio-spatial strategies* are strategies to change *both* social relations *and* spatial organization. In fact, they invite us to understand that the transformation of social relations can usually not be achieved without a correspondent and appropriate transformation of space.

8   In a text prepared by MTST's leadership for militants, one can read that *sem-teto* '[…] have to undertake a careful planning and a survey which comprise a correct analysis of vacant areas: their situation in terms of the existing zoning, their ownership, their fiscal situation, and so on. We do not intend to reproduce the chaotic and unbalanced logic of capitalist urban expansion, which pushes poor people to areas located far away, including environmental and river source protection areas. Moreover, an adequate knowledge about the property owner is necessary to avoid unexpected reactions as well as to plan a tactics which permits people to stay on place' (MTST, 2004, p. 5).

9   'Participatory budgeting' was implemented in Porto Alegre as the Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*/PT) came to power in 1989, although civil society (the municipal federation of neighbourhood associations, UAMPA) had already claimed for a democratization of municipal budgeting process a couple of years before. Due to several reasons (for instance, widespread disappointment with PT under the presidency of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva), Porto Alegre's PT lost the municipal elections (by a small margin) in 2004 for the first time after 16 years, and since 2005 the city has been governed by a

conservative coalition. Although the new mayor stressed after his election that 'participatory budgeting' would not be affected by political change, there have been many evidences that the new government does not pay very much attention to this participatory arena.

10 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Second Part, Chapter 'Manly Prudence'): 'And he who would not languish amongst men must learn to drink out of all glasses; and he who would keep clean amongst men must know how to wash himself even with dirty water' (Nietzsche, 1994, p. 149).

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