PUBLIC HOUSING IN SAO PAULO+NYC

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Photo: Dova Verde by S. Johnson
**PUBLIC HOUSING**

**Number of units and residents**

**SP:** 84 estates with 530,000 residents, located on peripheries

**NYC:** 2,604 buildings with 175,475 families and 403,665 authorized residents and (including Section 8) located throughout city and near center

**Building history**

**SP:** Large complexes built with basic infrastructure between the 1960’s-1980’s

**NYC:** Built between 1935-1970’s

**Provision of social services**

**SP:** Lack social services

**NYC:** 60% have community centers

**Access to public transport**

**SP:** Lack of adequate transportation (up to 20km from city center)

**NYC:** 28% at least ½ mile from closest subway station

**Service to the very poor**

**SP:** Not available to very low-income population

**NYC:** 49.5% below poverty line/47.4% are working families

**Ownership and management**

**SP:** Owned by the São Paulo Metropolitan Housing Company

**NYC:** Conventional public housing units are owned by The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Section 8 units are owned by individual landlords and subsidized by NYCHA
PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMS

New York City’s Programs:

Section 8
- Also known as Housing Choice Voucher program
- Subsidizes rent for low-income families, elderly and the disabled
- Participants are free to choose any housing that meets requirements

HOPE VI
- Federal program provides grants to city and state agencies
- Revitalizes public housing developments physically and socially
- Affordable tenure opportunities

Sao Paulo’s Programs

Verticalization program
- Replaces favelas with multi story public housing developments
- Helps provide public facilities, social services and tenure prospects
- Serves over 2,106

Viva Melhor
- Renovates and provides tenure legalization of public housing estates
- Umbrella program for other housing initiatives
- Covers over 15 public housing estates
DOVA VERDE, SAO PAULO

- Slum renewal site built in 2006 as part of the Verticalization program
- Lack of management; no public education on maintenance
- No public participation process on design and land use decisions

MARKHAM GARDENS, NEW YORK CITY

- Demolition of 370 affordable rental units to 270 mixed income, rental and owned units
- Public participation in re-design facilitated by Pratt Center
- Residents guaranteed ‘right to return’
• Santa Etelvina is a development located in Eastern portion of Cidade Tiradentes municipality, built in the 1970’s.

• With 84 clusters of rundown apartment blocks (and no schools or health centers) it is the largest public housing complex in Latin America.

• Example of Viver Melhor (renovation of public housing) program that has improved existing buildings to include social services.

• Similar, yet different, outcome than in large under-funded American projects where demolition and conversion to low-rise private housing is common.
MOVING FORWARD

- Slum renewal process that includes public participation
- End cycle of Favelas created through displacement
- Ensure social services and access to reliable transportation in all new developments
- Promote and support ownership of public housing units
SOURCES


“Fact Sheet - New York City Housing Authority.” Web. 23 Apr 2010.

“Pratt Center Public Housing Executive Summary.” Print.
“Preserving Affordable Housing at Markham Gardens.” Pratt Center for Community Development. June 2005.

Public Housing in São Paulo is a relatively recent initiative, started in the 1960’s and 1970s. New York City’s first public housing development was built in 1935. The São Paulo Municípal Housing Company owns 94 estates with 530,000 inhabitants located mostly on the peripheries of São Paulo, while the New York City Housing Authority owns and operates 2,604 buildings with 175,475 families and 403,665 authorized residents (including those in section 8 programs). A major difference between São Paulo and New York City’s housing is that New York City’s housing exists throughout the city:

- The Bronx has 44,479 apartments
- Brooklyn has 58,501 apartments
- Manhattan has 53,887 apartments
- Queens has 17,144 apartments
- Staten Island has 10,4357 apartments

Both cities suffer from lack of access to transportation. In NYC, 28% of public housing residents are over 1/2 mile from the nearest subway station. In São Paulo, tenants in public housing lack access to adequate transportation services to travel between neighboring settlements and to São Paulo center, which is often up to 20km away. In both cases, the number of employment opportunities that residents of any given development are able to access is diminished and public housing residents’ social and economic isolation is compounded.

São Paulo, public housing lacks basic social services—community centers, cultural or educational programs. NYCHA offers these programs—60% of public housing complexes have community centers—and services in many of their developments. However due to declining federal subsidies, these centers are closing and services are being cut.

While the lowest income segment of the population in São Paulo is generally excluded from public housing, 49.5% of the public housing population in New York City is below the poverty line. At the same time, 47.4% are working families.
Sao Paulo is in the process of ending its Verticalization Program that replaces squatter housing and/or favelas with multi-story public housing developments. Through the negotiation of Municipal Secretariat of Housing and Urban Development (SEHAB) and the Inter-American Development Bank existing development will be upgraded to include public facilities, social services and tenure possibilities.

The Viver Melhor program, that renovates and provides tenure legalization of public housing estates, is a program in Sao Paulo that covers over 15 public housing estates. It serves as an umbrella program for other housing initiatives that focus on various physical and/or social services. Viver Melhor also has a tenure initiative for apartments within public housing estates for which property titles were never issued.

Public housing in New York City is heavily dependent on the federal Housing Choice Voucher program also known as Section 8. The program subsidizes rent for low-income families, elderly and the disabled to afford safe and sanitary housing. Participants are free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program although a majority of them do reside within subsidized housing projects.

New York City also uses funds from Hope VI, a federal program, that provides grants to public housing agencies for the revitalization of its existing developments. The grant funds physical improvements including major rehabilitation, demolition, and off site construction; it also funds social services, education programs for residents and encourages affordable tenure options. Any severely distressed public housing development is eligible to apply.
Dova Verde is a public housing development in Sao Paulo, built by the city in 2006, to house former residents of a favela. Before the new structures, most families had extended families living in units and were considered overcrowded. In Sao Paulo, overcrowding is defined as 2 to 3 families per units. To initiate the project, the government gave extended families 5,000 reais to leave in order to prevent overcrowding. This creates cycle for Favelas by giving people a small sum of money to relocate.

The verticalization program removes squatter settlements and replaces them with multi-story apartment complexes but with no provisions for social services. Similar to urban renewal of the mid-20th century in New York City, it did not provide mechanisms for participation of residents in decision-making. For example, there was not public education on apartment maintenance and tenants have little voice in land-use decisions. They did not participate in the decision to convert 25% of the land in to a information technology center. SEHAB decided to discontinue the program but will fulfill current contracts and try to provide social services in conjunction with the Inter-American Development Bank.

In New York City, although residents of public housing often form tenants' associations, there is often little opportunity for involvement in decision-making processes, especially regarding construction of new housing projects and relocation of residents. In 2004, residents from the Markham Gardens public housing project in Staten Island, New York City, were removed from their homes to make way for renovation of the project from 370 affordable rental units to 270 mixed income rental and owned units. The Pratt Center for Community Development worked with the tenants' association and facilitated a process through which residents were guaranteed the right to return to their units and provide input on the design and location of social service amenities to be included in the new development.
Santa Etelvina is a development located in Eastern portion of Cidade Tiradentes municipality, built in the 1970’s. With 84 clusters of rundown apartment blocks (and no schools or health centers) it is the largest public housing complex in Latin America.

Viver Melhor is a municipal program to undertake renovation of public housing by improving existing buildings to include social services.

This reflect a similar, yet different, outcome than in large under-funded American projects where demolition and conversion to low-rise private housing is common.
MOVING FORWARD

Similar to New York, Sao Paulo’s public housing has experienced both success and shortcomings. Resident testimonials helped identify key elements for moving forward.

Throughout the visit, residents shared their bittersweet experiences in obtaining public housing. They were grateful to have formalized shelter but also felt their unique needs were lost in the process, showing a need for more public participation in housing decisions. Public participation will not only educate residents on the matters affecting them but also prevent community divides.

Residents also noted that many individuals are displaced while waiting for the completion of public housing developments revealing a need for a better interim housing procedure. Current housing vouchers that are below market rate rent only perpetuates the cycle of favelas and overcrowding.

Residents also expressed the desire for housing security by gaining tenure of their apartments. Supporting ownership of public housing units will increase civic engagement and ensure long term viability of neighborhoods.

Sao Paulo has established new initiatives to ensure social services and adequate transportation for residents in public housing developments. Residents believe a continued effort will uplift communities both socially and physically.

It is apparent that the government and residents of Sao Paulo are dedicated to establishing a sustainable public housing system that will meet the needs of the people despite the challenges and drawbacks.
SOURCES


“Fact Sheet - New York City Housing Authority.” Web. 23 Apr 2010.

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