

The urban development model of São Paulo needs to be reversed

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Introduction

URBANISM HAS always walked the tightrope between professional practice, scientific discipline or utopia. From the ideal cities of the Renaissance, the utopian socialism of Owen and Fourier in the early nineteenth century - which was nothing but plans for imaginary cities - to the modern urbanism; from the vanguards to the Athens Charter, dreaming of habitable environments free of inequality, with a balance between the built environment and nature, where peace, solidarity, equality, citizenship and tranquility could bloom has always been the engine that drove the debate of new ideas to boost urban development.

At the end of the twentieth century, however, the utopian energies seemed to have disappeared from the imaginary of society and of the city of the future. Urbanism was turning into urban marketing, a practice at the service of the market. The collapse of the false Soviet socialism, disenchantment with transformative ideologies that had thrilled several generations since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the prevalence of consumerist materialism, the force of the market, governed by neoliberal ideas, and the false belief that science could predict and determine all that would happen were leading our time, inexorably, to this blackout of utopian energies, which was called the “end of history”.

A belief took hold that it would be possible to reverse ongoing processes through collective actions, leading citizens to seek, in individual solutions, answers to the questions that concern them, a situation that is particularly strong in Brazil. The risk of violence is faced with segregation and confinement; the precariousness of public transport with the private automobile; environmental degradation with the creation of a microcosm of green next to gated communities; air pollution with weekends in the mountains or by the sea; untreated water with pet bottles of mineral water. Insufficient solutions to which only the high and medium social classes could have access. The rest of the population was faced with barbarism. The creation of ghettos protected from the evils of the metropolis (gated communities, armored cars, policed malls, monitored environments) seemed to be the only solution to overcome an unwelcoming and aggressive urban environment.

This climate changed in the first decade of the twenty-first century. September 11, 2001 represented, symbolically, the downfall of the false sense of security that the strictly guarded ghettos seemed to guarantee. The wave of robberies in gated communities and shopping malls, which became a routine in São Paulo, shows that the logic of segregation does not guarantee safety. The global crisis of capitalism in 2008/2009 exposed what we already knew, i.e., that the market cannot run loose without a strong regulatory presence of the State, bringing down those in Brazil who still advocated further deregulation of urban processes. Climate disasters, in turn, have shown that “development at any cost,” consumerist orgy and the way of life prevailing in the country, with the standards imposed by the market and accepted by the middle class are unsustainable in the near future.

New hopes, however, have resurfaced. The creation of new global networks focused on transformation, such as the World Social Forum with its motto “A new world is possible”, and the organization of people through the Internet are proof that global society is showing signs of vitality and dissatisfaction. Overcoming classical forms of organization, new networks mobilize society, linking previously isolated citizens, and introduce other ways to build collective desires. In different ways, the utopian vigor, which is an indispensable element for the rebirth of urbanism is recovered.

That is because without utopia there is no urbanism. It would be reduced to a mere technocratic and bureaucratic practice, facing more the effects than the causes of urban problems, and lose its transforming momentum. It is common to hear ordinary people and even some experts claim that large metropolises, especially in poor countries, are hopeless. In São Paulo this is very common, especially on days when floods or giant traffic jams paralyze the city and frighten citizens. For no other reason, more than half of the population, as much as 65 percent in 1999, say that if they would move out of the city if they could.

Overcoming this pessimistic view is essential for society to engage in the construction of alternatives. But this requires recovering the utopian energies, a dimension of passion capable of convincing citizens that they can change processes that seem unchangeable. Only when the population of the city believes that it is possible to substantially change the current scenario, so as to make São Paulo feasible from the standpoint of both the quality of life of all its residents and urban and environmental balance, it will be possible to build this path, which although seemingly utopian is within reach, provided that there is consensus on key aspects of the city’s life and that the government, detached from individual interests, is called upon to coordinate this transformative process. If it were simple and easy, it wouldn’t be a utopia.

This article seeks to start a debate on alternatives for the urban development of São Paulo, which can only be built through a participatory planning process in which the government has a key role, but that requires the engage-

ment of society. It is not easy to face an urban model and a way of life that sustain solid economic interests; and they can only be reversed if society realizes that they are unsustainable.

The metropolis we have

It is evident that São Paulo, as well as other Brazilian metropolises cannot continue to grow from the existing urban model. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the city is teetering towards chaos, and only by changing this model one can hope for a better future.

Urban, functional and social inequality is increasing, generating a divided and segregated city. The urban sprawl expands horizontally, destroying environmental protection areas and producing on the one hand distant slums with no infrastructure and on the other medium- and high-income gated communities, accessible only by car. Migration has decreased and the population has grown slightly since 1990 (about 0.7 percent annually in the municipality of São Paulo, and 1.65 percent in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (MRSP) in the last twenty years), but in a very unequal way: the best urbanized areas have lost population, while more distant regions, areas of environmental concern and the poorest municipalities in the Metropolitan Region continue to show high growth rates.

Physical expansion is even more serious. The horizontal expansion of the MRSP tends to create a mega-metropolis almost fully inhabited, thus reducing the still non-urbanized green spaces between the region of Campinas, Baixada Santista and the conurbations of São José dos Campos and Sorocaba. The model of low density gated communities is spreading exactly in this region, tending to eliminate a greenbelt that still exists around the urbanized mass. The process will contribute to global warming, to change in water behavior, with serious consequences for water supply and the worsening of floods, besides promoting the way of life based on individual cars, the only way to access these communities. This urban model is incompatible with public transport.

The 53 most urbanized districts in the municipality of São Paulo provided with facilities and jobs, including predominantly vertical neighborhoods, have lost residents. Areas provided with infrastructure and opportunities, where traffic jams are endemic, are losing residents; installed facilities such as schools and health clinics are becoming idle, while the government is forced to build facilities in distant neighborhoods, which are becoming increasingly denser. Closed schools in the most consolidated areas as well as “tin schools” in distant outlying areas are the very picture of this phenomenon.

Territorial inequality has serious consequences for urban mobility. In the district of República there are over *six hundred* jobs for every one hundred residents; in the City of Tiradentes, in the far East Zone, this number drops to *eight*. Commuting from bedroom neighborhoods to the expanded center spurs overcrowding of the road system and public transport. On these trips, there are

those who spend terrible six hours in public transport, spending literally a third of their lives in commute.

Priority on the car, which marked the vision of progress of the twentieth century, underscored by the implementation of expressways and road networks, compounds this problem because the road system cannot cope with the nearly seven million vehicles registered in the MRSP. Traffic has become the nightmare of São Paulo residents, although public investments have prioritized the expansion of road networks over the enhancement of public transport. Not by chance, the only plan fully implemented in São Paulo was the sadly famous Avenues Plan, a proposal to build radial avenues and beltways, which guided the insufficient public works in the city from the 1930s to the late 1960s.

Obsolete, vacant or underused buildings populate the old downtown area abandoned by the elite, where over 18 percent of homes were vacant in 2000. In another landscape, a large number of sheds remain unused along the railways, an area with great potential for mass transportation, where real estate projects are beginning to be implemented detached from an urban strategy.

Floods are aggravated by soil sealing, generated by both the official practice, in force since the 1930s, of building avenues and expressways in valley bottoms and irregular land occupation. Tolerance or the inability to curb illegal use and occupation is a reflection of the disregard for urban planning and environmental standards.

Due to the lack of housing policy and planning, more than two million people live irregularly in environmental protection areas. A recent survey conducted by IPT showed that there are about 110,000 homes in risk areas, most in areas of stream sanitation and steep slopes, i.e., Permanent Protection Areas, as defined by the Forest Code. In the last three decades, the population living in slums has grown at rates far above that of the general population.

Environmental degradation, desertification of public space and neglect of the urban and social memory are features of a city whose identity has been threatened. Narrow sidewalks, either obstructed or not built, pollution of air space, streams turned into sewers and the aggressiveness of drivers make life in the city even more difficult. To have access to their garages, residents build steps on the sidewalks and obstruct them with gates that stretch beyond the private area. Disrespect for public space is the rule in the city, as a result of either formal or informal real estate processes or the lack of civility by residents.

Can this situation be reversed and can the metropolis turn things around and become viable, environmentally sustainable, with a new urban model and a simpler and more balanced way of life?

Building an alternative path: Could a new São Paulo emerge in the twenty-first century?

The utopia of a more just and sustainable city, capable of both ensuring quality of life for its citizens and growing in balance with the environment

may seem distant to many. “This city is hopeless” is a statement often heard in reference to our future. The utopia of a better city has disappeared from the collective imaginary, as people would prefer to move out of the city if that were possible.

This, however, is not easy: São Paulo’s wide range of employment, business, leisure and sociability opportunities attracts a vast population that incapable of disconnecting from the city. Many have moved out, such as to a gated community located within a hundred kilometers from the capital - a common situation for the higher income population - but remain professionally linked to the city and start experiencing the everyday crazy life of commuting between home and work, a lifestyle that requires hours on the road and in traffic and several cars in each household. In the early morning hours, traffic jams on the main roads of access to the city are as bad as on the busiest avenues.

Those who choose this alternative are deprived of the richness and diversity of urban daily life, “where one breathes the air of freedom,” as it was said in the Middle Ages, and have to settle for the monotonous and quiet life among equals in a permanently guarded territory.

The basic issue that needs to be addressed is how to reverse the current growth model of the mega-metropolis based on horizontal (low income) or dispersed (medium or high income) peripheral expansion; on the vertical integration of low population density in the consolidated area; on the intensive use of the automobile; on the increasing distance between home and the workplace; on the overproduction of trash; on the deterioration of the oldest zones of historic interest; and on the occupation and destruction of environmental protection areas. The big challenge is finding a way to stop this process that can gradually be replaced by a new model of urban development that maximizes the potential of the macro-metropolis while minimizing the very serious environmental impacts that today tend to derail our future.

The Strategic Master Plan of the Municipality of São Paulo (PDE) approved in 2002 indicated a possible way forward, although with limitations because it was the result of extensive negotiations with various social sectors, whose interests not always allow for significant changes in the prevailing urban model. But it is one of the most advanced master plans to be implemented in Brazil in the recent planning cycle marked by the 1988 Constitution and the Statute of the City (2001), governed by the principles of social function of property, right to housing, participatory planning and social recovery of real estate valuation generated by public investment. The new urban tools created by this legal instrument, however, can only be used if set out in master plans and regulated by specific municipal laws approved by city councils, and this hinders its implementation.

In predicting the use of these instruments, the PDE presented the key elements for a reversal of this urban development model that prevails in the

city. However, its implementation has been curtailed. Although some of the instruments provided for and the strategic actions contained therein began to be implemented in 2003, they were interrupted in 2005 with the change in administration, and when partially resumed they were not associated with a global strategy for the city.

Nevertheless, today there is a certain consensus among the various sectors of society, at least rhetorically, in relation to most of the main goals of the PDE, which are strategic and long term goals. However, achieving them requires putting into practice in the short-term strategic instruments, programs and actions that are indispensable for producing the expected results, and this has been postponed.

Challenges to changing the urban model of São Paulo

Reducing urban inequality is a summary challenge to making the city better. The model of a segregated city, with ghettos that resemble Switzerland and enormous territories with huge needs and precariousness should be fought against with vigor, which implies prioritizing investments in the poorest areas and using tax and urbanization instruments to redistribute wealth. The adoption of progressive property tax (IPTU) according to the price of the property adopted in the Property Tax rules since 2002 is a mechanism in this regard, as it means higher taxes on more expensive properties and tax exemption on less expensive ones.

The establishment of the onerous grant of the right to build, i.e., the soil created through a more intensive use of the land, regulated by the PDE, is another instrument to stimulate the decentralization of private real estate investments. This is achieved by levying proportionally higher taxes on the soil created from developments located in areas that are consolidated and more valued and most wanted by the market, favoring intermediate and peripheral regions.

Reducing inequalities also means bringing housing, including social housing, closer to workplaces and facilities by combining two strategic actions: bringing urbanization, land tenure, jobs and services to outlying peripheries, which should be structured and qualified from the standpoint of urban planning, and encourage residential use, with incentives and subsidies to lower-income people in areas of employment concentration – the expanded downtown area and the southwest zone. That would enable reducing commuting needs and time, thus reducing the need for cars and motorized transport.

A less unequal qualification of public spaces is crucial. Most of the city's well-structured parks are located in middle and upper class neighborhoods, while in the most excluded regions the few existing green areas have been depleted. In these areas, slums have occupied free spaces, generating an environmental liability that needs to be faced even to increase soil permeability in the city, an essential step for coping with the floods.

Based on these assumptions, the PDE established goals to restructure the

city, which can be systematized in eight summary challenges. These are challenges that apply, in general, to the Metropolitan Region as a whole, since the basic urban issues are the same.

Challenge 1: Curb the horizontal expansion process of the metropolis;

Challenge 2: Reduce the need to commute by bringing the workplace closer to home;

Challenge 3: Restructure public transport and encourage its use, thus reducing the use of cars;

Challenge 4: Rehabilitate and repopulate, with social inclusion, the expanded metropolitan center and consolidated neighborhoods, reversing the current process of population flight;

Challenge 5: Regularize, urbanize and qualify irregular lots and slums located in outlying peripheries;

Challenge 6: Create new centers and stimulate job creation in areas characterized as bedroom towns;

Challenge 7: Curb construction increase and stimulate population growth in the consolidated area;

Challenge 8: value and enhance public spaces, expand green areas, afforestation and soil permeability.

How to face these challenges?

What needs to be done for São Paulo to achieve these goals? How would the city grow? What would be the way of life and sociability of its residents? How would they move around? How would they relate to the physical environment?

Reversing the current model requires a lot of determination from the government, including take unpopular measures that would certainly run counter economic interests. This requires increasing the support of organized society achieved from a broad pact generated by a participatory process, so that more conscious citizens can become advocates of the main transformation axes to be pursued.

The key to this true urban revolution is a *better use and distribution of the resources we have*, avoiding waste, excessive consumption and opulence. This means avoiding the horizontal expansion of cities; making greater and better use of urbanized land and buildings; rehabilitating the obsolete housing stock; re-urbanizing underused or poorly constructed areas; mixing uses and social classes to reduce the need for long commutes; generating less waste and recycle waste; saving and reusing water; rationalizing the use of energy; balancing the relationship between built space and the environment; prioritizing the road network for vehicles with greater capacity to transport people.

Curbing the horizontal growth of the city implies prohibiting new land divisions beyond a borderline of the area already urbanized, involving all municipalities included in the macro-metropolis. The goal is to consolidate a very

low-density greenbelt around the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, thus preventing it from fully mingling with other urban clusters that make up the so-called macro-metropolis.

This guideline requires preventing the beltway from becoming a mechanism of encouragement to an urban sprawl of clearly speculative character and building a barrier to urban growth flanked by a large ring-shaped park. This requires preventing side accesses, even on roads connected thereto. Without such a measure, not only water source protection areas located around the metropolis can be occupied, but a continuous urbanized area of two hundred kilometers in diameter will be created, resulting in a true environmental disaster.

This greenbelt needs to be used for productive and profitable activities complementary to the metropolis compatible with environmental preservation. The creation of mechanisms of payment for ecosystem services needs to be seriously reviewed, as a compensation mechanism for the maintenance of a wide area around the metropolis without urban occupation. But other proposals for the use of this greenbelt should also be encouraged.

An example is the Land Commune, a project that is being developed by the Landless Workers Movement (MST). These communes are organized settlements in small areas, established in the vicinity of large cities and formed by workers from the urban area who are former migrants from rural areas. Some units have already been established, such as the Land Commune Dom Tomás Balduino, in the municipality of Franco da Rocha. Products to be sold in the Metropolitan Region itself are produced and processed at the commune. The federal law requiring that 30 percent of products purchased by the Government for school meals should come from family agriculture can be an excellent stimulus for this activity, which usually suffers from the absence of market for these products.

Settlements like the Land Communes can be sustainable alternatives for this greenbelt, as the rural activity is maintained while population is added to sites provided with public facilities, quality of life and sociability substantially different from those of the previous rural areas.

Leisure activities through the maintenance and/or restoration of vegetation and very low building density is another suitable option for this belt, considering the huge demand that exists in the city, especially by the low-income population living in outlying peripheries, and therefore at a short distance from this region. Creating quality leisure options near the city is indispensable for São Paulo. As a result of increased income – an inevitable process resulting from economic growth and better income distribution – the entire population will want to spend a long weekend out of town. Should the current model persist, instead of leisure the urban population will spend days on congested roads, a situation already experienced on some occasions.

The restriction to horizontal growth requires a better use and densifica-

tion of the already urbanized area. This is perfectly possible because the occupation density in the MRSP, incredible as it may seem, is still relatively low. The urbanized area in the region adds 2,200 km² (excluding scattered gated communities), with a population of about twenty million people. This means a gross density of 90 inhabitants per hectare, an index that is still quite low.

This aspect holds the key to solving the urban issue in São Paulo: if the metropolis should not grow horizontally, where will the real estate developments needed to accommodate future housing demands and new shops, services and other non-residential uses be implemented? We believe it is possible to make better use of urban spaces, so as to provide better quality to meet both existing uses and future needs.

As shown, population growth of both the municipality and the Metropolitan Region has been dropping significantly and will tend to decrease gradually in the coming decades. This means that the demand for space may be progressively lower. However, the territorial expansion of the city has been determined largely by the abandonment of the building stock, new space use habits - whether for residential or commercial and services purposes - and, above all, by a mistaken urban development model.

It is no coincidence that vertical neighborhoods with high building density lose residents. The model of real estate developments, in part related to the peculiarities of the Housing Finance System, is responsible for that, since it rejects mixed-use buildings on the lot, as there used to exist in the past, with shops and services on the ground floor and mezzanine and residences on the other floors. In residential buildings there is a lot of idle space on the ground floor, which could house activities that ultimately occupy, with very low density, other prime locations.

Moreover, the average size of families has fallen sharply; in São Paulo, the expected size of a family in 2020 is only 2.53 members. This means that housing units can be smaller, particularly in the medium and high income layers, which occupy extremely privileged areas in the city; these are apartments that are empty most of the day. In turn, new gated communities create true private clubs that overuse urban space rather than using collective, private (clubs) or public facilities. With a better use of urbanized areas, the need for expansion would be much smaller.

Clearly, these options require changes in both the way of life and expectations of the population and in the action of real estate agents. These changes are necessary if we are to ensure sustainability for a metropolis the size of São Paulo.

It is clear that the city will continue to require areas for new developments. The alternative is to grow inwards by organizing underused regions. This reoccupation process should be developed in a new type of enterprise, with planning and urban order. The current real estate model, usually mono-functional, where each developer individually defines the characteristics of their projects, such as

the volumetry of the building, based on general rules established by the zoning code, must yield to the complete planning of large areas with a previously defined urban design, thus eliminating the model of isolated and mono-functional gated communities.

The house could be harmonically associated with non-residential uses, thus establishing new urban centers with open public space for the city, where work, consumption and leisure can be close to home, thus reducing the need for long urban commute.

São Paulo has numerous areas where this could occur, some of which are defined in the Master Plan, such as areas of urban operations along railway lines, which form a horseshoe around the most consolidated area in the city, and the more than 900 Special Zones of Social Interest, which are empty, deteriorated areas or areas occupied by slums and irregular settlements, many of which can be entirely re-urbanized. We should not fear processes of complete restructuring of some areas in the city, as long as this does not affect the urban heritage and memory, and what is very important, does not displace - but rather attracts - low- and medium-income residents.

Among the areas requiring rehabilitation, one of the most important is the historical center and nearby neighborhoods. It is a challenge that demands strong action to reverse the combined process of underuse and exclusion that the area has been going through. Rehabilitation needs to be compatible with the production of housing, including for the low-income population, so as to bring the workplace closer to home. Special Zones of Social Interest have been established for that purpose, but much more is needed: public investment to increase supply, actions to lower the prices of land and buildings for housing production by fighting, through heavy tax burden, the idleness and underuse of land (including those occupied by parking lots), vacant buildings and industrial sheds.

The instruments provided for in the PDE to combat speculation and give a social function to the property must be used to their full potential. The progressive tax on vacant, idle or underused properties took almost eight years to be regulated by the City Council, and the Executive branch did nothing to accelerate its approval. The law, although positive, is still insufficient vis-à-vis the expected results.

In turn, the mechanism that the municipality is using to promote the rehabilitation of the regions of Santa Ifigênia - also referred to as “Cracolândia” or “Nova Luz” (Crack Cocaine Land or New Light), known as urban concession, has been adopted without broad public debate or a defined urban design. For these reasons, it has had the opposite effect to its intended purposes, deteriorating the region even further and generating strong opposition from residents and businesses. Rather than a plan developed with the participation of society and mobilization of the private sector in coordination with public initiatives and

local organizations, the aim seems to be transforming the urban rehabilitation of a neighborhood as a real estate business. This is exactly what should not be done.

These older regions, which are marked by memory and are indispensable for strengthening the city's identity, should be the target of more decisive actions to rehabilitate and recycle vertical buildings of the 1930s and 1970s, which soon will be between 50 and 100 years old. São Paulo has been demolished twice: in the late nineteenth century, when the lath-and-plaster city built by the Portuguese and Tupi indigenous people was destroyed; and in the mid-twentieth century, when the brick city built by Italian, Portuguese and Spanish immigrants was brought down. A vertical concrete jungle was built, which is gradually becoming obsolete, but will not be brought down without a high environment and urban cost, which needs to be avoided. The demolition of the São Vito and Mercuric buildings promoted by the municipal government - which resulted in the generation of a large amount of debris - to remove houses from where they are essential to a new model of urban development is a mistake that cannot be repeated.

This option to deal with obsolete buildings should be avoided at any cost. Through the development of new technologies for building rehabilitation and recycling, the city can be renewed without demolishing, thus creating new living spaces from the perspective of growing inwards, better balancing the complementary urban uses, with greater possibilities of on-foot commute. Another structural action to balance the relationship between housing and employment is the creation of new centralities and jobs in the outlying peripheries of the Metropolitan Region. But this cannot and will not happen without strong intervention by the government through economic development plans in different regions - stimulating the establishment of new activities and generating more jobs where a true bedroom town currently prevails. That is what began to be implemented between 2003 and 2004 with the Economic Development Plan for the East Zone provided for in the PDE, which aimed to create a new centrality in a region where a population of over six million has no employment options. But in 2005 the proposal was shelved by the city.

The urban development of outlying peripheries so that they can attract economic activities requires urban qualification and land regularization, in coordination with social inclusion and solidarity economy programs capable of stimulating entrepreneurship in the local population. The transformation of these precarious peripheral settlements into true neighborhoods with infrastructure, green areas, facilities, title deeds and social organization would have an enormous impact in reducing violence and changing the face of the bedroom neighborhoods that characterize the region marked by an undefined and grayish landscape.

Better distributed uses would enable reducing the extreme need for mo-

bility that is now the rule in the city. More housing in areas with higher employment availability, better distribution of economic activities benefiting areas with scarce employment opportunities, in addition to mixed-use real estate developments contribute to shortening commuting distances. But in a metropolis, the issue of mobility will always be an important requirement.

The PDE included a proposal - that has just begun to be implemented - to reorganize the transport system in the city. Based on a structural subsystem consisting of subways, commuter trains and bus corridors on exclusive lanes, and a local transport subsystem with smaller capacity vehicles coming close to the residential areas articulated by the unified commute fare, the aim of the proposed action was to create conditions for a public transport system capable of competing with the private car.

However, this proposal, which promised to make public transport as comfortable and fast as the car, has never been fully implemented. Since 2005 no new bus corridor has been established in the city. The local subsystem has never been effectively implemented, hindering quick access to subway and train stations. Thus, the use of individual vehicles, despite brutal traffic jams, continues to enjoy enormous competitive advantages over the use of public transportation. Investments in subway and commuter trains are indispensable for addressing the problem in a structural way, but are excessively high, and results are seen only in the long term.

On the other hand, massive investments continue to be made in the road system, without specific lanes for public transportation vehicles, as recently seen in the enlargement of the Marginal Tietê Expressway, a project worth 1.3 billion reais designed exclusively for automobiles, and that has aggravated the problems of overflowing of the Tietê River. Construction projects like this work as an appeal to reinforce a paradigm that should be changed. In order to be universal, public transport should be able to compete on equal terms with the private car. Achieving this condition is a key challenge facing the new urban model to be implemented in São Paulo.



View of Jardim Paulista in the West Zone of the city of São Paulo.

Is another city possible?

Although the city and the country have changed significantly in the past eight years, the general lines of the PDE remain valid, but need to be further explored and discussed. New goals need to be included, especially in relation to environmental and climate change issues; others need to be taken to the extreme. Economic growth and greater public access to consumer goods (such as cars), as well as the exceptional increase in housing loans - processes that are positive in theory - are worsening the urban scenario in São Paulo, as it involves a city that continues to grow based on an unsuitable model.

In 2002, when the PDE was approved, the investment capacity of the government was very low; since then, the municipality's budget has more than doubled. The municipal and state governments have recovered their capacity to invest in the city and could reverse this model. This opportunity cannot be missed; society should engage in the debate about the urban issue and mobilize itself to influence government decisions. After all, the city exists for its citizens.

ABSTRACT – This article aims to point out some of the main changes needed in São Paulo’s development model, according to the goals defined in the city’s Strategic Master Plan in force since 2003. The continuance of the model that has guided urban policies in the city for decades – based on the unlimited expansion of the urban footprint, on the primacy of the automobile, on increasing soil imperviousness, on the depopulation of consolidated regions, on ingrained but outmoded processes of real estate development, and on the creation of outlying peripheries lacking infrastructure, services and jobs – will lead the city to an unsustainable situation, aggravating its already existing chaotic conditions. The text shows that consistent alternatives do exist, but that their implementation would require increased participatory planning and societal mobilization, because changing a deeply ingrained model runs counter well-entrenched vested interests.

KEYWORDS: Planning, Master Plan, São Paulo, Land use, Urban development.

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