

Neoliberalism and public participation in urban regeneration in Portugal

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1 ABSTRACT

The concept of the revanchist city will be discussed in the light of dismantling public assistance policies as an attempt to provide incentives to private economic initiatives which are characteristic of neoliberal urban governments. The welfare state crisis, associated with the entrenchment of conservative agendas and responsible for producing changes in urban governance, also play a role in studying this concept. Besides this, the concept also shows how the discourse on urban regeneration within the scope of urban policies and the production of the city's image, aims at keeping the present population in the area, while modernising the economy, increasing employment rates and promoting economic growth.

The aim of this paper is to make an assessment of the participation process in the measure called "Initiative for the Qualification and Urban Re-insertion of Critical Neighbourhoods" (commonly known as the "Critical Neighbourhoods" Initiative). It is one of strategic measures coming within the Cities Policies launched by the present Portuguese government and aims at integrating peripheral spaces and urban areas in crisis into the social-urban network. For our case study, we shall be looking at the Cova da Moura Quarter situated in the municipality of Amadora in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The model underpinning the public's active role and following an "entrepreneurial mimetic" in all but name, is based on efficiency. It has neglected to take into account the specific nature of the public services, mainly where the responsibility of the voters and their lawful rights and duties are concerned, as well as the very concept of truly active citizenship.

2 INTRODUCTION

The first symptoms of the welfare state crisis were felt in mid-1970s. From then on, the progressive breakdown of the predominant model of public intervention has been simultaneous to the replacement of fordism by post-fordism, making it more difficult for the state to find the necessary resources so as to guarantee expenditure in public interventions, contrary to what had happened in previous years. Strategic business-led management now guides urban governance, where public resources favour investment, a service supply that is geared to the market and the private sector, and where public-private partnerships are reinforced.

The concept of the revanchist city will be discussed in the light of dismantling public assistance policies as an attempt to provide incentives to private economic initiatives which are characteristic of neoliberal urban governments. The welfare state crisis, associated with the entrenchment of conservative agendas and responsible for producing changes in urban governance, also play a role in studying this concept. Besides this, the concept also shows how the discourse on urban regeneration within the scope of urban policies and the production of the city's image, aims at keeping the present population in the area, while modernising the economy, increasing employment rates and promoting economic growth. On the other hand, it also works as a mechanism that legitimises power and mobilises important public investment used to subsidise the wealthier strata of the population instead of benefiting those in need. Finance, the large economic groups, civil construction groups, entrepreneurs and the governing class among others, all help to polarise society.

The aim of this paper is to make an assessment of the participation process in the measure called "Initiative for the Qualification and Urban Re-insertion of Critical Neighbourhoods" (commonly known as the "Critical Neighbourhoods" Initiative). It is one of strategic measures coming within the Cities Policies launched by the present Portuguese government and aims at integrating peripheral spaces and urban areas in crisis into the social-urban network. For our case study, we shall be looking at the Cova da Moura Quarter situated in the municipality of Amadora in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The model underpinning the public's active role and following an "entrepreneurial mimetic" in all but name, is based on efficiency. It has neglected to take into account the specific nature of the public services, mainly where the responsibility of the voters and their lawful rights and duties are concerned, as well as the very concept of truly active citizenship.

3 CRISIS IN THE WELFARE-STATE, NEOLIBERALISM AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE REVANCHIST CITY

In this chapter we will be talking about the changes that took place in the principles guiding the economic system and the way it was regulated. They left their mark on the transition from a Fordist mode of accumulation based on Keynesianism and predominant in Western countries and metropolises between the 2nd World War and the 1970s, to a flexible mode of accumulation situated in an economic framework that has been greatly influenced by neoliberalism. As we shall see later on, neoliberalism largely explains the emergence, proliferation and reinforcement of the urban regeneration trends witnessed during the last few decades of the 20th century.

During the 1960s and 1970s, evidence of the welfare-state's expansion and consolidation was seen in the way the state diversified its supply of goods and social services where this supply enjoyed a high standard of benefits and quality. Persistent inequality and the emergence of new demands seemed to have largely been out-manoeuvred by consolidating and extending social rights. It was the era of positive discrimination, programmes aimed at fighting poverty, improving social services and fomenting the value of benefits and transferences. It was the era of the Fordist pact and the welfare state. Fordism undeniably represented more than just an economic development model. In fact, the very nature of this model favoured the emergence of a well-defined set of social actors and provided the conditions for creating standard rules of procedure in the relationships established among them. As from the 1940s, the State became the most important stakeholder in supplying assistance to the most under-privileged strata of the population. This assistance became generalised and widespread although in nearly all of the developed countries it varied according to different the kinds of assistance and their geographical intensity. The expression welfare state became common coinage to describe the direction along which state policy was heading where organised power used the term to change the path of market forces in at least three directions: guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum wage; reducing the degree of job insecurity and giving individuals and families the conditions whereby they were able to handle certain social contingencies (for example, illness, old age, unemployment) which otherwise would cause them suffering; ensuring that all citizens had at their disposable the best possible standards offered by a moderate range of social services (MELA, 1999).

Keynesian policies kept abreast with and stimulated Fordist urbanisation, giving rise to a “welfare city” (in keeping with the welfare state) in order to cement the Fordist pact between entrepreneurs and workers and thereby uphold social harmony and the capitalist system’s reproduction. This was done by the state giving state incentives to the economy by making public funds available for collective facilities and welfare housing, as well as by favouring the industrialisation of the building trade and public works by repeatedly placing large-scale orders. Nevertheless, nowadays this way of producing urban space and indeed, the whole Fordist philosophy, have been plunged into crisis (ASCHER, 1998).

The first symptoms of the welfare state's crisis became apparent around the mid-1970s. From then on, the gradual disintegration of the predominant model of public intervention was witnessed at the same time that Fordism gave way to Post-Fordism. This situation made it increasingly more difficult for the State to find the necessary resources to guarantee public funding at the same rate it had managed to do in previous years. In addition to the inevitable precarious state of the job market affecting unskilled labour and the most under-privileged strata of society, was the deregulation of the housing market and urban land use which now tended to favour a more randomised pattern in the temporal and spatial production of urban events. This pattern is simply the social outcome of the interplay involving an inadequately regulated real-estate market based on speculation and pricing activities rather than owing to localities and their distances from/to the centre or work places, or the local standards of trading, facilities or environmental quality. Urban governments have followed a managerial model (the strategic management imported from the business world) where public resources are provided so as to attract investment. Furthermore, the provision of services has now been taken over by market forces and the private sector and public-private partnerships have been up-graded (HALL, 1998).

Following upon the fairly active production-based interventionist State, although the degree of this intervention varied from country to country, now came a State which sought to transfer many of its services to the private sphere (transports, housing, communication and electricity distribution networks...). The idea - how often only in appearance - was emphasised that by making such transfers, economic activities were more efficiently regulated (by means of laws, inspections, setting up regulatory committees overseeing the

stock-exchange, telecommunications, etc.). This same State which was shaped by the neoliberal reference framework in the 1980s and 1990s still exerts a heavy influence today (SMITH, 1989; PIMENTA DE FARIA, 2002); it has reinforced competitive rationales of a spatial nature (DOMINGUES, 1996; PECK, TICKELL, 2002) and housing policies (WEXLER, 1996, 1999). The depression experienced by the large cities which characterised the end of the post-war economic cycle was followed by a new urban policy that was far more geared to the market and therefore affected by philosophies based on promoting consumption, inter-city competitiveness, and the protagonism of private stakeholders in the city's planning process and production (LEY, 1980; BARATA SALGUEIRO, 1999; HALL, HUBBARD, 1996).

It is a fact that, associated with the first signs of the crisis in the welfare-state and the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1980s but more particularly in the 1990s - and even later in Portugal, namely the collapse of this model founded on public intervention mainly lay at the bottom of new fast-growing social inequality. The situation has become worse to the extent that the most developed countries have tended to regress back to levying indirect taxes rather than direct taxes, or at least to exert fiscal pressure once again on income gained from labour which benefits capital-generated income. The purpose of doing away with public welfare policies in an attempt to encourage the kind of private economic initiative that urban governments have been promoting in their neoliberal drive, together with the crisis in the welfare state, is also linked to the conservative agenda flexing its muscles. It has played a powerful role in producing the radical changes taking place in city governance which, as SMITH (2005: 75) defends, has led to the revanchist city that has come about owing to:

“Las enormes subvenciones concedidas al capital mundial; la destrucción y el desmantelamiento sistemático de servicios públicos (por ejemplo, la educación) y la crisis de la reproducción social; y las nuevas ambiciones políticas de las ciudades en la economía global. [...] El argumento general que deseo plantear aquí es que la ciudad revanchista [...] forma parte de todo un nuevo régimen de desarrollo desigual que encaja con el nuevo globalismo. Conjuntamente con una mayor represión política, representa elementos centrales de un nuevo régimen de desarrollo desigual que se vuelve cada vez más visible en las economías capitalistas avanzadas” .

As an activist and social critic, SMITH (1996)¹ has denounced the discourse favouring the kind of regeneration dependent on urban policies that seek to enhance the city's image even if such policies promise to keep its present population, modernise the social fabric, offer more jobs and promote economic growth. The truth is that it will still not stop it from working as a means of legitimising the powers-that-be and attracting large-scale public investment which in a last analysis, will not be used to help the most needy but will act as subsidies to the wealthiest (banking, financial institutions, large economic groups, construction companies, entrepreneurs and governing officials, etc.). Smith works on the basic premise that the body of laws governing capitalist society is necessarily bourgeois (under the control of the dominant class) and it serves the interests of capital and not the social majority. The same may be said of the State which, even under a liberal guise and legally acting on behalf of the whole of society's interest (in the discursive theoretical sense), in fact really represents the domination exerted by the “bourgeois class” particularly in this mode of production. In other words, the groups enjoying the highest social and economic status as well as the interests serving big capital

The public interventions aimed at enhancing the city spark off a chain of contradictory mechanisms leading to expulsion and re-appropriation. New urban policies mean a sharper turn towards the market and the consumers in detriment to the most under-privileged classes. The selective nature of investments favouring capital reproduction means abandoning, forgetting about and paying less attention to the “city of the majority”, and all the more so in the already needy areas where the under-privileged are concentrated (BRENNER, THEODORE, 2002; JESSOP, 2002). Rather, according to Smith's theory which he has been busy exploring recently (1996, 2001, 2002), what we have is the emergence of the “revanchist” city produced by the neoliberal offensive. In this way, the author has unmasked the reality behind the social concerns and

¹ “The enormous subventions carried out in the capitalist world; the destruction and the systematic dismantling of public services (for example, education) and the crisis in social reproduction; and the cities' new political ambitions in the global economy. [...] The general point I would like to make here is that the revanchist city is a part of a whole new system promoting unequal growth that is contained within the new globalism. Together with greater political repression, it represents the central paraphernalia of new governance based on unequal development that is becoming increasingly more evident in the advanced capitalist economies”. (From the Spanish).

the “institutional generosity” which have inherently accompanied new urban management’s recent real-estate products and he has explained how they have promoted a rationale based on social control that is favourable to the reproduction of capital and the dominant classes.

4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC LOCALISATION AND CHARACTERISATION OF THE COVA DA MOURA QUARTER

The last four decades of the 20th century bore witness to deep political, economic and social changes in Portuguese society. Such changes were without precedent and exerted a tremendous effect on the Portuguese population not so much from a quantitative point of view as the total Portuguese population did not increase to any great extent, but in its type of distribution and structure. Perceived from within this framework of change, the heterogeneous nature of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area appeared to be a spatial unit. Apart from its marked demographic growth, not only were its demographic-spatial features observed in the rest of the country - for example, the aging of the population as well as the population drain particularly in the rural areas, the growth of the tertiary sector in the active structure, an improvement in the level of education, etc. – but in terms of its urban-metropolitan nature, a clear definition was obtained of the kind of demographic-spatial features that were typical of a large urban area that was (still) growing and has only now been consolidated. Without any doubt, it is at this level that the specific character of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area resides: in addition to the first phenomena happening within it and referred to above, other overlapping phenomena have occurred, such as suburbanisation and peri-urbanisation; large, on-going, diversified immigration flows; the gentrification and regeneration of the historical quarters of the city; de-industrialisation and the relocation of industry; de-polarising economic activity and a concentrated flow to the coast owing to tourism and leisure that are now more easily reached owing to greatly improved accessibility.

Amadora was the first Lisbon suburb to grow and develop. Its growth was the result of the migration flows in the 1960s and 1970s, its availability of housing, its proximity to the capital and the urban axis mushrooming along the Sintra railway line. The process involving Amadora’s rapid growth gave rise to a densely populated area that failed to conform to urban standards and was further complicated by the added burden of becoming the first municipality in the country to gain this status after the 25 April 1974 Revolution.

The Cova da Moura Quarter is situated on a steep slope and covers an area of about 16.5 hectares to the east of the Amadora municipality, very close to Benfica (Lisbon). Its administration is shared between the Damaia and Buraca parish councils (Figure 1), although most of Cova da Moura is situated in Buraca. To the West, it is bound by various high-rise buildings belonging to a private estate which has partially cordoned it off with a fence. To the South, East and North, it is bounded by roads forming a ring around the neighbourhood, and includes the Sintra railway line running North as well as the beginning of the IC19 motorway going South. It may be said that Cova da Moura owes its existence to the 25 April 1974 Revolution when the expatriates or retornados returning from the former Portuguese colonies found a place to build their homes in although it already contained some older houses built by people coming from other areas of the country and some farm buildings serving the surrounding farmlands. During the second half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, in the period following the transfer of colonial power and associated with the effect brought about by the so-called immigrant network, there was a marked increase in the number of families mainly coming from the Cape Verde Islands and squatting on nearby vacant land. Their dwellings which were very flimsy shanties at first were gradually improved over the years. The neighbourhood has an extremely flexible urban fabric which is the result of people constantly moving there to live and build their homes, and the gradual addition of urban facilities namely with regard to sewerage, tarred roads, garbage collection and street lighting, as well as collective facilities.

The majority of the Cova da Moura resident population is composed of black Africans and their descendents, where most have their origins in the Cape Verde Islands although many have been born in Portugal. Therefore more than 40% possess Portuguese nationality even though the fact is relevant that almost 2/3 of the residents were born in abroad.

In terms of their qualifications regarding work and their socio-professional level, it is natural that the population in this neighbourhood present a basically unskilled/semi-skilled labour profile where workers are often employed doing short-term piece-work drawing low wages. The fact that Cova da Moura is over-

represented by this sort of indifferentiated, socially stigmatised activity where instability is common, is due not only to little schooling or the urgent need to guarantee income but also to employers' prejudices. They rank people of African origin in the unskilled bracket of the labour market and construct social representations that end up by erecting barriers against obtaining jobs offering a better professional status.

Because Cova da Moura has a predominantly young, active population, it is natural that the largest groups are comprised of workers (42%) and students (about 23%). Although there are cases involving dependent residents (pensioners and people receiving subsidies who are grouped under "others"), their numbers are not really very significant. Only a few residents are unemployed but this number is not relevant owing to the fact that the macro-economic variable is heavily influenced by conjunctural factors.

Most of the men work in the building trade, where a number of them are contractors and subcontractors who recruit many of their workers through family and neighbourhood networks. These small-time entrepreneurs and self-employed workers are listed as building and public works "companies" with their offices in Cova da Moura although it is frequently the case that their offices and their homes are one and the same. Despite the fact that they do not put up business signs outside their buildings, the local population knows where to find them. The women are employed as domestic workers, office cleaners, home-helps, caterers, street hawkers or stall-keepers at small local markets. The study in Figure 2 shows the polarisation in employment based on unskilled labour (personal and domestic service and the building trade). It reveals a clear dichotomy in the way professional activity is carried out according to gender (MALHEIROS et al., 2006). At the moment, the Cova da Moura Quarter is one of the most problematic areas in Greater Lisbon due to its high population density and its large numbers of illegal homes, as well as the lack of or not enough urban infrastructures, social facilities, open areas and green spaces. The neighbourhood also suffers from serious weaknesses in the buildings already standing in terms of their solidness, robustness and healthy environments; the Amadora Municipal Council (AMC) has made them the target of repair work with the aim of not only regenerating the neighbourhood but also socially integrating the population that lives there.

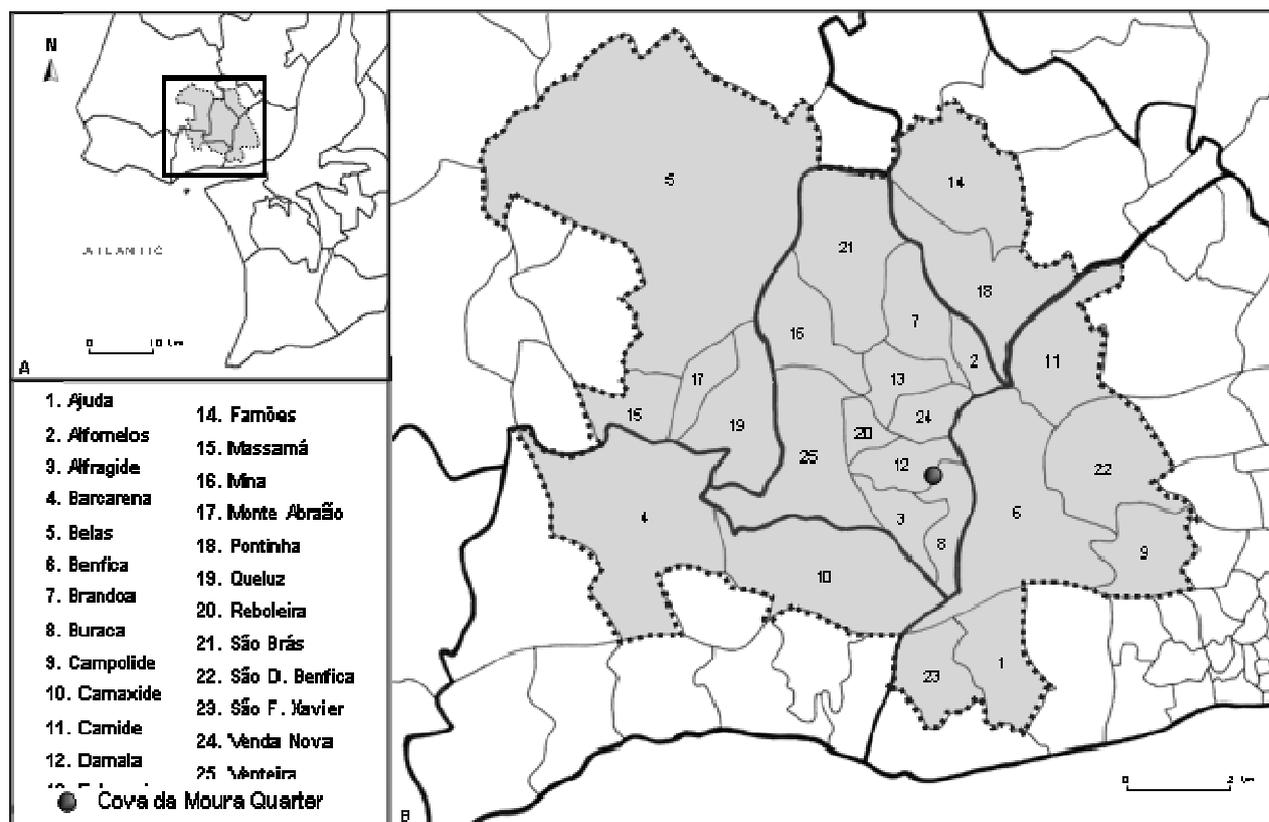


Figure 1 Geographical Locality of the Cova da Moura Quarter in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (Source: Luís Mendes, May 2009)

<i>Professional Groups</i>	%
Scientific, technical, artistic and like workers, managers/directors and higher administrative staff	3
Administrative staff and technicians	5
Retail staff and sales personnel	5
Personal and domestic staff and security personnel	33
Farm labourers and fishermen	1
Workers in the manufacturing industries and the building trade; fixed machine operators and transport drivers	40
No data	12

Figure 2 Resident Population in the Cova da Moura Quarter according to Professional Groups in 2001 (%) (Source: Characterisation and Diagnostic Study on the Cova da Moura Quarter, by Vasco da Cunha, Estudos e Projectos SA, 2001)

5 PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS TO REGENERATE URBAN AREAS IN CRISIS AND THE GOVERNMENT “INITIATIVE FOR THE QUALIFICATION AND URBAN RE-INSERTION OF CRITICAL NEIGHBOURHOODS”

The “Initiative for the Qualification and Urban Re-insertion of Critical Neighbourhoods” (commonly called the “Critical Neighbourhoods” Initiative), has helped towards making the present Government’s strategic measure on City Policies operational. It is geared towards the integration of neighbourhoods displaying factors that indicate critical vulnerability into a social and urban framework. The goal is also to encourage and test institutional, procedural and technological solutions that are innovating, integrated and participative, as well try and achieve the concerted, optimised involvement of both the stakeholders and public action in integrated interventions. In launching this initiative, the Portuguese Government wants to test an experimental approach based on development methods and intervention, management and funding models of what may be called “Good Practices”. Such practices might lead to the formation of a panel of interventionist methodologies, tools and models which are transferable and have a broader application in the near future. The Initiative is grounded in several principles seeking to conciliate initiatives and define priorities. Among them, the most important measures are the inclusion and active participation of Local Partnerships which define and draw up the Intervention Plans and develop public-public and public-private partnerships at different levels whether based on models of funding or project management models. The Action Plans and the Funding and Management Models therefore have become dependent on sharing out the work (for designing them up and carrying them out) among the representatives of the Ministries and Local Partnerships involved.

By referring to the experience gained in increased public participation in the “Critical neighbourhoods” Initiative, more specifically pertaining to the Cova de Moura Quarter situated in the Amadora Municipality in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area – we shall now be making a critical assessment of the underlying model of public management. We will then show how this model, which has borrowed from the entrepreneurial philosophy based on efficiency, has tended to forget the specific nature of the public services mainly in terms of the elected members’ responsibilities and the powers invested in them, as well as the concept of citizenship itself. The dictates centred on economic factors, efficiency and efficacy – the central axis of the ideology underpinning neoliberalism – has neglected to take into account the values guiding public policies such as justice, equality, participation or redistribution which instead call for the redefinition of policy-making so that the concept of energetic citizenship is materialised as the active expression of the most underprivileged groups.

Regenerating the neighbourhood is at the top of the municipal agenda owing to the fact that the whole of the surrounding urban area has deteriorated and this fact has cast the municipality in an unfavourable light. Local government has gradually come to respect the guidelines of the Municipal Strategic Plans in effect since 1994, as well as other spatial planning and regeneration tools. In doing so, it runs programmes and carries out strategies that seek to best improve citizens’ quality of life by solving housing shortages and strengthening and diversifying the basis of production. This up-grading is achieved by using its own resources, seeking central government backing or resorting to partnerships and EU funding. As regards EU funding, several projectes aimed at up-grading urban spaces are now being implemented, such as the URBAN II project (following on from URBAN I) and the PROQUAL project.

To this effect, the Amadora Municipal Council is carrying out a set of measures aimed at keeping the area from further deteriorating. Following the process to reconvert the neighbourhood, the AMC decided to run for the Polis Programme so as to reconvert and rehabilitate the Damaia and Buraca parishes – located in the extreme east of the municipality – with Cova da Moura in the heart of them. The project was budgeted at about 16 million Euros and launched with a view to obtaining Community funding to pay for the investments needed to start work on rehabilitating the neighbourhood and the two surrounding parishes.

Apart from this, an application was also made for the EU Urban II Programme aimed at regenerating the Damaia and Buraca parishes where Cova da Moura is located. The area of intervention covered by the URBAN programme includes the eastern-most section of these two parishes involving an area of 80 hectares. It is bounded to the North by the railway line, to the South by the IC 19 motorway, and to the East and the West by the respective administrative boundaries of the Damaia and Buraca parishes. Cova da Moura is in the centre and is the reason and focal point of the entire URBAN strategy. There are different targets to achieve: satisfying the housing shortage, urban up-grading, the full social integration of the resident population, fighting drug abuse more efficiently and making the socio-economic life of the quarter more dynamic. This is envisaged through encouraging the population to open up more economic activity and provide more services, set up more socio-cultural associations, valorise the African population's cultural heritage and encourage the professional training of human resources. The intervention measures now under way are the outcome of cooperation between the Amadora URBAN II Programme and other programmes and projects which have the aim of helping Cova da Moura to become fully and definitively integrated into urban city life, thereby breaking down the ghetto's physical and social barriers present in the neighbourhood's daily life. Among these various projects, the most important programme is the "Initiative for the Qualification and Urban Re-insertion of Critical Neighbourhoods" (Council of Ministers Resolution No. 143/2005 passed on 2 August 2005).

In order to ensure that the conditions for Participation, Partnership and Proximity are respected according to each neighbourhood's specific nature, the organisational model of this initiative is based on setting up Local Partnership Groups in each neighbourhood that bring together a wide range of stakeholders – ministries, local government, programmes and projects all with an interest in the terrain, organisations, associations and local leaders. The Local Partners Group is responsible for what sort of Intervention should be drawn up, and it receives the help and encouragement of multidisciplinary Technical Support Groups that are coordinated by the National Housing Institute. Partnership Agreements and the integrated management of the Action Plans – are previously worked out and agreed upon at the headquarters of the Local Partnership Group.

Participating in the initiative is based on choice and by applying a technique through which citizens have a say in what decisions interest them or what action the public authorities are willing to take in order to encourage citizens make suggestions and decisions. In the latter case, the citizens' shared involvement has to be organised which means having information collection and distribution mechanisms at hand as well as mechanisms enabling citizens to be consulted and hence involve them in co-decision making. All of this presupposes the existence of representative associations defending citizens, groups and interests (MOTA, 2005). Here, however, the already excluded weaker social urban movements which show up the contradictions inherent to collective consumption are silenced. Nevertheless, present policies acknowledge numerous advantages attached to shared participation: it helps the political system to include measures that will correct and integrate, and that will act as a means of facilitating consensus, promote stability and hence strengthen the status of the powers-that-be as well as the dominant interests of the capitalist State.

Without linking up the urban contradictions which drive the movement's activity and set in motion the remaining general social contradictions, organised participation will never be able to take the shape of a true urban struggle nor will it be able to become an urban social movement leading to social change. It will merely limit itself to being an instrument that participates within the confines of the general capitalist aims of the dominant powers. This is even more perverse if we take into account the present incentives being offered by the capitalist State through its planning strategy to participative urban governance that sets its sights on creating a system of participation in which the "good citizen" sits around the table with others and works out the details for applying general plans and rules, or attempts to support regulations/peace-keeping measures that control urban strife, thus accepting the social dominant order as inevitable (ARANTES et al., 2000; MATIAS FERREIRA, 2004).

In fact, the crusade for renewal which has accompanied proposals based on participation has given rise to serious reticence in the academic milieu and in alternative political circles particularly when considering the “generosity” allowed this participation. From a more radical point of view, the proposition of urban governance has tended to coincide with the neoliberal-inspired “Minimum State” which includes privatising the public sector, deregulating private activity and securing the hegemony of market forces in supplying public services (BRENNER, THEODORE, 2002; PECK, TICKELL, 2002; JESSOP, 2002; GOUGH, 2002).

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: FALLACIES ABOUT PARTICIPATIVE CITIZENSHIP AND THE NEOLIBERAL OFFENSIVE

The “Initiative for the Qualification and Urban Re-insertion of Critical Neighbourhoods” (or the “Critical Neighbourhoods” Initiative), has helped towards making the present Government’s strategic measure of City Policies operational in Portugal. Its working method is founded on participative citizenship as it has involved the participation of local partnerships to define the intervention plans needed for regenerating the critical neighbourhoods such as the one described in this paper, Cova da Moura situated in Amadora. Effectively speaking, in referring to the expression “participative”, the process is immediately and automatically assumed to be “democratic” whereas in reality, the conditions in which these so-called citizen and local partnerships are only allowed a voice within the limited confines conditioning them have never been questioned. So-called social participation therefore becomes a democratic fallacy when its operational conditions and modes are nothing more than the political inversion of the very processes of socialising civic participation.

What in fact happens is that, owing to this supposed participation, the social stakeholders and the neighbourhood population legitimise the State’s capitalist power to regulate (be it at Central or Local level) and they unwittingly accept large real-estate projects aimed at urban regeneration as well as the benefits bespoke in programmes that only serve to strengthen the most powerful entrepreneurial fabric, the strategic functions and relations of control, and the power over and the domination of the urban space. This is nearly always made at the expense of investment in local services needed for collective consumption and it ends up by expelling the most under-privileged part of the resident population in an urban area that, because of its extraordinary proximity to the centre of the city of Lisbon, presents an excellent opportunity for real-estate business and investment and for reproducing capital.

Departing from the preliminary deduction that capitalist society is governed by a series of laws that are necessarily bourgeois (under the control of the dominant class in social and economic terms), such laws exist to protect the interests of capital and not the social majority. The same may be said of the state which, even under a liberal guise officially geared (in the theoretical sense) to safeguarding the interests of the whole of society, represents the domination of the “bourgeois class” more in particular with regard to this mode of production. In other words it not only serves the interests of groups enjoying high social and economic status but also the interests of capital. Central power – through the supposed decentralisation that promotes the much-publicised rationale of public participation in urban regeneration projects launched by the “Critical Neighbourhoods” Initiative – ensures that the spatial stability of the system continues rock fast and indeed strengthens its ability to withstand social change. This is because the administration foments the hierarchy and encourages social demand by means of urban planning and urban regeneration policies. As a matter of fact, public interventions which seek to valorise the city trigger off a chain of contradictory mechanisms leading to expulsions and re-appropriation. The new urban policies in Portugal have taken a more accentuated swing towards the market and consumers in detriment to the most under-privileged classes. The selective nature of investments that are favourable to reproducing capital means that the “city of the majority” is voted to abandonment, neglect and less attention, and the situation is all the more serious in the neediest places where the most under-privileged are packed tightly together.

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