

Accessibility in historical areas: what is the contribution of strategic planning? The case of Recife, Brazil

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ABSTRACT: issues concerning accessibility and transport and those related to urban renewing strategies, have been in the agenda of many cities around the world. The recent adoption of urban policies addressed to historical centres appears at the same time as strategic planning issues, which became, in turn, a new approach capable of dealing with the crisis urban planning has faced. Strategic plans for central areas have put emphasis on the transport issues insofar as the accessibility to these areas is a crucial variable for the sustainability of the renewing processes. This paper intends to show how fragile is the relationship between the implementation of urban renewing projects for the city centre of Recife, particularly for Bairro do Recife, and the possible consequences for the sustainability of the renewing process.

RÉSUMÉ : Les questions concernant l'accessibilité et le transport et celles liées aux stratégies de renouveau urbain, ont été à l'ordre du jour de beaucoup de villes du monde entier. L'adoption récente de politiques urbaines adressées aux centres historiques apparaît en même temps que des questions de planification stratégiques, qui sont devenues, à leur tour, une nouvelle approche capable de gérer la crise à laquelle la planification urbaine a fait face. Des projets stratégiques pour des zones centrales ont mis l'accent sur les questions de transport dans la mesure où l'accessibilité à ces zones est une variable cruciale pour le caractère durable des processus de renouveau. La communication a pour but de montrer la fragilité du rapport entre la mise en oeuvre de projets de renouveau urbain pour le centre ville de Recife, en particulier pour Bairro do Recife, et les conséquences possibles pour le caractère durable du processus de renouveau.

1 INTRODUCTION

Besides constituting the core of the transport nets, the central areas of the cities are, usually, the place where good part of the people's flow converges. There, usually, are located the headquarters of government powers and a wide range of economic activities which varies from industrial activities to retail and wholesale trade and services.

The central areas have faced cycles of valorisation and decadence. Territories of origin of the cities, home and business place of the dominant classes, of the luxury trade, of the modern services and of the leisure equipments, the central areas begin their decadence processes insofar as the cities grow and expand territorially. The improvements on communications and on the transport systems, the abandonment of the city centre for higher income classes, and the appearance of new consumption areas with provision of goods and services very close to them contributed to the process of decadence of

their activities and obsolescence of their urban structures (Villaça, 1998; Zancheti et al, 1998).

However, due to economical and social importance the city centres still possess, they figure again in the urban planning agenda, in particular and more intensely from the 1990's, when they become the focus of public and private investments. Urban policies for those areas have as main objective the promotion of new economic dynamics starting from the renewing of their activities, stimulating changes in the land use patterns and also allowing new economic activities to set up. Although urban renewing experiences occurred in the past, it is from the 1990's that they intensify. The experiences as the one of Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid and Lisbon, at the international set, and of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Salvador and Recife, in the Brazilian context, constitute important cases for analysis concerning the contribution of strategic planning in improving accessibility in historical centres. On the one hand, the international experiences show that improvements and investments on the operation in mass transit, on

communication infrastructures and on non-motorized transport are one of the first steps to attract new investments in contemporary cities, insofar as they improve their accessibility. On the other, the experiences in Brazil seem not to consider such a premise resulting, thus, in poor investments on such issues.

This paper intends to show (i) how fragile is the relationship between actions addressed to renewing the city centre of Recife, capital city of the State of Pernambuco, Brazil, specifically the neighbourhood of Recife, and the accessibility to the area; and (ii) the possible consequences for the sustainability of the renewing process.

This paper follows into five sections: section 2 introduces briefly the crisis both in the transport planning and urban planning, and shows how the literature considers the strategic planning as the current model capable of dealing with urban contexts, recognizing also the role played by accessibility and mobility matters; section 3, in turn, concerns the preference of strategic plans to address actions to central or obsolescent areas in the cities; section 4 provides information of the city of Recife; section 5 describes the renewing process of *Bairro do Recife* considering the nature of projects already implemented and its future actions; and, finally, section 6 reinforces the possible contribution of strategic planning for improving accessibility in historical areas, mainly by improving mass transit systems and the infrastructure for non motorized trips, and shows the consequences of not taken it into consideration for the urban renewing process of *Bairro do Recife*.

2 TRANSPORT PLANNING, URBAN PLANNING AND THE CITY: TWO CRISES, A REALITY

According to Hanson (1995), "transportation is vital to (...) urban life (...) because it is an absolutely necessary means to an end: it allows people to carry out the diverse range of activities that make up daily life. Because cities consist of spatially separated, highly specialized land uses - food stores, Laundromats, hardware stores, banks, drugstores, hospitals, libraries, schools, post offices, and so on - people must travel if they want to obtain necessary goods and services ". Besides, the location of a territory in the transport net determines its accessibility and that accessibility has a relevant impact, among other factors, on the land value: the most accessible lands, in addition the other attributes, are the more expensive land in the land market .

The World Bank's report *Cities on the Move* (2001) shows that "economically, transport is the life blood of cities, which in most developing countries are the major sources of national economic growth which makes poverty reduction possible. Poor transport inhibits growth. Socially, transport is the means of (or impediment to) accessibility to the

jobs, health, education and social services essential to the welfare of the poor (...) ". Thus, considered as a function of common interest for the economy and for the social relations in the cities, the appropriate operation of the transport system is essential to reach the efficiency and competitiveness disputed by the regional and world economic arrangements and to reduce social inequalities.

In the Brazilian urban context, the motorized transport became the main mode of travel. It is observed, on the one hand, that the number of car owners has been growing progressively, put as efficient alternative of transport for people with better financial conditions. The city of São Paulo, for instance, presents high indexes in terms of private motorized transport - 2,55 inhabitants per private car against 7,33, on average, to the country (Barat, 2001). On the other hand, bus and trains are the modes of transport frequently used by low income people (ibid, 2001). Besides, whereas urban roads are enlarged to improve traffic flows, government institutions have facing difficult to manage the transport policies.

Parallel to the increment of the number of private cars, the mass transit systems are not able to provide the adequate services to the ever growing demand. In spite of some improvements, the systems face cyclical crises mainly in virtue of the incompatibility among costs, tariffs and incomes, of precarious management and of shortage of resources for investments. Lately, they have facing the competition of the paratransit, that captured part of their demand and have worsened the financial condition of the mass transit systems (Lima Neto, 2000). Moving from a solution to a problem, the efficiency, the reliability and the importance of the mass transit before other public demands have declined.

In fact, as Vasconcellos (1998) states, a clear separation between those who have access to private car and those who depend on the mass transit is observed, which mirrors the social and economic disparities within the society and reflects on the unbalance between the emphasis put upon the private cars and the discontinued investment the public transport systems have faced. Few portion of the population enjoy better transport conditions; most of them have their accessibility constrained .

Urban planning, as well as transport planning, is also suffering from crises of legitimacy. The uncontrolled growth of cities, the degradation of public spaces, the low quality of the spaces generated by the stubborn urban expansion, the lack of public investments for implementing urban projects, the inefficiency of their instruments to respond rapid urban changes, and the weak institutionalization of their organizational structures contribute, among others, to raise questions about its capacity to deal with urban contexts. The traditional urban planning, based on rational procedures and free values principles, is questioned and new approaches to dealing with the

city of the future appear in the urban planning literature. One of them is denominated as Strategic Planning, so in vogue recently.

For Sánchez (1999), urban policies by the end of the 20th Century have applying both strategic plans and the city marketing as instruments to recover the legitimacy lost by urban plans concerning its capacity to act on cities. Arantes (2000), in turn, emphasises that it is through the diffusion of the strategic planning that is possible to verify, in the literature, a recent way back to the city. For her, however, there is no structural rupture between the traditional model frequently adopted and the strategic planning except for the management model adopted by the latter. Vainer (2000) argues that the strategic planning is one of the urban planning approaches which compete to occupy the emptiness left by the traditional technocratic-centralized planning. Nevertheless, the strategic planning has been diffused in Brazil and in Latin America for the combined action of several multilateral agencies and, in particular, for the Catalan consultants.

The strategic planning, according to some scholars, should be adopted by the local governments for cities are submitted to the same conditions as firms. Competition is, therefore, the key word in that process. As Vainer (*ibid*) affirms, "if during a large period the debate concerning urban issues addressed questions such as uncontrolled urban growth, reproduction of the workforce, equipments of collective consumption, urban social movements and rationalization of land use, the new urban question would, now, have as central point the matter of urban competitiveness. (*ibid*)"

Borja and Castells (1997) make clear this argument when they stated that "the local government should promote the city abroad, developing a strong and positive image supported by a good offer of infrastructure and services (communication, services, culture, safety, etc) capable of attracting investors, visitors and solvent users to the city and which facilitate exportation (of goods and services, of their professionals, etc)." The elaboration of strategic projects capable of promoting urban changes is crucial in that process.

3. ACCESSIBILITY AND URBAN RENEWAL IN CENTRAL AREAS

Before continuing the discussion it is important to define the terms accessibility and mobility applied in this paper. It is used the concept adopted by Hanson (1995) who defines accessibility as a number of opportunities, also called activity sites, available within a certain distance or travel time. Mobility, in turn, refers to the ability to move between different activities sites (e.g. from home to a grocery store). It can be said, therefore, that accessibility reflects a variety of destinies that one can reach and the arch of possible social, economic and cultural relationship in a

society. In this sense, accessibility has direct relationship with the spatial coverage of the transport system.

The main objectives of strategic plans are those which allow a qualitative jump concerning the accessibility and mobility of the urban-regional space, and the creation of centralities in the territory. For Borja (2001), accessibility and the internal mobility are indispensable requirements for the competitiveness of a city as a "economic means" and for achieving its social integration function. Thus, most of the great strategic projects deal with mass transit issues, zones for logistics activities, improvements in the communication infrastructures (stations, ports), etc. Over that basis will take place economic projects such as technological parks, exhibition and cultural centres, etc. It is important to emphasise that investments on mass transit operations and on communication infrastructures are crucial for reaching the objectives proposed by strategic plans in contemporary cities. Therefore, it is argued that accessibility is a relevant variable in the process of promoting cities, and that strategic planning, as conceived by most of the international experiences, has the potential to strengthen the mass transit systems and non-motorized trips.

The international experiences have been focusing, usually, on urban centres as territorial areas for strategic performances. In most of the cases, the continuous urban environmental decay is diagnosed as a result of displacement of activities provoking, as a consequence, the residents and jobs' exodus. What to do with the enormous fixed capital which represented the public investment and which reinforce the centrality of places through the provision of infrastructure and transport services? How this capital can be used and who benefits from it, ask Portas (2001).

Cities need to offer conditions such as transport and communication infrastructures, political stability and quality of life, to attract investments. As mentioned above, very frequently, strategic plans addressed their project to central and/or obsolescent areas. Over them, changes in land uses and the installation of new activities are stimulated so as to give the economy a new dynamic, attracting, consequently, new trips to these places.

In urban areas, people and goods need to move fast, economically and comfortably, a lot of times at the same time and for the same places. Accessibility and the transport system have, therefore, deep implication in the operational costs of urban functions (Villaça, 1978). These concerns, however, seem not to be taken into account in the experience carried out by the municipality of Recife through the Plan for renewing the *Bairro do Recife*.

4. THE CITY OF THE RECIFE: AN INTRODUCTION

The municipality of Recife, nucleus of the Metropolitan Area of Recife (MAR), have the surface of 220 km² and a population of 1.421.947 inhabitants, corresponding to 18% of the population of the State of Pernambuco, northeast of Brazil. Its density is of 6.458 inhabitants/km². In relation to the Metropolitan Area of Recife, the municipality of Recife represents 7,9% its surface, 43,6% of its population and 60% of its gross domestic product (IBGE, 2000).

The population dynamic reveals a slowing down in the rhythm of its growth. In fact, what is observed is an increase in the population in the municipalities nearby Recife resulting in a physical conurbation expanded in 50 km from north to south and in about 20 km from east to west (Prefeitura do Recife, 2002).

The municipal law which defines the structures for operating the local urban planning system, divides the territory of the city into 6 political-administrative zones, named RPAs (see figure 1). RPA1, corresponds to the city centre, sheltering the original nucleus of Recife. This RPA is characterized by the development of a wide range of activities which varies from port activities to tertiary ones; by the location of executive, legislative and judiciary headquarters and by the concentration of 85% of the total heritage of city. In spite of the decline of its economical importance expressed in the obsolescence of significant structures of their older neighbourhoods, it is in that RPA where the medical pole and the second largest shopping centre of the city are located. RPA1 is limited by 1st Perimetral of the City, that allows not only the connections among all RPAs, through the main intersection points with the radial roads, but also it constitutes a metropolitan axis of connection between the municipalities of Recife and Olinda.

Figure 1 Map of Recife and its RPAs



Considering the travel patterns of the population of Recife, it is verified that bus is the more used

mode of transport followed, in decreasing order, by walking, private car and bicycle. The other modes used by the population are inferior to 2% (see table 1). That demonstrates the importance of investments which should be accomplished by public and private sectors concerning the improvements in the mass transit infrastructures and services.

Table 1: Modal split in the city of Recife

Mode of travel	Trips made %	Mode of travel	Trips made %
metro	0,99	car	20,00
train	0,03	táxi	0,77
bus	39,64	motorcycle	0,55
coach	0,09	truck	0,01
school bus	1,10	bicycle	2,36
walking	32,79	other	1,67

Source: Origin/Destination Survey – EMTU/Recife (1997)

Since 1997, the Bus System of Recife (BSR/Recife) is managed by the Metropolitan Company of Urban Transports (EMTU/Recife). Such delegation was given through Municipal Ordinance of the City Hall of Recife. In Recife circulates local as well as metropolitan bus lines, using the same roads and corridors of traffic. In some areas of the city, there is bus circulating with competitive tariffs, what gives to user the right of free choice.

As shown in the table 2, the largest number of travel made by bus is for RPA 1 (city centre); by private car are for RPAs 4 and 6 (west and south); and by walking is for RPA 5 (southwest). It is observed that walking trips are relevant and constitute one of the most important modes of travel in the city. However, government initiatives in this matter are incipient.

Table 2: Modal split in the city of Recife by RPA

Mode of travel	RPA 1 %	RPA 2 %	RPA 3 %	RPA 4 %	RPA 5 %	RPA 6 %
Bus	53,71	37,68	37,88	37,25	32,46	35,77
Private car	20,50	17,97	21,02	23,14	14,33	23,66
Walking	19,77	37,82	33,35	31,12	43,17	32,96
Other	6,02	6,53	7,75	8,49	10,04	7,61

Source: Origin/Destination Survey – EMTU/Recife (1997)

5 BAIRRO DO RECIFE AND ITS URBAN RENOVATION PROCESS

The *Bairro do Recife* together with Santo Antonio, São José and Boa Vista are the neighbourhood which constitute the historical centre of the city of Recife. *Bairro do Recife*, where the city originated, concentrated in the 19th Century practically all the city urban economy. The first program of urban renewal for this area was implemented between 1913 and 1920, and focused its actions on enlargement of roads, modernization of its port and in the sanitation

provision. The economic decay of its activities and the degradation of its infrastructure began in the late 1940's when important activities were set up firstly in the neighbourhood of Santo Antônio and lately in the neighbourhood of Boa Vista (Zancheti, 1995).

The decentralization of the main economic activities and services, until then located in the central territory of the city, intensified with the metropolization. The reorganization of the urban functions, its demographic and spatial growth, the improvement in the modes of transport, the implementation of a radial-perimetral road system, and the increasing investments in the real estates close to the central area, caused strong impact on the central area (ibid). They took the neighbourhoods of Recife, Santo Antônio, São José and Boa Vista to a growing process of degradation both of their infrastructures and of their environment. The loss of attractiveness of the Recife centre can be verified by the reduction in the number of trips made to this area.

In spite of the important initiative, in the 1970's, on developing a programme for preservation of the city heritage, it was only in the mid-1980's that the municipal power acted emphatically so as to reduce the degradation process in the city centre. It is important to stress that in this period the metropolitan planning system and the urban transport system were structured through the institutionalization of the Foundation for Development of the Metropolitan Area of Recife (FIDEM) and the Metropolitan Company of Urban Transports (EMTU). After the establishment of the Metropolitan Area of Recife (RMR), the urban and transport studies and plans developed until the 1990's, frequently pointed out the expansion of the city to areas nearby the city centre, the traffic jams and lack of parking zones in the central area of Recife as problems which needed to be sorted out.

The strategy adopted in the 1980's to stop the process of economic and environmental decay of the city centre, identified two macro zones for action: one referring to the neighbourhoods of Santo Antonio, São José and Boa Vista and other to *Bairro do Recife*. While the first focused on the maintenance of the public spaces (e.g. urban cleaning) and the organization of the informal market activities, the second set up an urban planning office named *Escritório de Revitalização do Bairro do Recife* (ERBR) responsible for putting in practice strategic projects to this macro zone which culminated, in turn, with the development of the Plan for Renewal the *Bairro do Recife* (PRBR), today in progress. The main objectives of PRBR are (i) to transform the economy of the neighbourhood to turn it in a regional metropolitan centre; (ii) to turn the neighbourhood as a leisure and amusement place for the whole population of the city; and (iii) to turn the neighbourhood as a centre of national and international tourism. It is possible to observe that the PRBR has objectives very

frequently found in strategic plans for renewing central areas in Brazil and abroad. One of the differences observed, however, concerns the little importance given to accessibility in the process of implementation of PRBR's projects.

As far as the public transport is concerned, the plans of that period proposed the creation of an integrated structural system with the implementation of a mass transit system, including bus and metro modes, the transformation of the transport net from radial to radial-perimetral solving the problems of the pendulum trips as well as the derived problems of the people's and vehicles convergence to the central area. Besides these, the creation of new bus lines linking neighbourhoods, of bus lanes, of pedestrian streets, of parking facilities and the new arrangements for the bus terminals in the city centre were proposed.

Nowadays one can still observe that the urban strategies adopted to deal with these central neighbourhoods have not changed much. While for Santo Antonio, São José and Boa Vista the main local government initiatives is still confined to maintenance of urban spaces, for *Bairro do Recife* it covers a wide range of actions to attract new businesses and modern services through tax compensations and the promotion of cultural activities which increase the tourism and enhance the place. These actions, nevertheless, are guided by the PRBR.

As far as the mass transit and accessibility to those areas are concerned the public and private initiatives have little expression. Located in the Santo Antonio neighbourhood, the metro central station did not provoke any significant economic dynamic in its surrounding. The rationalization of the number of bus lines which go to city centre, the provision of bus rapid transit corridors and the improvement of the bus operational system are examples of initiatives that urge to be done. To non motorized trips, that represents 35,15% of the daily trips in Recife, little attention is given. The low quality of the public walks pavement, always obstructed by the informal market activities, and the non existence of bike lanes or any kind of incentives to the use of bicycles provides examples of such a situation.

The implementation process of PRBR projects, in turn, have addressed significant part of private and public investment through international programmes, financing the recovery of historical buildings and promoting splits in the land uses. Among the projects foreseen in the PRBR, the Animation, Cultural and Leisure pole of the street of Bom Jesus, the Technology, Information and Communication Enterprises of Porto Digital and the Alfândega Shopping Centre were already implemented and have provided a new dynamics in the renewing process. In fact, this performance gives PRBR the status of one of the best urban renewing plans in Brazil (Zancheti et al, 1998). However, it is still necessary

to expand urban activities to other areas of the neighbourhood, as for instance to Pilar's area, where lives most of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in precarious housing conditions.

As far as the accessibility to the neighbourhood is concerned the plan foresaw, mainly, the implementation of a road ring to improve traffic conditions and improvements of parking facilities. There is no clear priority to mass transit and to non motorized modes of transport. Nevertheless, contrary to the above mentioned projects which have changing the economic profile of the neighbourhood, few of the accessibility measures were undertaken. The road ring was not implemented and debate to improve the mass transit to the area still has to be done.

6. CONCLUSION

The international experiences on urban renewal of central areas of cities have adopted strategic approaches to urban planning whose focus is on implementation rather than on urban guidelines. Using concepts and methodologies from the firms, the strategic planning approaches the city as a business and as such it has to be competitive. In search of this quality the investments should be addressed to provide, for instance, good communication nets, mass transit, modern services and leisure and cultural facilities. The place of accessibility in strategic plans is central for its implementation process. It is from the investment to improve mass transit and communication infrastructures that other activities follow, such as, leisure centres, high-tech offices, etc.

The Plan for Renewal the *Bairro do Recife* (PRBR) has as main purpose to turn the neighbourhood in one of the most dynamic areas of the city, stopping its decaying process, through the diversification of land use patterns and the provision of incentives to installation of new economic activities principally those related to the modern services and culture and leisure. However, little attention has been given to one of the components which make it to happen in a sustainable way: the accessibility to the neighbourhood and the related transport projects has been neglected. Issues concerning accessibility are only debated when specific problems of traffic jam and of parking facilities to private car appear and, very frequently, precarious solutions are provided. The accessibility to public transport is not considered even though the figures show that the main mode of travel to the city centre is by bus. In other words, it can be said that, in opposite important international experiences to renewing urban areas which adopted a strategic planning approach, the issues of accessibility in the case of PRBR is rather considered as a consequence of the economic dynamics of the area than as a structural component of the renewing process itself.

It is important to stress that the revitalization which occur from the installation of new activities takes place in a limited physical space, which may rapidly become saturated. This situation may be worse without the support of the transport system to access such activity sites. Therefore, one can argue that better facilities to access these sites, as the improvement in mass transit and non-motorized modes of travel, are crucial to guarantee the sustainability of the renewing process in *Bairro do Recife*. In other words, if measures are not taken to improve the public transport system to the area the sustainability of renewing process is threatened.

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