

# PUBLIC SPACES<sup>1</sup> IN SAO PAULO: SOME DIFFERENT APPROACHES

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## ABSTRACT

*Sao Paulo is one of the most interesting Latin American Cities nowadays. Several recent studies have focused on this city through distinguished approaches, such as its cultural diversity, multiple ethnicities, social and economical contrasts, as well as its different spatial arrangements. Globalization has also modified its importance in the international context, bringing a new light to World Cities' hierarchy (Koulioumba, 2002). In this sense, this article aims at discussing some of the contemporary approaches to the use of public space, particularly to some social and cultural exchanges that are happening mainly in Sao Paulo's central area, including, for example: streets, squares, parks or meeting points; open air markets; street shopping and shopping centers. Our main objective is to point out how recent urban transformations have contributed, on the one hand, to change some forms of social coexistence, destabilizing life in community, as suggested by Baumann (2008) as well as legitimizing individualism, as presented by Richard Sennett. However, it has been noticed, on the other hand, that well established social networks stimulate sociability and public space use, especially in some places where historical, economical or cultural associations dominate, in spite of the advances of globalized Capitalism. For this paper, three different situations in Sao Paulo's city will be analyzed: Augusta Street, Shopping Center Higienópolis and Bom Retiro, a central based and immigrant neighborhood, as well as some other examples. Therefore, we hope to leave some contributions to the public space debate.*

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<sup>1</sup> PAQUOT, T. *L'espace public*. Paris: La Découverte, 2009. In this book's introduction the author proposes a distinction between the following terms: public spaces and public space. Public spaces are more related to an architectural and urban vocabulary, assuming a more physical connotation whereas public space is linked to a political and philosophical vocabulary, based much more on citizenship practices.

### INTRODUCTION

The present article aims at analyzing the public space in Sao Paulo city through some distinguishing approaches. In the past decades, dealing with such questions is becoming something more and more complex. On the one hand, it has been noticed a substantial increase in shanty towns ('favelas'<sup>2</sup>), edge cities, shopping centers and business centers, during the 80's and 90's, revealing a social-spatial fragmentation of the territory that promotes a confined urban life, restricted to controlled, protected and vulnerable situations, of either high or low income classes (Rolinik, 2001). On the other hand, it is been observed that the traditional city center is suffering from a severe degradation, popularization and diversification process (Frúgoli Jr., 1995).

We can also identify the constitution of some new urban centralities<sup>3</sup> and the emptiness of others, due to profound changes in socio-economical aspects, such as, the new international labor division that establishes itself, comprising time-space<sup>4</sup>, and conferring a significant value to World or Global Cities, like Sao Paulo (Sassen, 1994; Koulioumba, 2002). *Therefore, as suggested by Carlos (2004), "The city's production such an enterprise appears based on a model inspired by vehicles, prioritizing the existence of empty spaces for circulation, where individual private transportation dominates with all its strength (...) In such a context, public space transforms itself – becoming meaningless because it is more limited and imposes new ways of appropriation – streets utilization, for example, where meeting points are vanished, breaking up with old neighborhood relationships, as well as encouraging some decrease in sociability"* (p. 71).

However, on the the other hand, it has been verified that well-established social networks stimulate sociability and public space use, particularly in some areas, where historical, economical and cultural associations dominate. In such a way, heterogeneous neighborhoods, regarding their uses, socio-economical diversity, as well as distinguished architectonical and urban landscape tend to be more intensified in terms of social relations, according to Jacobs (2000), in her famous book entitled 'Death and life in great American Cities'. These, among some other topics, will be discussed in the following paper.

Many authors have been responsible for discussing such important topics, like *public space* and *the right to the city*, through critical literature (Arendt, 2000;

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<sup>2</sup> The rise of 'favelas' in Brazil and Sao Paulo is a recent phenomenon. According to the site 'Sao Paulo 450 anos', in 1973, only 1% of Sao Paulo's total population lived in 'favelas'. In the 1980's, this number grows to 4%, reaching 8% (1,15 million) in the beginning of the 1990's. In 2000, according to a study developed by the Municipality and the Centre for Metropolitan Studies, there were 2.018 'favelas' with 378.863 residences for 1,16 million inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> FRUGOLI JR. H. *Centralidade em São Paulo: trajetórias, conflitos e negociações na metrópole*. São Paulo: Cortez/ EDUSP, 2000. In this book, the author argues about some urban centralities in Sao Paulo. Firstly, he talks about the old city center, located nearby Sé's Cathedral and its surroundings; secondly, deals with Paulista Avenue axis, the main financial and commercial center between 1960's and 1980's; and, lastly, Luiz Calos Berrini Avenue axis, the most recent economical and financial center of Sao Paulo, located in the southwest region of the city.

<sup>4</sup> HARVEY, D. *A Condição Pós-Moderna*. 6ª edição. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1996.

Benjamin, 1996; Lefebvre, 1991). Others have dealt with the poetical aspect of the 'man lost in the mob', wandering around Paris, London or Berlin nineteenth century streets', or simply moving through imaginary cities (Baudelaire, 1952; Calvino, 1991; Poe, 1944; Bresciani, 1982). In the last decades, nevertheless, many other intellectuals have spent a lot of attention to this theme, among them architects and urban planners, philosophers, social scientists and anthropologists (Habermas, 1984; Jacobs, 2000; Sennet, 1998, Frúgoli Jr., 1995; Serpa, 2007; Abrahão, 2008; Canevacci, 1993). In spite of this, we do not mean here to develop a deep analysis on the theme, but use some concepts to further improve the debate.

Therefore, one can say in general words that *"(...) public space is considered to be that one which, inside traditional urban territory (especially in capitalist cities where private is predominant), reflects common use and collective possession (that belongs to public sector). The street is, consequently, a public space per excellence<sup>5</sup>".* Hence Carlos (2004) considers the street as an enlightening element, through each one can think of it as a place for exchanging experiences, routines, conflicts, dissonances, as well as, revealing an urban dimension, based on strategies of subsistence and life, pointed by simultaneity of emptiness and fullness, of sounds and noises from distinguished temporalities (p. 54).

But, even more, *"(...) the street is also the ideal place for evoking citizenship, in the sense it can be the place for vindicating struggles. It also gives visibility to different social projects, and in spite of being only an accumulation of different times, it is a virtual and open possibility for building up another social project"* (Ibid, p. 55). Thus, public space is the site for collective socialization and it establishes a dialog among diverse sectors of city's population, besides being the proper location for pointing out social differences. In other words, as Bauman (2009) presents:

"A space is 'public' in the sense it allows free access to men and women without previous selection. No exclusive pass is required, and no entries or exits are registered. For that reason, someone's presence in a public space is anonymous, and the ones that find themselves in there are foreigners to each others (...). Public spaces are sites where strangers gather themselves. In such a way, they condensate – and, even to say so, end up – distinctive traces of urban life. It is in public sites that urban life and everything that distinguishes other forms of human socialization reach its most completed expression, with happiness, pains, hopes and feelings that are so characteristically" (p. 70).

So, public spaces can be defined as spaces for circulation (like a street or a square), spaces for entertainment and recreational activities (like a square or an urban park), for contemplation (like a public garden) and for preservation or conservation (like a huge park or even an ecological reserve), where the right of coming and going is total. But, as pointed out by Dias (2005), traditional public spaces have acquired new meanings and connotations in recent times. What occurs is, according to this author, an 'introversion of space', followed by the

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<sup>5</sup> [http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Espa%C3%A7o\\_p%C3%BAblico](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Espa%C3%A7o_p%C3%BAblico).

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emergence of introspective spots with superior environmental qualities rather than the city itself.

*“Air conditioned and protected spaces simulate public spaces instead of trying to translate them as part of their internal environment. Shopping centers, museums and supermarkets are the new spaces of socialization and attractiveness and are very much connected to the logic of consumption, either of cultural or mass industrialized products, that built up the twentieth century city and that still reverberates in the twentieth first century” (Dias, 2005).*

As a result, it can be observed a clear erosion of public and private life's balance, that previously gave some support to capitalist societies, in Sennett's (1998) and others analysis. Because of this, as suggested by Serpa (2007), “(...) we are moving towards individualism as an ideal way of life, instead of an even more decadent collectiveness” (p. 35). When one agrees to move public spaces into islands of 'uniformity', one generates an even greater obstacle for sharing and living social differences, contributing to weaken all possible dialogs and pacts, as discussed by Bauman (2009: 71). Public space restricts itself, thus, into an unusable remaining location among private's space portions (Ibid, p. 71). In other words, public space transforms itself in a collection of privatized spaces, where each social group does not share the territory, but instead, divides it, in such a way that users contribute to amplify the private sphere of public space, sharpening a mutual strangeness of privatized territories (Serpa, 2007: 36).

Brazilian case study, better described below, tends to exaggerate even further this trend, according to Dias (2005). In this author's opinion, there is a reduced existence of public spaces that are severely restricted to limited and shy elite. Public national policies, on the other hand, do not give enough importance to the construction of public spaces, directing most efforts to the creation of rentable spaces specially designed for semi-public or private entertainment (Ibid, p. 7). Most proposals are characterized by punctual 'revitalizations' of urban centers<sup>6</sup> that have followed an international pattern, recreating hermetically safe atmospheres, free of any kind of conflicts.

### BRAZILIAN CITIES: WHERE IS THE PUBLIC SPACE NOWADAYS?

Matos e Silva (2008) shows that city centers' are not the same as two decades ago. Along with this writer, in many Brazilian cities, state governments have designed rehabilitation projects for city centers', but many of them follow a perverse and segregationist logic, essentially anchored in tourism. In the example adopted by him, he analyses Aracaju, a city located in Northeast Brazil. Hotel Palace, sidewalks of Joao Pessoa street, cinemas, Cacique Tea House and other representative

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<sup>6</sup> HARVEY, D. *A Condição Pós-Moderna*. 6ª edição. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1996. In the chapter of his book, entitled: 'The Post-modernism in the city', the author argues about Baltimore's revitalization, in the United States, that has inspired several other urban requalification's.

spaces in city center are not the same anymore since Riomar Shopping opening, in 1989, in a nearby area. Central areas have been suffering a decline of public use, that not even some frustrated revitalization experiences, including the creation of a 24 hours street, have avoided such a trend. Though the pseudo-modernization myth introduces new dynamics to the existent city, recreating, on the other hand, artificial spaces that are unable to deal with cultural diversity and social plurality that use to take place vigorously in historical city centers.

Another interesting example is the case of Pelourinho, situated in the Historical Center of Salvador, Bahia's capital state. This central area possesses a historical and symbolic value that includes several relevant buildings. However, since the 1960's, Pelourinho went through a political, economical and social degradation, thanks to the emergence of new commercial and industrial centers located in new geographical neighborhoods, as the Iguatemi Shopping Center and many shops across the seashore between Barra and Pituba neighborhood. Marginality and prostitution face to face with historical building deterioration took place in the subsequent decades. It was not until the recognition of UNESCO of this area, as an important human legacy in the beginning of 1990's that Pelourinho restarted to become a vigorous and vibrant area again, mainly directed to a cultural and touristic demand (Crepaldi, 2002). Nevertheless, costs for such an urban requalification project were extremely high, including the removal of low-income residents. Currently, one can notice a visible loss of social diversity. In relation to this, Matos e Silva (2008) summarizes saying that a new way of organizing city center is taking place in the main Brazilian cities:

"We have lost the capacity of learning and socializing with people from different social and cultural classes, because we do not have spaces in cities where socialization can happen. We gave up of public space and have decided for privatized and 'purified' spaces – in a Shopping Center or University Campus, for example, that fundament themselves around consumption. Spaces do not allow to practice the art and ability of sharing public life".

Thus, Serpa (2007) says that there is a general trend, either in Brazilian cities, or in world cities, to invest in 'visible' public spaces, mainly in centralized and touristic areas where a partnership between public and private sectors are welcome. Such proposals follow, as a consequence, a taste for gigantism and for the 'great spectacle' in terms of architecture and urbanism<sup>7</sup> (p. 26). Or furthermore, as Dias (2005) reinforces, "(...) *the aim at transforming each city into a new place in the world culture, either as a great historical and cultural center like Paris, London or Berlin, or even enlightening small cities such as Bilbao city, in Spain, for example, is a trademark of new European urbanizations that complete the previous with spectacular urban objects, such as new buildings, parks and public spaces created by the most famous names of contemporary architecture*".

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<sup>7</sup> ARANTES, Otilia..*Urbanismo em fim de linha*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1998. In this book, the author talks about some international examples where the city is used as a stage for 'spectacular' urban interventions as well as a fascinating architecture.

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*“Sao Paulo is today a city of walls. Its inhabitants do not risk to have a house without fences or barriers to protect their respective windows. Physical barriers surround public spaces: houses, buildings, parks, squares, financial districts, commerce and schools. As the high-income (elite) classes move to highly protected areas, they abandon few remaining public spaces to the poor or homeless, and the number of spaces for public meetings from people of different social groups decreases considerably” (Caldeira, 2000).*

Public space utilization in central areas, in Sao Paulo's case study, points out to be problematic, especially in recent times, as shown by Frugoli Jr. (1995). According to him, the old city center has changed into a more heterogeneous use and a crescent deterioration process, mainly due to internal migration from Brazilian northeast. These people characterize themselves as 'informal street community', based on principals of solidarity and social strategies of surviving (Frúgoli, 1995: 70).

These factors conducts to the consolidation of a 'street culture', that differs enormously of a 'publicized culture', once the first “(...) *tends to be against any kind of institutional formalization, operating according to informal principles, based on certain forms of transgression, that are strategically inserted in a body of rules and codes (...) which are normally in conflict with official public order*” (Ibid, p. 70). On the other hand, 'publicized culture' aims at using space in a predefined mode or minimally consensual, introducing a kind of sociability that is connected to debate's practice and ideas' exchange, conflicts' resolution, culture's acquisition and public opinion formation (Ibid, p. 71).

In the last decades, Sao Paulo has suffered profound restrictions in public space use, either in elite or low-income class areas. In relation to the first ones, a new pattern of sociability has been identified founded on 'confined spaces' (restricted residential areas, financial centers), protected by security systems that change completely residents' routine. Shopping centers<sup>9</sup> are also, since the 1970's, important areas designed for entertainment and consumption of the high-income classes. Recently, nonetheless, because of increasingly violence in city's streets, shopping centers are been built in distant areas, where the poorest population lives, characterizing an alternative for leisure and sociability (Frúgoli Jr., 1995).

Regarding the low-income classes, as presented by Serpa (2007), it has been noticed a privatization of the few public spaces (particularly in the case of social housing complexes). There is also a devaluation of public space in the outskirts, due to precarious maintenance and/ or inexistence of such places. Then, the meaning of public space as a potential are to discuss and to increase citizenship

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<sup>8</sup> ABRAHAO, Sérgio Luís. *Espaço Público: do urbano ao político*. São Paulo: Annablume/FAPESP, 2008. The author traces comprehensive and broad panorama about public space in Sao Paulo. He also offers in his book an interesting literature review on the topic.

<sup>9</sup> FRUGOLI JR., H. & Pintaudi, S. M. (org.). *Shopping Centers: espaço, cultura e modernidade nas cidades brasileiras*. São Paulo, Ed. UNESP, 1992.

debate is becoming rare there. The following examples aim at discussing some points.

## SOME RECENT CASE STUDIES IN SAO PAULO: AUGUST STREET, SHOPPING PÁTIO HIGIENÓPOLIS AND BOM RETIRO'S NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS.

### AUGUSTA STREET

An important commercial street of Sao Paulo that establishes a connection between the center and Jardins neighborhood, Augusta Street represents a vivid portrait of contemporary street use as a public space. This street was very significant during the fifties and sixties, when it used to concentrate along its 3.000 meters of extension some of the most sophisticated shops in the city. In the seventies, however, Augusta Street lost its importance, because of the establishment of the first shopping malls in Sao Paulo, like Iguatemi. Its prestige was ruined simultaneously with the city center. The area was transformed into a prostitution and drugs zone.

But in the last two decades, Augusta has become a research object for sociologists and anthropologists interested in its social dynamism and variety of uses that has transformed the place into a 24 hours moveable feast. As pointed out by Revista Veja Sao Paulo (2009), in the last four years it was a 40% increase in nightclubs and related activities there. Nowadays, only in the central portion of Augusta Street, there are 52 bars, 18 discos and 16 restaurants (p. 34). Nevertheless, the street does not 'work' only at night. Daily services that vary from hairdressers to laundries and sewing offices, as well as cultural activities (cinemas, theaters and galleries), have been responsible for assuring its population heterogeneity, either of residents<sup>10</sup>, or of peasants.

"In Augusta everything is a blend. You can walk by normally to five star hotels, that has one of city's best cuisine, to ruined old houses, and little mansions that announces promiscuous adventures: mixed saunas, only for adults, massage only for men. Next to them, without break for air breathing, elementary or medical schools that when are closed make their innocent public of students mixed up with prostitutes the same age as them. Everyone socializes with everybody" (Canevacci, 1993: 196).

That is the reason why some authors, like Canevacci (1993), while analyzing this city, spend some time to write about Augusta Street. For this author, this street represents the '*crème de la crème*' of Sao Paulo. It is there that empirical structuralism presented by Levi-Strauss, allows a straight relationship between past and present, mentally connecting different times and locations among them (p. 196). Therefore, its hybrid characteristics are a clearly distinctive from the

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<sup>10</sup> Rent in the area has gone higher than in other areas of the city. Between 2005 and 2009, average rent rates in Sao Paulo increased 35%. In the same period, rent for a small studio went up from 330 reais to 600 reais (82% increase) and for a one-bedroom flat varied from 590 to 930 reais (58% increase) (Veja Sao Paulo, 2009: 41). Good public transportation options have also contributed to rent rates increase.

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hermetically closed spaces of the city, presenting a possibility of an interesting debate about the public space in Sao Paulo.

Another approach can also argue that Augusta Street brings back some important elements of the *'flanêrie'*, posted by Baudelaire in the nineteenth century, because any time of the day and night, coming and ongoing is a constant move, allowing symbolic exchanges among foreigners<sup>11</sup>. So, in spite of its fragmentation and chaotic meaning, it is important to underline that this path shows an internal coherence, due to its communicative urban flows (Canevacci, 1993: 198). Consequently, Augusta Street can be understood as a *'miniaturization'* of the whole city, what makes me remind a description of it, said by a regular user: *"What is the purpose of going to New York. Augusta is New York!"*.

## SHOPPING PÁTIO HIGIENÓPOLIS

Opened in 1999, Shopping Pátio Higienópolis is a commercial center designed for A-level<sup>12</sup> social classes, situated in Higienopolis, a traditional high-class neighborhood class since the nineteenth century, when it was still a residential area of the elite. This shopping center construction generated huge protests by the residents that were afraid of public space deterioration and traffic explosion in the surrounding area. Another critical point occurred in respect to some preserved historical buildings nearby the shopping mall. After a long debate among residents and businessmen, that thought the houses were going to be demolished, Shopping Pátio Higienopolis direction decided to buy and refurbish them.

In spite of the problems, mentioned above, what catches up our attention are the different forms of sociability that happens in such a building. Officially, this is a private space with some semi-public areas that include coffee shops, restaurants, theater, cinemas, gym and specialized services. Also some special places were designed for dogs. Third age people go very often there, either for a coffee or just to chat. Young people meet after school. Mothers go sightseeing with their babies, especially during the mornings. And, finally, adults that either work or live nearby use the shopping mall for diverse purposes, including eating.

In other words, initial objection to a shopping center in the area has been transformed into one of the main entertainment options in the neighborhood. Some statistics show that most of the users are residents, on the contrary of the majority of other shopping centers in Sao Paulo that have a very distinctive public. In

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<sup>11</sup> FRUGOLI JR, H. Em *Sociabilidade Urbana* (2007) refers to GEORG SIMMEL, in his famous writing dated by 1908, entitled *'L'Etranger'*. This last author says: *"(...) the stranger metaphor conducts to the idea of fragility in social relationships based on intimacy and distance. This can also be applied to the cities' inhabitants, because depending on where and when they meet to each other they translate the condition of being strangers to themselves"* (p. 48).

<sup>12</sup> According to some statistics offered by Shopping Pátio Higienópolis web site, around 65% of its users belong to an A class (high-income consumers). This Shopping receives monthly an average public of 1.626.000 persons, from them 22%, are between 17 and 24 years old, 25% between 25 and 34 years old, 18% between 35 and 44 years old and, finally, 35% are 45 years old or over.

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consequence, Shopping Patio Higienopolis is an extension of resident's homes and a continuation of some squares that characterize the neighborhood (Vilaboim Square, Buenos Aires Square, etc.).

So, this shopping center recreates in its interiors the idea of some public spaces, such as squares, corners, streets, where social contacts can occur safely away and very distant from ethnical, social and religious conflicts. This can also be translated into shopping center's imaginary, once its own name carries the false idea of being a 'patio'. It is interesting to observe that some of squares' names, outside the shopping center, were used to name each of its floors. Finally, by welcoming dogs (even a competition for dogs was installed recently) in its interiors, Shopping Patio Higienopolis permits extending some public activities into the semi-public/ private sphere.

Nevertheless, it is worth saying that not everything is allowed there, and that sociability suffers from severe constraints and restrictions for those that do not follow the rules, as pointed out by Frúgoli Jr. (1995) in many of his studies about shopping centers. For him, shopping centers create spaces of 'public access', but they are not effectively public, because there is a private control by each respective administration (p. 95). The myth of security is another point to be taken into account. This January, not even a rigid internal security scheme has avoided some thefts to invade such shopping center. This fact shows that highly controlled places are also vulnerable to violence. Thus it is not denying the city and its diversity that public space revival will happen.

Finally, we can argue that a shopping center is a falsification that deals with specific public, according to financial resources, time schedule, etc. of their users. *"Shopping centers use procedures of control and selection, but in a larger proportion compared with 'desert public spaces' of monumental architectural financial enterprises, or gated neighborhoods, where social diversity is lower"* (Frúgoli Jr., 1995: 102). In synthesis, streets are recreated inside a building in order to offer different opportunities of leisure, buying, services and entertainment, but with a limited social diversity compared to some streets, as for example, Augusta Street, or of an entire neighborhood, like Bom Retiro, where streets assume a predominant historical role.

## BOM RETIRO NEIGHBORHOOD AND ITS STREETS

Bom Retiro is an old neighborhood of Sao Paulo. It appeared in late nineteenth century, as a recreation and leisure area of the city, due to its location close to Tiete River. Several immigrants, from different nationalities have been living in this place since then. Recently, the neighborhood was chosen by Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico and Artístico Nacional (IPHAN), the National Historical and Artistic Institute, to be preserved nationally due to its ethnical and multicultural diversity, constituting one of the first examples of such a type in Brazil and in the world. Italians, Jewish, Greeks, Armenians, Koreans, Bolivians and several Northeast migrants constitute its

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approximately 25.000 inhabitants<sup>13</sup>. Its economy is basically structured around garment and textile industries, plus services and commerce related to them both. Something like 2/3 of the national garment is produced in this place. Also, other cultural and entertainment complete the huge hall of activities offered by the neighborhood to the general public.

Interesting study developed by Koulioumba (1993) showed that the architectural building constructions played a significant role to the diversity of uses. Since its origins, Bom Retiro tried to combine work and living together. Through the decades, this pattern of occupation was applied, with European Jewish immigrants and, more recently, with the Koreans. The neighborhood<sup>14</sup> reveals thus, up to nowadays, a huge complexity of elements that makes its streets so vibrant and important for the establishment of social, economic and cultural networks.

Nothing is invented. Everything is spontaneous. Since the ancient 'pletzale', a meeting point of Jewish men on the corner of Graça Street and Ribeiro de Lima Street (that does not exist anymore) to the informal commerce that permeates José Paulino, the main open air shopping street, where the Koreans immigrants have built modern shops. Therefore, one notices that streets assume a key role to social exchanges. Unlike Augusta Street, that has a varied public through all day, Bom Retiro presents a diverse social universe too. During the day, local street movement is marked by retail and wholesale consumers, who divide public space with Bolivian workers and local residents. Old ladies with their respective nurses share the squares with homeless in a sunny evening. Young people move quickly to one of the many courses offered in the neighborhood. Not very distant from there somebody is preparing a barbecue on a sidewalk, reuniting colleagues after a working day. On Saturdays, orthodox Jewish cross some bars where Koreans and national migrants are drinking a beer. In another situation, a Bolivian market is taking place inside a private parking lot, occupying as well half of the street.

Of course one can observe in addition to this some social conflicts. But a common solution can be found. Sidewalks and streets have the power, consequently, to translate the notion of being community member, strongly linked to some urban references in spite of some problems that might emerge. An increased local sociability modifies the place, transforming it into a diverse and plural area. One can verify as well some closeness among local social agents, even though they belong to different social groups.

That is why one can argue that if Augusta Street have the power to summarize contemporary cities' dimension, Bom Retiro can go further considering it can

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<sup>13</sup> This neighborhood is characterized by medium/ low-income residents. There is a mixed population that consists of some immigrants and descendents, living in worthy modernist 60's and 70's buildings, as well as national migrants, Bolivians, etc., living in slums and/ or precarious homes.

<sup>14</sup> Certeau (2008) says that, "(...) *the neighborhood can be considered as the progressive privatization of public space. It is a very important mechanism to ensure the continuity between what is more intimate (the residence's private space) and the unknown (the whole city of even the entire world). (...) a neighborhood represents the average term of a dialectical existence between the inside and the outside.*" (p. 42). The neighborhood is a place not intimate, nor anonymous: but neighbor." (p. 43).

preserve as well some traditional values in parallel to some progress introduced by globalization. However, one should point also that Bom Retiro is not an ethnical neighborhood, like Liberdade, a famous Japanese place where several shops and restaurants are located. Bom Retiro is a unique example, somehow similar to what Jacobs (2000) has suggested in her book, because it is a diverse and plural neighborhood, not only socially, but also architecturally and economically speaking. The 'practice of the neighborhood', as Certeau (2008) writes, introduces, therefore, some fortuities in the place of necessities, making favorable the use of urban space.

### PUBLIC SPACE IN SAO PAULO: IS THERE STILL A WAY OUT?

Sao Paulo's configuration tend to establish certain modernized spaces, connected to a privatized spirit whereas public space is abandoned and left to deterioration, violence and a conflicted use, as said by Frúgoli Jr. For him,

"Public space, this imprecise dimension, but constantly present in urban life, reflects several sceneries in the main picture. Increased portions of high-income groups escape to protected and gated areas whereas a huge part of low-income population live in deteriorated areas, permeated by transgression" (Frúgoli Jr. 1995: 106).

Matos e Silva (2008) talks, in consequence, of the need to formulate public spaces, in order to improve coexistence among different people. This fact will help to build the construction of a civil order, based on freedom and solidarity, in public spaces designed to express citizenship and to develop sociability. The examples above mentioned aimed at showing different uses for public and semi-public spaces in Sao Paulo. We have noticed some radical changes in public space. Or as underlined by Carlos (2004), "*new metamorphosed space redefines uses and paces in space as well as daily life. But life does not change only because there are some urban renewals; one can observe in a modern world transformations in routine life, revealing new ways of using times and spaces – different social values, behaviors, women's role, leisure type facilities, etc. that constitute urban society*" (p. 104).

So, the greatest challenge consists in searching for solutions based on an internal model, as public spaces become extremely vital for Brazilian cities. It represents a place that strongly needs to be revalorized in opposition to such 'introverted architectures and urban planning models'. We have intended to point out here the importance to construct a more equal and participative city. One that can permit the dissolution of segregated areas, bringing back to lights the complexity and dynamic that some of Sao Paulo's streets and neighborhoods contain. Only in this case, it will be possible to reinforce public space use by the whole city's population.

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