

The Relationship between Urban Morphology and Space Appropriations in Degraded Areas

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Analysing the morphological dimension of space can allow us to understand the relation it establishes with the social logic of a human settlement. This work attempts to express that degraded spaces, so visible in cities, cannot be understood separated from the society which produces them. From an analytical vision, inspired by Space Syntax theories, we will try to identify the socio-political properties responsible for the genesis of those degraded areas and analyse the relations which the inhabitants of those contexts create with the every-day spaces. In such environments, the relations are deeply connected with lifestyles and uses of space.

The socially appropriated physical space expresses social distances and hierarchies, consisting in a form of symbolic and material violence. Proximity within physical space, allows that proximity within social space produces effects related to accumulation of capital, such as social and symbolic capital (BOURDIEU:1993). In Brazilian cities, urban relationships have changed significantly, since we witness spatial proximity between heterogenic groups, that are, on the other hand, socially distant (CALDEIRA:2000). Favela (and we could say slums, in general), being understood as a place dominated and shaped by deviations (such as crime or drug traffic, among others, built due to the absence of "eyes on the street" and constitution of isolated groups) is becoming more and more excluded of a physical and social relationship with the "city", and this emphasises social and spatial segregation (JACOBS:2003; CALDEIRA:2000; CHAMPAGNE, BOURGOIS in BOURDIEU:1993). Those circumstances lead to a vicious circle, since the inhabitants, when feeling excluded, tend to assume behaviours that excluded them even more. This circle is stimulated by the media that "create effects of reality by producing a mediatic vision", that influences deeply in a symbolic way, contributing for the stigmatization of those places (BOURDIEU:1993; CHAMPAGNE in BOURDIEU:1993).

The problem of spatial relegation is becoming more extensive, due to the rapid expansion of cities and the growing of informal settlements in big urban areas. These questions have led to numerous studies, drawn from different points of view, such as researches concerning the socio-spatial analysis, the morphological analysis and its connection with forms of appropriation, or the coming out of new elements of segregation, along with others.

The relations between society and the form of human settlements are broached by Holanda (2002), from a perspective focused on co-presence, through three analytical levels: spatial patterns, spatial life and social life. Based on spatial patterns and transversely to a specific selection of categories, it is possible to establish relations between space and society; from an analytical prism centred in spatial life it is possible to connect social get-together patterns with space; the analysis about social life permits to characterize cultural patterns which are responsible for the constitution of spatial patterns and spatial life. Throughout this integrated analysis and its assessment by a combination of specific socio-economical characteristics, we try to interpret how works the relation between the different spaces of the favela and the way they are appropriated by their inhabitants, since, we believe that urban morphology consents to understand the behaviour of space users and it can determine ways of managing foreseeable conflicts interconnected with the use of these spaces.

The questions concerning degraded settlements are complex and interdisciplinary, which means they must be observed in a systemic way, allowing the key elements that interfere with the actions related to slum-upgrading be understood in a way that makes possible an individual analysis of the organic life of the favela, working, on one hand with questions related with physical, social and spatial aspects, and, on the other, considering the settlement as a whole. For this, we need the so called integrated analysis, using instruments of physical, spatial and social evaluation, concerning the problem of the city interconnected with the structure and the meaning of social relation.

The space of these places must be classified as a socio-spatial concept, not simply defined by reference to its physical form, but also considering specific types of social gatherings and categories. The topics that present the form determined by the way of production of space need to be worked out and clarified, specially the link between productive process and some elementary qualities of architectonic space, like mobility or the structure of barriers/boundaries and permeability acquainted with usage and displacement in space. Looking at the society spatially can make possible to identify and understand the links and relations between architecture and society, making clearer the questions in which architectonical space is comprised of social structures, how it can contribute to the access to material and immaterial life and how it composes relations of power and control.

Key-words: degraded settlements, urban morphology, space syntax, space appropriation.

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