

The relocation of squatter settlements in Brasília

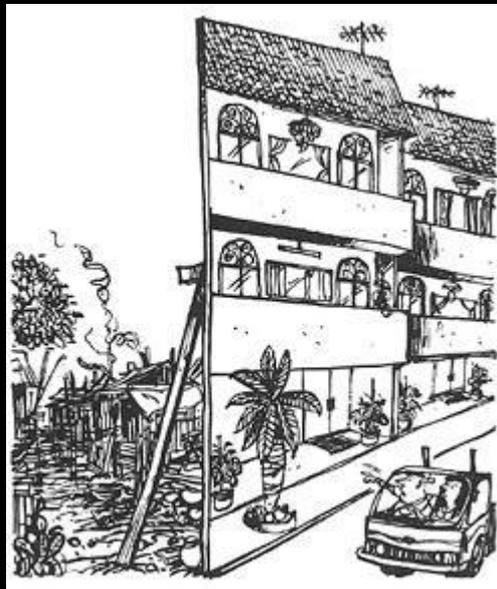
A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Architecture.

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1997



"It's better this way...now we don't have to clear the slums
everytime there's an international conference in town!"

Note: The following text includes only a small portion of the study, since the whole thesis comprises more than 100 pages, rendering it too long for the purposes of [Maquis](#). The full version, though, including all the graphs, tables and charts, will be available through the [MCHG](#) site in the near future.

Abstract

This study investigates the causes and consequences of intra-urban relocation of squatter settlements. The process of removal and resettlement of land invasions is analyzed in the light of past and contemporary experiences within the context of the developing countries, and a theoretical background is presented as a support for the

main argument of the study. The urban network of Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, was selected as case study to illustrate the use of resettlement as a planning instrument and to discuss the impact that such undertakings bring upon the relocated communities. The study demonstrates how the development style adopted by the local government, which combines clearance and relocation of squatter settlements with a strong emphasis on peripheral development, has resulted in the formation of a highly dissociating environment, in which the practice of land invasion has become the primary strategy of poor dwellers to achieve land tenure.

Preface

The growth rates of urban population in the Third World are astounding. The realization that this accelerated growth has had, and will continue to have, profound consequences upon the urban landscape of the Third World cities is crucial for the understanding of the issues addressed in this study. Urban growth often entails urban space reordering and land-redevelopment for the majority of the cities of the developing world. Intra-urban movements and population relocation are listed among some of the most controversial tools that have been used as official policies and as compulsory measures to complement the urban planning process. The issue of relocation of squatter settlements involves many crucial problems of the urban environment, such as: social and economic disruption, loss of informal networks and income generating activities, increased housing deficit, inadequate transportation systems, environmental degradation, etc. As will be demonstrated further in this study, the use of squatting practices as a method to achieve land tenure has numerous precedents in urban history. However, the existing body of knowledge regarding the processes that influence both the appearance and the relocation of squatter settlements has not reflected the magnitude of the problem. It is with the intention of contributing to increase the comprehension of these issues that the present study has been formulated.

Rationale

The rationale that has led to the formulation of the main argument of this study, besides the already mentioned lacuna on existing research, was the assumption that the decision of relocating low income settlements goes beyond the planning process, but is also influenced by several "external" factors, some of which are easily identifiable through a merely superficial analysis. Political struggle, economic speculation, social and cultural "boundaries", among other factors, are empirically assumed to have important roles in the characterization of urban land-use control and intra-urban population movements. Moreover, the processes of materialization and removal of land invasions within the urban context appear to follow somewhat distinct patterns, concerning factors such as the size, the location and the period in which these occupations take place. But to what extent each of these factors influence the decision of invading and/or relocating?

The composite analysis of these factors within a specific case study area, despite the risks that are intrinsic to reductionism, may confer a wider comprehension of the phenomenon, as the "broad statistical pictures always come alive better through individual case analysis" (Cernea, 1993:33). In that sense, the case study selected for this research, the urban network of Bras lia, the capital of Brazil, might prove helpful in exemplifying the causes and consequences of relocation of urban squatters within the context of urban areas of the developing world.

Throughout Latin America, and especially in Brazil, the governmental action in the field of low-income housing has traditionally adopted a centralized, paternalistic approach. The level of participation of the involved population has been, with very few exceptions, restricted to that of mere observation and acceptance of the actions that are imposed upon them through the use of urban planning strategies. Brasilia, despite its peculiar historical background, is a clear example of the authoritative character of Brazilian housing policies, providing a natural context in which to study the process of displacement of low-income populations. The extensive process of removal and resettlement of low-income communities, which conveyed to an extremely suburbanizing approach, has resulted in what has been widely recognized as an extremely segregative and class-selective urban environment.

In order to understand the effects of intra-urban relocation upon the current profile of Bras lia's landscape and its effects and consequences on the city's low-income population, it is essential to look back and try to discern the historical facts that have influenced the decision-making and the planning of its relocation projects. Furthermore, it is necessary to divulge the current situation of illegal settlements, the so-called "invasions," located within the capital's urban sphere and clarify certain aspects of the process of relocation of these invasions. Up to which point have factors such as the size and location of an illegal settlement influenced the process of relocation/resettlement of its population? Which areas have been the main targets for relocation schemes and why? What has been the effect of the relocation practices upon the characterization of the urban environment in Bras lia? In elucidating these basic interrogations, a first step is taken towards a better comprehension of the whole phenomenon of urban squatters, and the effects of intra-urban relocation in general.

Based on the above arguments, the following research question has been formulated:

  What sort of factors characterize the process of relocation/resettlement of squatter settlements in the context of developing countries?

Some keywords are readily identifiable in this question and, being actually intertwined, may be combined to generate several other arguments:

-   Relocation / Resettlement.
-   Urban Context (spatial urban configuration).
-   Low-income squatter settlements (invasions).

Research sub-questions (case study):

Â· What has been the extent of the relocation/resettlement of invasions within the urban context of BrasÃlia during the last decade?

Â· What has been the rationale behind the relocation schemes carried out in BrasÃlia during the past decade?

Â· What has been the effect of the relocation of squatter settlements upon the current urban configuration of BrasÃlia?

Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized in the following manner: The first chapter consists of a brief introduction to this study, explaining the rationale that guided the ensuing research, presenting the research questions, and defining the terminology used throughout the thesis; Chapter II presents a literature review on the subject of urban growth and population relocation in the context of developing countries, and aims at providing the necessary historical and theoretical background for the subsequent analysis; Chapter III introduces the case study area, highlighting the most significant historical facts leading to the construction of BrasÃlia, tracing back its modernist origins, and identifying some of the factors that helped create the current scenario of poverty and exclusion of the low-income groups of the city; Chapter IV concentrates primarily on the low-income housing problems in BrasÃlia, with special reference to the official policies towards squatter settlements, and the phenomenon of peripherization of poor communities; Chapter V presents a summary of the information that was gathered through the field research, consisting of an itemized account of the practice of urban land-invasions in BrasÃlia during the research time-frame, and providing the necessary data for the analysis contained in chapter VI; The final chapter of the study consists of a detailed analysis of the results of the field research data using analytical and comparative methods and, based on the results, some conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

Urban Growth, Migration, and Housing Issues in BrasÃlia.

Some of the most serious problems that BrasÃlia had to face during its first decade were related to the extensive migration process which flooded its housing system with appalling intensity. The growth rates to which the Federal District was subjected in its early years are unparalleled in the urban history of the whole Latin America. Brasilia's growth rates are by far the highest and, despite a projected decrease of almost 50% in the average annual growth rates which were observed during the eighties, it is still expected to surpass major cities like BogotÃ and SÃo Paulo in the rapidity of its urban growth process.

Despite the severity of this growth pattern, several of the problems that BrasÃlia faces today have been attributed not only to the intensity of the migration waves,

but to deviations from the original housing plan. Lack of development control, particularly in the housing subdivisions, land speculation and the continuous opening of large peripheral housing sites with minimum or no infrastructure or urban services are just a few examples of the issues that affected and changed the city's planned future. Nevertheless, these problems are not recent, having their genesis during the early stages of the consolidation period:

"The origins of the housing problem of Brasília go back to the time when its construction began. The lack of planning for installing the migrant families who arrived attracted by the opportunities for work offered by construction, the economic conditions of those human groups, and the incapacity of the sector to accompany the dynamic of population growth, caused the formation of agglomerations of sub-normal dwellings, in a process of accumulative proliferation which reached a recognizable critical level." (Codeplan, 1972:03). In the descriptive memorial of his Pilot Plan for Brasília, Lúcio Costa (1957) pointed out the extreme importance of providing suitable housing for the whole social spectrum within the same urban structure. Costa implied that the full range of the urban population should be accommodated within the city, and, familiar with the favelas of Rio, he recommended that:

"The growth of slums, whether on the city's outskirts or in the surrounding countryside, should at all costs be prevented. The development company should, within the scope of the proposed outline plan, make provision for decent and economical accommodation for the entire population." (Costa, 1957).

Although well intentioned, Costa's preoccupation was not reflected in the development style that followed the construction of the city, in what many authors recognize as being the main deviation from the original plan. The original intention was to provide suitable housing for all echelons of the government within the Pilot Plan's superquadras, which would then encourage a mix of social classes. The inter-residential facilities: nurseries, schools, social clubs, etc., were designed to serve as social-gathering spaces, where all the economic groups would be brought together. The solution that was adopted, however, shifted from its original "socialist" goals by adopting the idea of detached low-income peripheral settlements. The analysis of this "shift" in the urban priorities is critical to the understanding of the processes of displacement facing the capital's lower income groups. As Norma Evenson observed:

"Brasília has never had a coordinated plan of housing governing the size and types of units to be built and which would relate to a projected population. In general, the constructed housing tended to be middle class, partly because the capital was conceived as a city of white-collar civil servants, but also because its builders were reluctant to lower housing standards in what they envisaged as a model city." (Evenson, 1973:174).

This development style resulted in what several authors observe today as a disruption of social boundaries and in urban squatting practices, which derived from the lack of appropriate development strategies relating to the provision of low

income housing. This model led to the appearance of an important, albeit unplanned, aspect in the evolution of the sub-regional structure of Brasília: the satellite cities, which were created with the underlying purpose of accommodating the low-income population that could not afford the increasingly high living costs of the Plano Piloto. Often referred to as "official slums" at their outset, satellite towns such as Taguatinga and Gama were created with the intention of housing the families that were evicted during squatter settlements relocation programmes. These areas served basically as dormitories for the city's low-income population during their early stages and were deliberately located more than 30 km from the city center, even though their population remained strongly dependent on the jobs provided within that area:

"The squatterments and, to a considerable extent the satellite towns, serve as reserves, at little cost to the employers, where large numbers of workers may be maintained; proximity to lines of transportation permits easy access to the work sites; high unemployment rates depress wages; domestic, service, and commercial work is available to diminish the effects of this unemployment and ease the burdens of the middle and upper classes." (Epstein, 1975:13). The overall physical conditions of these settlements, both in the quality of its dwellings and in the provision of sanitary services, were not very different from those of the original squatter areas. Most of the streets were unpaved and had no public lighting, which led these areas to be regarded as "official favelas". The scenario was particularly bleak during the early stages of occupation, as described by Norma Evenson:

"By and large, the satellites present the appearance of ordinary, unprosperous country towns, with housing ranging from poor wooden shacks to relatively comfortable brick bungalows. Because the urban amenities are so primitive, however, and so many of the houses little more than huts, some visitors tend to confuse the satellite with favelas." (Evenson, 1973:176).

According to Ludwig (1980:22), NOVACAP, the governmental corporation, developed this "unplanned" aspect of the capital because of the "extreme pressure of a burgeoning population whose chaotic urban sprawl of shacks threatened to create a second city within the stark outlines of the Plano Piloto." Undoubtedly, the satellite towns constitute the most arresting departure from the original plans, and the consequences of the adoption of this solution are clear throughout Brasília's urban landscape, reflecting the incoherence between the sociological urban principles made clear by Lucio Costa's plan, and the actual implementation of the plan carried by the planning and development agencies:

"The government founded the satellite cities to sustain the intentions that were threatened by the formation of the illegal periphery: it attempted to counter the brazilianization of Brasilia by developing satellites in the image of an uncompromised Plano Piloto. By projecting the order of this center to the periphery, the planners thus remained faithful to their model of exemplary capital. In maintaining the spatial dichotomy between center and periphery by a principle of status differentiation, the government created two broad status groups among Brasilienses: one group comprised those people living in the Plano Piloto, and the

other those living in the satellite cities. These two status groups were, with few exceptions, mutually exclusive during the formative period of these settlements, 1958-65." (Holston, 1989:273,281).

It seems obvious that the development style adopted for the city had stronger effects on the communities with lower income levels, but its effects are indubitably of city-wide proportions. The process of peripherization, that started with the removal of squatter settlements and labour camps in the early sixties, incurred in a type of urban sprawl that contributed to the widening of the gap between the poor and the rich, in a unchanged pattern which has been routinely carried out by succeeding governments, contributing further to the excluding character of the city:

"Since the beginning of Brasilia the urban poor have been continuously pushed out to peripheral developments and to satellite cities created specifically to provide housing for them. Evictions, police actions, resettlement programmes, master planning, land use regulations and police control over land occupation are just some of the instruments utilized by the local government to manage the growth and development of the city." (Acioly, 1994:246).

From the early stages of the city, the official strategy has been that of complete eradication of the squatter settlements from the urban tissue. A large percentage of these settlements, however, remained seemingly untouched for many years, resisting the several attempts of removal, usually through the use of political pressure or of mere social confrontation, with the most famous case being that of Vila Paranoá (Fig. 20), a former labour camp that resisted several removal attempts by successive governments until it was finally recognized and formally settled with few modifications to its original arrangement.

The Policy of Clearance: Historical Facts.

In 1970, under the strict ruling of the military government, a commission was created in Brasília with the express objective of clearing all the invasions of land and transferring their population to resettlement colonies, which then consisted basically of raw plot areas located as far as thirty kilometers from the city center. As a result, the satellite town of CÃ¡ndia was created, becoming the first clear attempt towards the peripherization of low-income settlements in Brasília, and exemplifying the official choice for peripheral expansion:

"This model [removal and resettlement] consolidated a trend towards peripheral development and increased the disparity between residential areas in terms of living standards, level of services and transportation costs, and perpetuated very sharp income inequalities." (Acioly, 1994:244).

This trend of peripherization is not exclusive to the Federal District. Since the early thirties, when the first shanties began to appear in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the official policy was to "prevent their birth, stunt their growth, and hasten their death." (Perlman, 1974:11). The official precedent for removal and resettlement was set in 1947, with the constitution of the first committee for eradication of the

favelas of the State of Rio. On that account, it is not surprising that the developers of Brasilia, especially with the backing provided by the military takeover of 1964, maintained the same development policies towards poor urban dwellers: "The physical segregation of rich and poor in Brasilia, although embodying an overall pattern of dwelling common to other cities, represents a much more clear-cut and thoroughgoing separation than is seen elsewhere." (Evenson, 1973:179).

The opening of new peripheral resettlement developments such as Samambaia, which grew from 60,000 inhabitants in 1989 to an estimated population of about 200,000 in 1994, and the construction of a new suburban subway system, that will make the link between the largest satellite towns - Taguatinga, Samambaia and Ceilândia - and the Plano Piloto, are clear indications of the idiosyncrasy of the official policies, which have often opted for accommodating, rather than addressing, some of the most contentious urban problems:

"Brasilia has avoided many of the oppressive problems of other Brazilian cities, by admittedly foisting 2 million of the Federal District's 2.5 million people onto nearby satellite cities." (Hess, 1991:96).

It is undeniable that the option for peripheral development has modified the original "utopian" plan in a permanent way and, unfortunately, there is no visible sign of a change in this pattern, at least in the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, the "abrupt disruption of the inhabitants' social environment and the sudden collapse of their informal networks of income generation" (Acioly, 1994:256) have only had a slender significance on governmental planning decisions, which often seem to completely disregard the possibility for self-improvement of the communities and the potentials of upgrading the physical aspects of the existing squatter settlements.

Some Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout this study, it has been demonstrated that the process of relocation of squatter settlements is an extremely important component of urban development, especially in context of the fast growing centers of the developing world. The information base related to high rates of urban population growth, in the form of migration and urban land reordering and redevelopment, points to the fact that this element is far from being insignificant, as the measure of available research might suggest.

The analysis of the urban network of Brasília as case study for this research has proved that not only the so-called "megacities" have suffered from the effects of development-induced displacement of low-income communities. Despite its atypical urban configuration and peculiar history of development, Brasília comes into sight as the most clear illustration of a problem that has invariably plagued the mid-sized urban centers of Brazil.

The choice for peripheral development in Bras lia may be interpreted as a product of an intricate historical process, in which cultural, economical and social factors have been combined with intense migration levels and lack of proper housing strategies, resulting in major deviations from the original intentions of the city plan. Nevertheless, by studying the main characteristics and patterns of development and relocation of squatter settlements in Bras lia, it has been possible to identify and confirm some hypotheses regarding the evolution of these areas in a wider connotation. The answer to the main question of this study, regarding the extent and characterization of the invasion practices within the urban context of Bras lia, has been accomplished through the analysis of the research data, but some of the most important arguments regarding the effects of peripherization of low-income communities can only be satisfactorily answered if one perceives them as a compound element, related to a myriad of urban disciplines, some of which are beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, after acknowledging the complexity of this issue, it is still possible to draw some general conclusions and recommendations, as follows:

-   Peripheral development and relocation of urban squatters in Bras lia has meant an increase of the spatial segregation of social groups, fostering uneven distribution of urban amenities and restricting access to income-generating activities, resulting in a disrupted perception of the urban environment and increasing the overall insensibility of the population regarding the most contentious urban problems.
-   The high cost of serviced urban land, coupled with the decrease in the ability of government to provide satisfactory income options for the relocatees, has resulted in the adoption of a style of urban development that does not involve social integrating measures, contributing to raise the poverty levels even further.
-   The inconsistency of relocation policies and the lack of continuity in the housing strategies, have provoked the complete failure of the resettlement schemes, which have solved neither the deficit of low-income housing nor the problems inherent to illegal occupation of urban land.
-   The notion of obligatory governmental assistance, and the intrinsic paternalistic intervention of official housing policies, have developed a sometimes undesirable link between economic speculation, politics and urban planning, resulting in an uneven treatment towards the most vulnerable squatter dwellers.
-   Even with absolute control over the process of occupation of urban land, the governmental systems have showed extreme unwillingness to accommodate the needs of poor inhabitants, which are not seen as an integral part of the spatial planning process.
-   The design of relocation projects should encourage the direct involvement of the relocated communities in both the planning and the consolidation stages. This participatory model requires that popular participation be enhanced in relationship to all the phases of the relocation process, what should be provided either directly or through representations from community-based organizations (CBOs) and / or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
-   To minimize the phenomenon of gentrification, the planning of resettlement schemes should assure the provision of employment/income generating opportunities and community development programmes as the paramount components of the relocation process, fostering the development of informal activities, and reducing as much as possible the need for transportation between the workplace and the household.

Despite the obvious disruptions and hardship caused by relocation schemes, there is a wide recognition that their implementation are sometimes unavoidable. Hence, there is an urgent need for an itemized reevaluation of the most significant aspects of such practices, in order to better respond to the very dissimilar situations of each squatter community.

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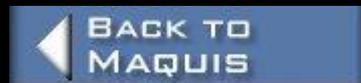
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