Monitoring and evaluation of urban regeneration processes. The case of Cova da Moura.

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ABSTRACT: In urban planning, monitoring and evaluation are increasingly becoming mandatory by both national governments and international organizations. These instruments aim at verifying the degree of coincidence between results and objectives proposed and to ensure the correct use of resources. It reflects the demand for new forms of public policies legitimacy and, in more ambitious perspectives, seeks to promote the deepening of democracy.

This paper focuses on the case of Cova da Moura, a settlement that resulted from occupation of private and public land and chosen as a pilot neighbourhood by the public policy named Iniciativa Bairros Críticos (IBC) (Law 143/2005). The IBC defined an innovative qualifying urban agenda fomenting public participation and including monitoring and evaluation. However, the difficulty of negotiation and shared decision-making process resulted in the bureaucratization of practices, prevailing the technicist visions towards a top-down driven process. This research is part of a broader, multidisciplinary project (named ‘Exploring the contributions of relational space for promoting the right to the city. Experimental research at Cova da Moura, Greater Lisbon’) developed by the Grupo de Estudos Socio-Territoriais, Urbanos e de Acção Local | CI-AUD | FAUTL) which explores the contributions of a collaboration between architecture and anthropology in urban intervention. Monitoring and evaluation are understood here as instruments for collective and participatory analysis of processes. Based on comprehensive and action-oriented methodologies, rather than an approach targeted to ‘accountability’, it aims to understand and learn from the ebbs and flows of processes involving multiple stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

This work emerges from the collaboration with the multidisciplinary collective Study Group named Grupo de Estudos Socio-Territoriais, Urbanos e de Acção Local (Gestual) integrated in the Centre Research in Architecture, Urbanism and Design, of the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Lisbon. Gestual focuses on applied research, on the close interaction between researchers and local communities, in order to build bridges between academia and social movements in semi-urbanized or self-produced areas. It is also the result of a personal research, under a PhD in urban planning, in progress on the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Lisbon, named “Participated urban qualification programs of self-constructed neighbourhoods. The space outcomes and the contribution of monitoring and evaluation.”

This text focuses on the project that is being developed by some members of Gestual, funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, named ’Exploring the contributions of relational space for Promoting the right to the city. Experimental research at Cova da Moura, Greater Lisbon’ (ERDC project). The aim is to present an intercalary evaluation of the actions taken so far in the neighborhood of Cova da Moura, identifying progress and setbacks, obstacles and opportunities for achieving the goals initially set. This text is assumed as a reflective moment on the actions taken by the ERDC project without disregarding the work of collaboration developed
between Gestual and the local associations of Cova da Moura, for several years, under the agenda of urban qualification. 

The text is organized into three points: (1) Monitoring and evaluation of urban regeneration processes; (2) The qualification urban process of Cova da Moura; and (3) Project ‘Relational Space and the Right to the City’: Intercalary Evaluation.

1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF URBAN REGENERATION PROCESSES

The urban interventions programs in self-produced urban areas present difficulties in the design of solutions and their implementation. These modalities of intervention usually result in time-consuming processes, unable to incorporate unforeseen opportunities and local dynamics, although we watch the emergence of innovative interventions that include participatory and negotiated methodologies. In urban planning, public participation, monitoring and evaluation are increasingly becoming mandatory by both national governments and international organizations. It reflects the demand for new forms of public policies legitimacy and, in more ambitious perspectives, seeks to promote the deepening of democracy.

Some innovative programs rely on plans provided by Law and European directives, which includes monitoring and evaluation mechanisms as well as participation. These are some of the requirements for the support of EU funds that aims to guarantee, in line with what some call the communicative planning (Khakee 2008), the continuous observation of modes of communication, of debates and political agenda, to gather both the quality of the planning process and program activities, through the development of collaborative processes and learning from the broad participation of stakeholders (Healey, 2003). Nevertheless, recent examples show that the new instruments of urban planning have not yet succeeded to break with the dirigiste tradition of the modern period (Bourdìn, 2011) and the decision-making tends to be on the side of technical knowledge and oriented by top-down processes, prevailing the rationalist/functionalist paradigms.

Different approaches emerge based on an interactionist paradigm (Raposo, 2012) and on practices of monitoring and evaluation of plans (CESUR, coord. Silva, 2007; Indovina & Ferreira, 1999) which rescue the concept of reflexivity (Giddens, 1987; Ascher 2001) to achieve more sustainable results. These approaches hold on the interaction between research and project, on bottom-up practices and on the importance given to the process as a resource to incorporate on solutions unforeseen opportunities or agreements (Portas 2005).

Consistent with approaches that advocate greater flexibility of the regulatory instruments implying more reflective attitudes we aim to reflect on ways of making city and realize to what extent they operate in favour of the right to the city as the right to transform ourselves whilst transforming our space (Lefebvre 2009, Harvey 2008).

2 THE QUALIFICATION URBAN PROCESS OF COVA DA MOURA

The neighbourhood of Cova da Moura, located at the doorstep of Lisbon (at the municipality of Amadora), results from the progressive occupation, since the 1950s, of public and private lands. Like other self-produced urban areas that arise at the time in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, the occupation of the land of Cova da Moura stems from a housing need, which found no response in national housing policies or in the private sector. Its population is linked to the migration movements from the interior of the country and from the former colonies of Africa. The occupation of the land of Cova da Moura has two distinct phases: at first, the occupation of the territory assumes a regular pattern (1960s and 1970s); later, the densification of urban fabric results in a loss of original readability affecting the living conditions.

During the post-revolutionary (post 1974) period characterized by political and social changes, the strong social mobilization for housing and place rights was supported by of the city council - at the time, the City Council of Oeiras, and later in 1979 by a restructuring of administrative boundaries, the City Council of Amadora - by the construction of infrastructure and the creation of an office for technical local support.
More recently, in the neoliberal context, the way public institutions perceived these urban areas as changed. Although interested in integrating these neighbourhoods in the formal city the public institutions procedures are characterized by bureaucratization and technicization and focus on the fulfilment of legal parameters in the processes of regularization.

In 2002, a Detailed Plan proposing the demolition of about 80% of the neighbourhood, declining mostly the typical buildings from the expansion of cape-verdian cities, where most of inhabitants came from. The plan caused reactions among the population and local organizations, which joined forces in setting up a Neighbourhood Comission (NC) and rised up against this solution. It was the impact of social movements, along with the studies of a group of students from the Faculty of Architecture - UTL for an alternative plan, in 2004 that captivate the attention of the central government and the media. In 2005, is created the Critical Bairros Initiative (CBI) (Resolution of the Council of Ministers 143/2005, of September 7th) and Cova da Moura is selected as one of three experimental neighbourhoods. The initiative proposed innovative principles oriented to the qualification of the neighbourhood, as well as to participation and partnerships between six public ministries, local actors (CMA, NC, and other partners) and technical support (Raposo, 2009). The process, coordinated by the central government (by the National Housing Institute, now Urban Rehabilitation and Housing Institute (URHI)) varies, however, between a first period very interactive and shared that draws the diagnosis and action plan (between January and November 2006) and a final period characterized by the CMA leaderships of the process, thought still under the supervision of URHI, in witch depended two main actions for the neighbourhood qualification: the land legalization and the drawing of a detailed plan (Raposo & Jorge, 2013). Numerous conflicts between NC and CMA followed a period of bureaucratization of participation, and the first proposals for a detailed plan were the expression of a technicist vision concerned strictly with hygienist issues and legal parameters. In April 2012, the URHI (from the central government) abandons the process induced by a period of economic crisis and the need for public spending cuts. Since then the design of the detailed plan is suspended, depending exclusively on the action of CMA, who has remained unreachable despite the NC attempts of contact, making predict that the current crisis and the lack of financial resources compromise the conclusion of a detailed plan.

The Neighbourhood Commission is now entering a new phase of action, seeking influential allies (in academic and professional fields) that may contribute to solve the problems on the qualification agenda, particularly in what concerns the tenure legalization, the drawing of an alternative qualification plan and small urban improvements to avoid a degradation process of the neighbourhood. The Faculty of Architecture is one of those allies, represented by Gestual, who has been providing technical support to the NC since 2004, during the CBI and know on co-designing an alternative detailed plan.

3 THE PROJECT ‘RELATIONAL SPACE AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY’: INTERCALARY EVALUATION

The ERDC Project is a short-term (12 months) exploratory research outlined with the intention of “contributing to a better understanding of the nature and transformative potential of the Lefebvorean notion of The Right to the City, as it germinates in the context of actions by people and institutions on the ground, willing to engage themselves in the definition of how their urban place is shaped. In particular, the research looks at and experiments with new forms of articulating academic knowledge with initiatives by other social actors in order to fill the gap between largely abstract insights regarding the right to transform ourselves while transforming our space and the concrete actions undertaken in particular territories.” (Carolino et al., 2012)

Two core purposes are defined by the project:

. to look at the potential of a relational conception of space and of multidisciplinary collaboration for the formulation of alternatives to the conceptions of space, place and social process that inform neoliberal policies (and conceptions associated);
to indicate concrete paths for basing qualification proposals on space as it is experienced and appropriated as a resource by the inhabitants (dwellers).

At this point, there are three ongoing tasks in the project. Task 1 (local laboratory), task 3 (workshops with the inhabitants) and task 4 (ethnographic and typo-morphological analysis). Task 2 was concluded (opening seminar). Task 5 has not yet started.

To what concerns to monitoring and evaluation we choose here to take special attention to the design project circumstances and to task 1 and 3 in order to situate the crucial difficulties of the ERDC project.

The project proposes the co-construction of parameters and tools for evaluation and monitoring activities that draw on themes and idioms meaningful for those involved.

The monitoring and evaluation activity has been developed, until now, with distinct resources in two different moments: i) concerning Task 2 (opening seminar, concluded) it was possible to define along with the NC a participatory monitoring an evaluation (PM&E) process. Three different meetings where made with the NC to define the objectives and the logistic of the seminar. When concluded, it was promoted an evaluation meeting among the team members and another between the team and NC; ii) concerning the task 3 the team is still thinking how to engage inhabitants and NC to co-construct (team/NC/inhabitants) a monitoring and evaluation tool; the monitoring and evaluation as been made, until know, with the teams members.

3.1 The Projects design: articulation between academic knowledge and social movements?

The ERDC project was formulated following a dialogue established between Gestual e Cova da Moura’s organizations over the last years. It results, furthermore, from the articulation of the individual doctoral and post-doctoral researches carried out by team members, which include two shared concerns: an experiment of innovative modes of relation between the university and social movements; and to relate abstract notions of the Right to the City with the concrete struggles of social movements on the ground.

The project aims to establish a dialogue with the ‘qualification agenda’ as it is defined by its actors, having in mind the current impasse (following the interruption of the Critical Bairros Initiative) and the new paths of action that the NC has been envisaging for qualification. One of the orientations identified by the NC regards the importance of promoting small improvements in the neighbourhood, aiming at both showing to ‘the outside’ that Cova da Moura remains active in spite of the public institutions withdrawal of the qualification process; and preventing a further degradation of the physical condition of the neighbourhood – at stake are interventions at the level of the blocks and public space.

The dialogue and collaboration between NB and Gestual proved to be pertinent and desired in this new phase of the qualification process (post-CBI). This was explicitly formulated in two distinct moments, which turned out to be central for the start of the ERDC project:

i) in November 2012, at the first NC meeting for the planning of the seminar Cova da Moura, que desígnio, que desenho. A qualificação sócio-espacial - balanço e perspectivas (which was also the opening seminar of task 2 of the ERDC project), which was desired as a moment for making an appraisal of the Critical Bairros Initiative, to make inhabitants of Cova da Moura aware of the current situation of the qualification agenda and, simultaneously, to launch the basis for the creation of a group of experts/technicians/consultants mobilized for the discussion of future action regarding Cova da Moura’s qualification.

ii) the application to ‘Apoio Pontual DGAJArtes 2013’, formally undertaken by an informal group engaging both Gestual and the NB (Colectivo ao Largo), with a proposal named Este Largo Podia ser Assim (This square could be like this). The application set forth to “undertake a qualifying intervention at the public space of Cova da Moura, having at its core a square with acknowledged potential for the fruition of urban life” (Grupo Informal ‘Colectivo ao Largo, 2013). However, the proposal was not financed.

The open support by NB to the actions mentioned above was however not extended to the ERDC project. Although the dialogue with the NB played an important role in the structure of the project, the project itself was discussed only with Moinho da Juventude (MJ), due both to
lack of time and to the greater understanding and proximity between the project coordinator and that organization that resulted from one year of work and cooperation in other projects (June 2011 - May 2012). The ERDC project was partially rejected by the Associação de Moradores (AM) and the Associação de Solidariedade Social do Alto da Cova da Moura (ASSACM), due to the project’s scholarly outline and the fact that its main purpose was not the construction of a material proposal. The local organizations expressed the view, also considered by the project’s team, that the inhabitants of Cova da Moura were not keen to welcome further enquiries by students and researchers that would not entail any material outcome for the neighbourhood and people’s lives. Even after the dimension of physical construction was added to the project, the support of the two other organizations (AMBACM and ASSACM) has not been expressed, neither have the organizations felt the process as theirs.

The dynamics of relation with the three local organizations and its impact for the project’s aims seems to have not yet been discussed enough by the team. However, it was discussed by the team that it was important to take distance from the ‘tripartite logic’ of the NB (which was found and conditioning during the preparation of the opening seminar – task 2) and that the project would find legitimacy, instead, through and engagement with the inhabitants directly. In this sense, other options were also made: to not negotiate/define with the organizations the concrete places in which the workshops would take place and to not engage them closely in the planning of the activities.

These choices vis-a-vis the NB are not yet stabilized by the team, since they interfere with some of the specific purposes of the project’s tasks: to launch a laboratory (task 1), involving the permanency of the team at Cova da Moura. It was foreseen that a physical space would be provided by the organizations which would enable the team to ground its activities on the bairro’s daily life, the gathering of data and the contribution of the project for formulating proposals of transformation that would be based on an approach to space as the outcome of human relations and on the notions and practices of the people most affected by the qualification process (task 3: workshops).

3.2 The ERDC project’s tasks

Differently from the plan established for Task 3 (the workshops) the team has currently interrupted some of the activities being developed at Cova da Moura, due to a need for team reflection regarding strategies followed and methodologies. At stake are the discussion of concepts and their appropriation by the different academic disciplines, as well as the construction of a frame of reference for monitoring and evaluation the project’s realization.

3.2.1 Task 1 - Local laboratory (ongoing)

Objectives: This task launches and maintains a local laboratory with the purpose of diminishing the distance between the research team and the daily life of Cova da Moura and enabling the team to ground the activities planned on the local conditions and perspectives. The laboratory situates and sets in relation the different activities planned in the course of the project (tasks 2 to 5) and interrogates their development according to criteria for evaluation that operate with the notion of the right to the city.

Task 1 is up to now partially conditioned by the lack of engagement of the NC as a group, in the process. Although the organizations have offered their facilities for use of the team, this was made with no manifest engagement (with the exception of MJ). The team has not insisted on fostering that engagement at that moment; instead it opted for building that relation as the project unfolded with the inhabitants. More recently, the team used twice the facilities of MJ, as required by events in course. Contacts were also made with ASSACM for information and invitation for the planned workshops.

This question is currently under discussion within the team, insofar as a need is felt to shorten the distance between the research team and the daily life at Cova da Moura, as well as enabling the team to plan the activities in alignment with the local conditions and perspectives. Proximity has been concretized on a near-daily basis by one of the team members. Although the changes identified in task 1 meant that the workshops (task3) have gained a more crucial role as a mean for engaging inhabitants, it is felt by some members of the team that a greater permanency at the
spot (with or without a working space there [facilities]) would allow for deeper knowledge of the largo’s daily life as part of a wider urban setting, as well as of the people that inhabit it and inter-relate there.

Regarding task 1, the co-construction (team/NC/inhabitants) of a tool for monitoring and evaluation is still missing. A proposal that may concretize a negotiation of this tool is currently being seen by the coordination as key for the greater engagement of inhabitants and the local organizations.

3.2.2 Task 3 - The workshops (ongoing)

Objectives: This task comprises the planning and undertaking of public workshops entailing a reflection about the socio-spatial characteristic of the bairro and potential transformations. The purpose of this task is to learn about how the inhabitants perceive and relate to each other in a given area. On the other hand, focusing on the dynamics of appropriation that characterize the socio-spatial shaping of the bairro, it dialogues directly with the key issues of the qualification agenda (such as space legibility, lack of public/green space, conditions of habitation) through an attention to what inhabitants do (rather than what lacks in the bairro). This task constitutes both an opportunity for data collecting and a specific contribution of the project for creating the conditions that allow local organizations (the Local Commission) to articulate proposals in line with the relational character of space and the conceptions and practices of those more affected by the qualification process (space ‘users’, especially the inhabitants and house owners).

To what concerns to task 3, the team decided to concentrate the 3 workshops at a location in which the team had already started a process – the Largo. This option is considered to have become a structuring choice in the project. It renders less evident the purpose of a morphological analysis as an inductive path for interpretation and proposal. It is also considered, however, that the question regards theoretical-methodological approaches, rather than the location chosen. It is currently under discussion whether the team should consider making subsequent workshops in other areas of the neighbourhood.

Task 3 led to important methodological interrogations and discussions within the team, especially but not exclusively after the accomplishment of workshop 1 (on the 29th June 2013).

The project coordination considered that the workshop operated with the notion of absolute space as a container (which is associated with neoliberalism and at the source of social exclusion), thus undermining the possibility of accessing comprehension with recourse to an approach to space as relational and a social resource (in the sense proposed by Lefebvre by Harvey in the right to the city). She argued that the use of finished models, used in the session with adults, elicit data about what to place ‘inside’ the largo (what is missing in the neighbourhood), thus operating the notion of space as a container. Differently from this, a tool was needed that would allow to ask (that the team asks itself) ‘what is the largo’ (including what the inhabitants do). This option is important in the project and was planned methodologically through the construction of a material representation of that place at stake (through a model) by the inhabitants – the idea was that by constructing together a representation of the place people would express notions, concerns, connections, separations, etc that would provide access (clues) to the meanings of place. These clues would be followed through interviews, starting with the idioms (themes, used words…) that were found in content analysis of the workshops (thus the importance of video recording).

The construction of a model with the inhabitants was discussed in the preparation of the workshop. It was considered by the workshop team not viable because it could not be accomplished within two hours (time estimated for the workshop). The construction of the model would only be possible if there was a laboratory, as established in task 1, which would enable the construction during a longer period, for instance with children. The choices made for workshop 1 were also an outcome of the unexpected reaction of some inhabitants in face of team presence (at a video display on the 14th of June) and the purpose of bringing transformation to the Largo. The preference for ‘doing nothing’, expressed by some residents, and the importance given to parking (the predominant current function of the largo) took the workshop-team to choose a session focused on reasons to keep or transform the largo and on the potential of functions that may co-exist with parking (following the ‘opening’ that followed new references offered at the Display).
These options aimed at not ignoring what people were saying. To move forward to the planned activities seemed not to make sense at that moment. However, the preparation of the workshop required more time for reflection in order to articulate what people said with the actions planned in the project and the reflection about the consequences of choosing some tools for action rather than others. The limited number of team members in face of the project’s ambitions was also indicated as a meaningful limitation for several times.

The strategy used for workshop 1 ended up resulting in a more complete version of the first event (‘Este Largo podia ser assim’ in June 2012). The accent was maintained in what people want for that space and communication proceeded through individual or small-group conversations. Other elements were introduced (a model 1:100, the ideas previously collected), but it remained a conversation-based collection of opinions about what to do at the Largo.

Having in mind the workshops’ aims, a reflection was undertaken, with residents, regarding potential transformations. However, an understanding of how the inhabitants perceive and relate to each other in a given area, was not yet achieved. On the other hand, a greater involvement of the NC in the workshops is lacking, and the conditions were not created that would allow to contribute for the articulation by local organizations of transformation proposals based on an understanding of space as an outcome of human relations and on the conceptions and practices of those who are more affected by the process of qualification (‘space users’, especially inhabitants e house owners).

It should be said that more people attended to workshop 1 than to the display event, namely the people who live at the Largo. It was important to keep the strategy of door-to-door invitation. Individual contact allows to explain the purposes of workshops and keep contact with people outside the days of events. This contact reinforces the relationships between team and inhabitants. People start knowing the team, however the predominance of children and women is noted, with men placing themselves at the limits of the largo (café, balconies, doors) and not interacting.

CONCLUSIONS

The progress of the ERDC project allows the team to understand that the research time and the practice time don’t work hand-by-hand, taking into account that an interaction process depends on non-controlled and unpredicted dynamics, interests and power relationships. The confrontation to social practices led the team to take non-predicted choices in order to include the inhabitants concerns and to engage the three local associations at the same level (even if it was not achieved yet). Seeing the process as an important resource and part of the solutions, the team is at the moment in search for the adequate methodologies to proceed with the aims of the project.

Based on a reflective attitude, the team is constantly between research and project, theory and practice (for instance, the questioning about the finished models meanings to achieved the aims of the research project) to indicate concrete paths for basing qualification proposals on space as it is experienced and appropriated as a resource by the inhabitants. A more focused methodology on relational space is needed in the next workshops so it would be possible to better understand how abstract concepts as the right to the city, as the right to transform ourselves whilst transforming our space, is perceived on concrete struggles of social movements on the ground.

One of the main challenges, by this time, is to find a monitoring and evaluation tool capable of engaging inhabitants and local association without becoming too analytical and uninteresting for them. One of the ideas is to use social design tools and co-construct a storyboard of ERDC project process. The aim is to find an on-going tool that could be constantly appropriate and, if needed, transformed by people so both the team and the inhabitants could understand the different stages of the process.

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