São Paulo’s deficiency in affordable housing is manifested throughout the city, in the small to large pockets of favelas, occupied abandoned buildings and infrastructure, to the extreme poverty areas along its periphery. The state of homelessness can in a way be applied to any individual living under these conditions, since what constitutes the definition of homelessness may be defined by the right to decent shelter.
Prior to embarking on a guided visit to São Paulo’s city center, the students had the opportunity to have dinner at the Penaforte soup kitchen with a few members of the Movimento da População de Rua and Associação Rede Rua to become acquainted with the statistics regarding homelessness in São Paulo. Penaforte (strong mercy) soup kitchen serves an average of 500 meals daily, provides bathroom/shower facilities, educational and leisure social activities. The soup kitchen is partially funded by the municipal government, however the support that comes from caring organizations and individuals allows the program to keep functioning properly, unlike another location at risk of closure or appropriation by inadequate management due to insufficient funds.

Introduction

- Movimento de População de Rua
- Associação Rede Rua.
During the discussion at Penaforte the group was briefed on a few statistics and conditions of the state of homelessness in São Paulo.

- There are over 13,000 homeless people in the city.
- There is capacity for potentially 7,300 people in existing shelters.
- An estimate of over 6,300 people sleep on the street.
- 22.7% Reduction in Social Services Budget affecting fundamental preventative and assistive programs.

Statistics taken from the Secretaria Municipal da Assistência Social de São Paulo.
POLICY + LEGISLATION

In 1997 Law 12.316 proposed by councilwoman Aldaíza Sposati is approved; it establishes the obligation of the municipal government to provide assistance to homeless people in São Paulo. In 2001 Ordinance 40.232 is established by Marta Suplicy to enforce this law. “…the municipal government must maintain services and programs in the City of São Paulo which focus on ensuring ethical standards of dignity and nonviolence for homeless people and achieving minimum social and citizenship rights in this social segment….” (Quote and information by Anderson Lopes Miranda from Movimento de Populacao de Rua)
ORGANIZATIONS

Along with Centro Gaspar Garcia, Associação Rede Rua and the Movimento de População de Rua arranged for a guided visit through São Paulo’s city center.

The group was exposed to the homeless condition during the evening when safe sites were sought by the homeless to spend the night.

Associação Rede Rua (Street Network) and the Movimento de População de Rua are national organizations that seeks to inform, educate and fight for civil/human rights.

______,_______ and _______ from Movimento de População de Rua

HOMELESSNESS // SÃO PAULO
THE REALITY OF THE STREETS

The city center is an area sought by many who sleep and live on the street, there they have access to public and religious institutions who provide food, bathing facilities, some work and even training workshops amongst other necessities. However the population here is under heavy scrutiny and pressure. The current Mayor Gilberto Kassab determined to “limpar” clean the streets. Kassab’s ‘strategy’ is to militiarize these areas with both Guarda Civil (Metropolitan Police) and Guarda Militare (Military Police), in addition to the private security local commerce hires to ensure their storefronts do not become shelters during the evening. This population is faced with a difficult dilemma, where they seek a quite and hopefully an area where they will not be disturbed or be the victims of violence, to the west is the police and to the east are areas of heavy drug traffic. The instructions to police are to use “o toque de despertar” the wakening tap and orienting the individual towards the nearest social assistance center. However these systems are quite deficient and Kassab continues to believe that the “incomodo” hassling the homeless will be the key to getting them off the street, not the social and economic support system.
During our visit we were approached by a teenager who was curious as to what a group of 10 foreigners were doing walking around the city center at eleven at night. He joined the group contributing with his story and experiences. Paulo is 17 years old and he sleeps on the street since he was 7, similarly to ____; claiming to have no parents or family to seek shelter with. Paulo's situation is very real and full of exponential intricacies. He is reaching an age where his priority in the shelter system is quickly coming to an end. However his experiences in the shelters have not been favorable and so he chooses to seek rescue on the street. You come to expect that most adolescents on the streets are substance abusers; Paulo was cohesive and articulate. He even showed off some of his break-dance moves. We also met a young woman in her mid 20s with a child of about 1 who had been sleeping on the streets for three months. According to Pedro men make up over 80% of the street population, however the number of children and women sleeping on the streets continues to increase, as evictions displace 200-500 families single handedly without provisions for their future.
VIOLENCE

The guided visit to the center ended in the Praça Sé adjacent to the magnificent Cathedral of São Paulo. Flanking the plaza were two trailers for both military and metropolitan police. Police brutality is a serious problem in the city, especially towards those who have difficulty in defending their rights. There have been various horrendous crimes and homicides towards the homeless in the city center. The movements told us accounts of various stories including one that shook the nation in 2004 with the total of seven homicides in one evening. In fact, as we approached the plaza Paulo said “look there, those are the guys that beat up on everybody” reffering to the police officers.

As our group concluded the visit on the plaza, it was witness to an unfortunate event that began to tell the story of the type of violence that takes place here. An elderly man while trying to protect himself was being violently pushed by a police officer while being flashed with a light repeatedly in his eyes in a disorienting manner. Dito, Luis and Rene from the Centro Gaspar Garcia, who accompanied the group on all of the visits; quickly intervened. _____,_____ and _____ also came to their assistance with a certain amount of caution. I came to understand the reason briefly after, when I overheard Pedro’s advice to the two younger members. “You have to becarefull guys, they don't forget faces and they'll come looking for you. Remember, in the end we have to sleep here tonight.”
OCAS
Civil Organization for Social Action

OCAS is a non-profit magazine that promotes the citizenship and empowerment of homeless and socially vulnerable people in Brazil. Since July of 2002, the OCAS magazine has been an opportunity for homeless and socially vulnerable people to make an income through the selling of a bi-monthly magazine.

O TRECHEIRO
Associação Rede Rua

The newspaper has sought to contribute to the visibility of the difficult living conditions of men and women on the streets of Sao Paulo and other Brazilian cities. Besides this main focus, the paper opens the way to social movements that fight all forms of social exclusion. The main themes of its stories have been institutional neglect and violence, lack of public policies and initiatives of civil society and government to confront these issues.
According to estimates of the Polis Institute, there are over 5 thousand Catadores in the city center and about 20 thousand in the entire city.

Catadores have been struggling for recognition and legitimization of their incredibly strenuous work for over fifty years. Their carts are usually perceived as eye sores by the city administration and often apprehended as well as their areas of work especially if individual are often the target of unannounced ‘limpezas’ clean-ups. The importance of cooperatives is a topic that even though relentlessly encouraged is still attempting to break down cultural barriers amongst those unfamiliar with the process. Another, yet more recent risk that threatens their already questionable job security is the city’s desire to privatize this type of work to a few large companies similar to the three contractors that currently handle the city’s unrecyclable materials.

The city of Sao Paulo has about 10.5 million inhabitants and produces about 15,000 tons of garbage a day, according to information from the City of São Paulo (2005). Currently only 1,300 tons are recycled. The selective collection held by the government collects about seventy tons per day of waste that is distributed to fourteen central sorting centers, where the separation, pre-processing and sale of the material takes place.

The other 1230 tons / day are predominantly collected by thousands of ‘Catadores’ collectors of recyclable materials, organized or not into cooperatives, associations or groups that make their living through this type of work.
COOPERATIVES // RECYCLING IN SÃO PAULO

COOPER, COORPEL, and COOPAMARE RECIFRAN are a great example of what begins as a community based initiative may lead to policy and legislation programs that begin to include this marginalized group into the city’s economy and legitimize it as a successful industry. The Cooperative was officially founded in 2003 and is the result of a social project assembled in 2000 called the Comitê Metropolitano de Catadores, with the partnership of Center Gaspar Garcia for Human Rights, OAF (Fraternal Aid Organization), the Franciscan Province of Immaculate Conception and the Municipality of São Paulo. In 2001-2002 the City Council implemented the selective collection program in the downtown area, as a means to form partnerships with cooperatives such as COOPER and encourage others to follow suit. In 2006 similar ordinance was passed at the federal level.

All cooperative members that work at COOPER, started at one of the reference centers, such as COORPEL, where they received care, through the development process of working and living in the pursuit of values, education and job training.

Today there are 100 cooperative members; work is divided into two shifts - from 6am to 2 pm and from 2pm to 10pm. It is through the collection of recyclable materials and outside donations that the members of the cooperative can continue to live with dignity, which for many of them, seemed lost. They also pride themselves as environmental agents.
Dry waste from homes and condominiums, mostly from the central region arrive at COOPERE via city trucks only. Individual Catadores are only accepted at the COORPEL location. These wastes are stored in warehouses or containers until they are sorted to pass through a conveyor where the waste is further separated by type of material. Women seem to take on the job of sorting since some of the other activities are more physically demanding. However, the Cooperative ensures that in addition to alternating work tasks everyone is compensated equally. All leftover material is returned to the city, most of these materials final destination is the city’s Landfill. The materials separated are pressed and packed to be sold to private companies. paper (cardboard, white paper, newspapers and magazines), plastics (PET, packaging oil, cleaning supplies, etc..), Packaging Tetra Pak (milk, juice, etc.). cans of all kinds, metal, glass (food, windows, beverages, etc.), computer equipment and appliances.
COOPERATIVES //
RECYCLING IN SÃO PAULO

The majority of cooperative members are homeless or previously homeless, elderly, young adults with no education and previous substance abusers.

The Cooperative however feels their future to be somewhat uncertain; the city owns the land in which they operate and by law they may relocate or appropriate the current area. COORPEL's dream is to continue to offer the opportunity of social inclusivity and form a more independent cooperative that does not rely on city administrations to determine their future.