

Design factors affecting the success of settlement upgrading projects.

Favela Bairro Program, Rio de Janeiro

Fernanda Magalhães¹

Abstract

One of the main stated objectives of the Favela Bairro program was to allow squatter settlements to become part of the formal city. The focus of the study is to assess how different project solutions in the Favela Bairro program have used urban design tools to achieve this objective. A subsequent question concerns the extent to which urban design factors helped to improve the social integration of the settlements, and specifically to overcome poverty and exclusion conditions.

This brings us to another group of problems related to indicators to measure the attainment of these objectives from four perspectives: Spatial, Social, Economical and Political (citizenship and participation)

This analysis highlights the major difficulties confronted by the design teams, and allows pinpointing the positive and negative impacts of the interventions on the communities and the city.

¹ Professora Urbanista - Banco Inter Americano para o Desenvolvimento - Brasília

Introduction

One of the principal characteristics of the Favela-Bairro program, launched in 1994 by the city government with support of IDB, is to consider these agglomerations as part of the urban structure, aiming at their integration into the existing “official city.” Many experts on Brazilian housing policy observed that the program and the projects developed under its umbrella have shown themselves to be relatively efficient in promoting community development and in the integration of those “informal agglomerations” to the “formal city.”

Special attention is given to architectural aspects and urban design, which is reflected in the multiple project solutions proposed by teams of architects and planners contracted by the city and chosen through competitions to develop the projects for each of the different favelas targeted by the first phase of the program. In this study it will be discussed the primary aspects of the urban design of some specific projects taken as examples of the programme.

Urban Design Guidelines – Key Factors

The guidelines of the Favela-Bairro program seek, fundamentally, that favela inhabitants have “a right to the city” (Magalhães, 2002, 67). That is, with the implementation of the program these informal settlements would come to be recognized as an official part of the city, their populations having a right to public services (water, sewer, garbage collection, electricity) and to possess “an officially recognized address.” Based on these premises favela dwellers also would acquire obligations from the moment they received title to their property, like the payment of fees for services and municipal taxes.

As part of their process of official neighborhood recognition, the favelas also would have gained access to services of

professional architecture and urban designers. According to the mentors of the program those professionals would not only introduce “symbols of modernity,” if they corresponded to the cultural aspirations of the inhabitants, but would also create conditions for the integration of these “ghettos” to officially consolidated neighborhoods around them.² For architect Demetre Anastassakis, then president of the Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil-RJ (Brazilian Institute of Architects-Rio de Janeiro) and of the national IAB for the period 2004-2006, urban design concentrated on favelas represented a great challenge to architects and urban planners because it represented an opportunity “to invent such designs, whether of architecture, whether of urban design, that integrate, that are beautiful, very beautiful, so that the favela might be accepted by everyone, and the favelados would be proud of it (...)” but that “this new design will not be culturally exogenous modernism, socializing luxury, nor will it be a contextualized mimicry romanticizing poverty: it shall be a design that will emerge from the day-to-day that represents modernity at the service of popular culture” (in Duarte et al., 1996: 14).

The convocation of architectural firms to reflect on methodologies for favela interventions was in itself an innovation and it meant the incorporation of the “informal city” as a “real client” of the firms, and not merely as an object for interventions by the state. Furthermore, going beyond the proposed specifications of the project for the areas, this process promoted “a deepening of reflection about the urban carioca phenomenon” (Duarte, 1996: 181).

² Truly this aesthetic concern corresponds to an aspiration arising less from the favela population than from wealthy classes which, as opinion surveys demonstrate, are much more bothered by the “unfinished” aspect of favela buildings than by the housing conditions of favela dwellers *per se*.

Urban Design Concept – Comments three projects

This study looks at three Favela Bairro of the first phase of the program - Vidigal, Parque Royal and Ladeira dos Funcionários to comment on their design concepts. These projects were developed during 1995, construction began at the beginning of 1996, and the projects were finished during 1996 and 1997.

Vidigal Favela

This favela is located in a site of extreme natural beauty surrounded by forest and enjoying breathtaking views. The settlement is accessed through Avenida Niemeyer – a panoramic roads that connects the elegant districts of Leblon and São Conrado. At the time of the project the favela had 9,900 inhabitants (around 2600 families) and covered an area of 58 acres.

According to the project leader, architect Jorge Mário Jauregui, the urbanistic plan arose from “a reading of the place’s structure, that was the key, the point of departure for the development of the project. Following the rugged topography of the place the urban project did not have many alternatives for the opening of new roads, but it sought to increase and valorize the flow of persons and vehicles along the principal axis. In this way the main street of the favela was given new functions and structures, recovering its vocation as the `backbone` of the community”.

In order to mark the access to the community, the team of architects created a gateway park next to Avenida Niemeyer made up of bleachers and a daring portico with vivid colors clearly inviting passers-by to discover the community’s spaces.

Using the landscaping potential of the place, along a trajectory a little more than one and a half kilometers (1.5 km) long, a series of facilities and spaces for socializing were distributed that had the objective of generating exchanges and social encounters. Beginning

with the gateway park the headquarters of the theater group “Nós do morro” (We of the favela) was built, then two parks, two day care centers, a cultural center with computer rooms, and a lookout on the most panoramic spot. A place for community clothes washing represented an attempt to recover an old pattern of conviviality from a time in which the inhabitants gathered around this daily activity, now more symbolic than real. Finally, at the end of this axis the topography allowed the construction of a soccer field, a covered school, and buildings for sports activities, designated “Vila Olímpica”.

The slowing of deforestation caused by irregular settlement on hillsides was another motive for concern, and the project established physical limits for settlement, proposing a containing wall. In order to create environmental awareness by means of urban components, an ecological park and a reforestation area were designed. The reforestation area today is being reclaimed by planting on slopes using labor by favela residents. Considering where the favela is located, near large hotels and important tourist sites, and because of its physical configuration and its beautiful panorama, the original project contemplated incorporating tourist activities as a way to integrate the different social groups that live outside the favela. In this sense, among other points of interest, the project proposed the construction of a cable car to the lookout; this would have facilitated the movement of those who lived on the upper slopes. The cable car proposal, however, caused great controversy among residents who lived in the formal city who pointed out its high cost and suggested that this facility would represent a specific incentive for the growth of the favela. Added to this was a lack of continuity in political administrations that caused the cable car proposal to be abandoned.

In a general analysis 8 years after the project's conclusion, it can be said that the residents recognize an improvement in their quality of life. However, there have been some cases of “soft expulsion,” that is, the urban improvements caused a rise in relative property values and some of the old residents, primarily those who

rented their shacks, were impelled to leave their homes, to be replaced by those who could pay higher prices (for rents and to buy properties).

Ladeira dos Funcionários

Located along the coast in the industrial neighborhood of Caju near the port area of the city, Ladeira dos Funcionários favela was born in the 1940s with the precarious occupation of the hill by workers from Hospital São Sebastião. It is occupied by 931 houses, a population of 804 residents, in an area of 2.7 hectares. The neighbouring Cemetery and the Hospital are in a prominent position. The favela is strongly clustered strongly clustered by major metropolitan roads - Avenida Brasil, the Linha Vermelha freeway, and the entrance to the Rio-Niterói bridge.

Like other projects of Favela-Bairro the proposal for this settlement was based on improving the neighborhood's connections with the formal city, which in this case were quite precarious. A two-way access ring road with limited automobile traffic was built around the favela. This road started at Rua Carlos Seidl, the most important of the Caju neighborhood, and provide the main access to the settlement. This ring has facilitated the implantation of infrastructure networks, as well as allowed after its completion a more efficient system for collecting garbage, reducing the collecting distance from 500 meters to 30.

Pablo Benetti, one of the architects responsible for the project at *Fabrica Arquitetura Ltd.*, explained that the design concept was that this ring road-would articulate a set of referential network of new public spaces, parks, day-care centers (in a total of 2 enrolling 200 children), soccer fields, and a small linear park near the Linha Vermelha, working as a magnet for social interaction.³

³ As explained by one of the project authors to the authors.

A multi-purpose court (196 m²) and a community center (396 m²), housed in a renovated existing metal shed that had been a war arsenal, provided a “gateway” to the favela.

All these new facilities serve both the local population and the neighbouring, functioning as spaces for social integration. Some years have passed since the project has been implemented and this has shown that those new facilities and urban improvements had a positive impact on the quality of life of local population.

Parque Royal

Parque Royal favela is located in the Ilha do Governador district on the shore of Guanabara Bay near the international airport. It began as an occupation on a flood plain by shacks built on stilts. It occupies an area of 17,8 acres bordered at north by the bay, to the east and west by two canals, and to the south by Avenue Canárias-Tubiacaanga, an important throughfare to the Ilha do Governador north shore.

The project for Paruqe Royal was done by *Archi 5 Arquitetos Associados* who concentrated on improving the settlement pre-existing structure by creating a number of new connections in the grid and correcting discontinuities. The overall design was based in establishing a new link between along the shore starting from Av. Canárias-Tubiacaanga. This important axis has allowed the neighborhood to change from a cul de sac position to became a passage way to other parts of Ilha do Governador.

This new street has the role of articulating the whole internal roadway system and permit the incorporation of the Bay's seascape into the favela establishing continuity between the agglomeration and its surroundings. Additionally the road also serve as a physical impediment that would stop growth of stilt houses on the water.

Public social facilities were located along the edges to encourage their shared with the surrounding neighbourhood.

The formal quality of the solutions, allied to the decision to locate the facility, commerce, and the new residential units on the edge of the favela is an urbanistic effort to permit greater integration of the favela with its surroundings. Today, some years later, this decision has been shown to be correct, contributing to the economic and social development of the area. It also consolidated a new image that, according to the authors of the project, arose from the necessity of working at “the continuity and discontinuity between city and community in such a way to make their integration possible.”⁴

Final Considerations

In methodological terms Favela-Bairro introduced two great improvements: First it established of low-income projects development process involving private firms in a public competition. Second, as governmental action, the guidelines of Favela-Bairro assumed great social responsibility in their respect for community participation, and for pre-existing peculiarities of environmental and cultural conditions in each site.

In general the main objectives of the program were achieved, that is: to correct discontinuities of roadways, infrastructure, and services by a qualitative improvement in the urbanistic conditions of the favelas, with a general improvement in the quality of life of the affected population that is manifested particularly by indicators relative to access to sanitation services, greater availability of facilities and urban services, better conditions of accessibility to houses and to work places.

⁴ Interview with the authors

One of its major limitations was the inability to confer land and property titles, difficulty generated largely by bureaucratic constrains like the demands made by the Cartório de Registro de Imóveis (Property Registration Office).⁵

⁵ For an evaluation of the difficulties in legalizing favela property see Fernandes, 2000.