

WAYS FORWARD FOR DOWNTOWN SÃO PAULO

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A concern for drawing up public policies capable of recovering the economic dynamism and the quality of the urban environment in degraded downtown areas is neither recent nor restricted to large cities. It is about a challenge for urban planning that has been fuelling broad debate in the theoretical field, but that has still not resulted in more than a few successful experiments. In Brazilian towns and cities, this concern started to gain space in public programs from the 1980s, but actions implemented, even at present, have never been free of controversy.

In the case of the city of São Paulo, the largest national metropolis, which ranks world-wide as a megalopolis, initiatives to do with adding value to its downtown area take on a strong economic character. Beyond the repercussions on the urban environment at the local level, the implications for the São Paulo Metropolitan Region - RMSPP - at the larger level are considered. Thus, actions directed at downtown areas, gain a strategic dimension with regard to economic and social development in general. This has been reflected in the programs recently created for this region: the Program for Urban Rehabilitation of the Center - "Reconstruir o Centro" (2000), the Program for Rehabilitating the Central Area of the City of São Paulo - "PROCENTRO" (2002), and the Program for Actions in the Center - "Ação Centro" (2004).

One result of the last mentioned program is the publication entitled "Caminhos para o centro: estratégias de desenvolvimento para a região central de São Paulo" ("Ways forward for downtown: development strategies for the central region of São Paulo"). This is a collection of papers produced by São Paulo Municipal City Hall, at the request of EMURB, in partnership with CEBRAP - the Brazilian Centre for Analysis and Planning, and CEM - the Center for Studies on the Metropolis. Its objective is to give a sound basis for diagnosing problems in the central region of São Paulo and to guide the grounds for contracting an international loan from IDB - the Inter-American Development Bank.

The collection brings together thirteen papers by authors from different disciplines, such as Sociology, Economics, Architecture and Urbanism, and Geography and Production Engineering, and thus to offer a multidisciplinary approach to the problems that affect the central region of São Paulo and to suggest possible ways of minimizing them. The problematic is tackled both by means of references to existing theoretical output and experiments already implemented, as well as from empirical knowledge of the local reality, this last being prioritized in most texts. The main contributions of the papers draw three main objectives together: identifying the factors that have borne on the degradation

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of the central region of São Paulo; characterizing current conditions, from which proposed public policies will have to be drawn up; and identifying strategies capable of inducing the recovery of the area.

The order of the papers in the book follows a logical sequence that goes from the most general to the most particular, grouping similar subjects around the specifics of the subjects tackled. The first two chapters consist of more theoretical approaches to the subject. In the text "As tendências da gestão urbana contemporânea e a promoção do desenvolvimento local" ("Tendencies of contemporary urban management and the promotion of local development"), Luis Otávio Silva calls attention to the sprouting of new trends in urban planning guided by recognizing the multiplication of the number of actors intervening in urban management, as well as the complex nature of the institutional arrangements and the interactions between actors. Next, Rose Compans, who investigates experiments in urban renewal in the chapter "Intervenções de recuperação de zonas urbanas centrais: experiências nacionais e internacionais" ("Interventions to recover central urban zones: national and international experiments"), verifies that despite the theoretical debate waged in the field of urbanism, programs for urban renewal are normally framed in accordance with the public platforms of national or local governments.

In the following two chapters, the themes are tackled in a more empirical and more localized way, and start to be tackled at the level of the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (RMSP in Port.). In them, São Paulo central region is viewed from how it participates in the national and metropolitan economy, the focus of the papers being centered on production activities and job generation capacity. In this sense, the ideas of Clélio Campolina Diniz and Bernardo Campolina Diniz in the text "A região metropolitana de São Paulo: reestruturação, re-espacialização e novas funções" ("The metropolitan region of São Paulo: restructuring, re-spacing and new functions") are reinforced in Cláudio Robert Amitrano's text, "A região metropolitana e a área central da cidade de São Paulo nos anos 90: estagnação ou adaptação?" ("The metropolitan region and the central area of the city of São Paulo in the 90s: stagnation or adaptation?"). Both papers argue that, despite the loss of part of industrial production to other regions, the RMSP, and especially the city of São Paulo, kept and extended its role as the command center of the national economy, by retaining a significant concentration of specialized services. The authors contest the idea that there has been a process of deindustrialization similar to what has occurred in the Northeast of the United States and the Northwest of England. They claim there has, in fact, been a process of productive reorganization.

A similar line of thinking is used in the approach of the chapter entitled "Dinâmicas dos subespaços da área central de São Paulo" ("Dynamics of the sub-spaces of the central area of São Paulo"), in which a more localized vision of the central region problematic is presented, with a predominantly urban bias. In this text, Kazuo Nakano, Candido Malta Campos and Raquel Rolnik question the idea of the centre of São Paulo having been "emptied" allegedly provoked by having been "abandoned" by public and private agents. They argue there was in fact a reorganization process (a change in the profile of the uses and users). In discussing the role of the urbanistic interventions in re-shaping and transforming the São Paulo central region, the authors emphasize the emergence of a new urban centrality in the southwestern region of the city as one of the main factors that has led the central area to being deemed the "peripheral centrality". For the authors, this state of being is the fruit of a historical process of concentrating public investments, especially with regard to structuring the road system, and the juridical construction of urban legislation for the control of the use and occupation of land. Moreover, they

highlight the existence of "a complex constellation" of sub-spaces in the central region which house different activities, people and territorial socio-economic dynamics.

Isaura Botelho and Carlos Torres Freire in their text, "Equipamentos e serviços culturais na região central de São Paulo" ("Cultural facilities and services in the central region of São Paulo"), deal with the problem of degradation in the historical center of São Paulo and make proposals on how to minimize this. They do so by analysing the potential of existing cultural facilities and services. Botelho and Freire argue the need for collaborative action between those involved in culture and other social and economic matters, and consider the priority partnership to be with the education sector. For the authors, despite the huge offer of cultural facilities in the central region of São Paulo, there is a need to increase the use of this equipment by means of measures directed toward security, infrastructure, transport and urban cleanliness. The solution would be to integrate multiple uses and users with multiple services.

The three papers that follow emphasize specific sectors of the local economy and their influences on the central region of São Paulo, which reinforces the idea of productive restructuring both at the metropolitan and municipal levels. In his text "O setor de serviço às empresas" ("The service sector for businesses"), Vagner de Carvalho Bessa proposes carrying out a diagnosis of what is available in the central region of São Paulo starting with the behavior of services connected to companies, and he points out that they form a strategical sector in defining the advantages cities have world-wide. Thus, for the author, the policy for downtown should privilege development actions centred on collaboration between productive and commercial networks, and take advantage of the favorable conditions of that area. On the other hand Marcos Antonio Cintra and Renata Silveira Corrêa make reference to financial activities. In their text "O complexo financeiro: um caso de concentração no município e relativo esvaziamento no centro?" "The financial complex: a case of concentration in the municipality and relative flight from the centre?", the authors highlight the degradation of the downtown physical environment and its being occupied by poor people as the main reasons for the migration of businesses to new centralities. However, they argue that the financial sector and the new companies generated around it can function as inductive centres to attract new businesses and to use the available infrastructure in the central region. Renato Garcia and Juan Cruz Moreira conduct an analysis of the textile-clothing sector, in which they point out the importance of the RMSPP, and downtown São Paulo, in commercializing and distributing products deriving from the textile-clothing chain. In "O complexo têxtil-vestuário: um cluster resistente", ("The textile-clothing complex: a cluster that has stayed put"), the authors suggest that joint actions by producers and public intervention in this sector be based on support for and incentives to the dynamic factors of company competitiveness, so that the relations between them are intensified and also with educational institutions and those that supply services.

Two papers take up, as their central theme, the problem of the informal activity which has sprung up in downtown São Paulo. The consequences of the street-trader presence for downtown São Paulo are pointed out by João Pamplona Batista in his text "A atividade informal do comércio de rua e a região central de São Paulo" ("Informal street trading and downtown São Paulo"), in which he traces a detailed profile of this activity. On the other hand, Luciana Itikawa, in "Geometrias da clandestinidade: o trabalho informal no centro de São Paulo" ("Geometries of clandestinity: informal jobs in downtown São Paulo"), argues for the formulation of diversified policies to deal with the problem. In her view, professional training, linking up with economic activities and sectors downtown and the

occupation of empty spaces ought to be the basis for positioning the informal sector inside the productive link of downtown São Paulo.

In the chapter “A dinâmica imobiliária da cidade de São Paulo: esvaziamento, desvalorização e recuperação da região central” (“The dynamics of real estate in the city of São Paulo: moving out, devaluation and recovery of downtown”), Pablo Sandroni adds the technological and architectural ageing of the space constructed and the existence of generalized negative opinions about downtown to the factors that led to its degradation. He therefore suggests that new vocations and new actors for the central region be found. His vision is somewhat controversial as the solution he proposes for attracting new real estate investments is the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new units.

Finally, Kazuo Nakano emphasizes the importance of urbanistic regulation to control territorial development downtown in São Paulo. His paper, “Desenvolvimento territorial e regulação urbanística nas áreas centrais de São Paulo” (“Territorial development and urbanistic regulation in downtown São Paulo”), calls attention to the importance of existing instruments in the City’s Statute and in the Strategic Master Plan for the Municipality of São Paulo in order to draw up structural actions for the central region. He has pointed out, however, that such longed for urban reform must be followed by administrative reform that enables public institutions to use the new instruments.

It is interesting to point out that whatever "the ways forward" to be taken may be in the attempt to solve the problem of downtown degradation, what is needed is that they converge in a common ideal. In other words, the proposals for adding value to downtown São Paulo, as for any another city, demand integrated actions and the confluence of interests. And it is this which is the main idea we glean from this rich publication.