

PERPETUATING THE TEMPORARY: CONSIDERATIONS ON THE USE OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE IN THE CITY OF SÃO PAULO

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reflect upon the role of Rental Assistance (Auxílio Aluguel), a modality of temporary housing assistance offered by the City Council of São Paulo, and to relate its use to the urbanization process of the metropolis. To this end, we expose the extent to which this subsidy has reached within the general framework of popular housing in the city of São Paulo and continue with an analysis on the origin of this type of assistance. This is followed by characterizing those in receipt of this assistance and identify the reasons for being included in the program. Finally, the use of rental assistance is discussed, both in the sphere of housing policy and in relation to planning strategies operated in the city of São Paulo.

Keywords

São Paulo; Urbanization, Urban Planning; Housing, Rent Assistance.

A REITERAÇÃO DO PROVISÓRIO: CONSIDERAÇÕES SOBRE O EMPREGO DO AUXÍLIO ALUGUEL NO MUNICÍPIO DE SÃO PAULO

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Resumo

O presente artigo visa refletir sobre a função do Auxílio Aluguel, uma modalidade de atendimento habitacional provisório ofertada pela prefeitura de São Paulo, e relacionar seu uso com o processo de urbanização crítica da metrópole. Para tanto, expõe a dimensão alcançada pelo subsídio no quadro geral das condições de moradia popular na cidade de São Paulo, apresenta uma análise sobre a origem dessa modalidade de atendimento e segue com a caracterização de seus dependentes e dos principais motivos que levaram à sua inclusão no auxílio. Por fim, o emprego do Auxílio Aluguel é relacionado às características apresentadas e problematizado tanto em relação à política habitacional como no âmbito das estratégias de planejamento urbano operadas no município de São Paulo.

Palavras-chave

São Paulo; Urbanização; Planejamento Urbano; Habitação; Auxílio Aluguel.

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Introduction

Rental Assistance (*Auxílio Aluguel*) currently stands as the only alternative of temporary housing assistance offered by the City Council of São Paulo and, until January 2020 (PORTAL HABITASAMPA, 2020)¹, registered 26,743 recipients. Operated by the Municipal Housing Secretariat (known as Sehab), it is basically characterized as a monthly pecuniary benefit to the value of R\$400.00 (in Real²), in order to subsidize the household rental of families with a total monthly income of up to R\$ 2,400.00 - or R \$ 500.00 per capita (SÃO PAULO, 2015b).

Until June 2019, this assistance was granted subject to the following situations: (i) removal from an informal settlement (termed *assentamento precário*) by public intervention; (ii) because of urbanization work or (iii) risk prevention; (iv) in cases of emergency, such as landslides, fire and flooding; and (v) in cases of extreme vulnerability, in accordance with social assistance criteria. However, after this date, the item referring to cases of extreme vulnerability was removed from within its scope (SÃO PAULO, 2019a), even though no impact studies or proposals for institutional shelter were presented, which took into account the worsening situation of the municipal vulnerabilities, as for example, the increase in the home-

1. Data from January 10, 2020.

2. At the time of writing, the exchange rate of the Brazilian Real was U\$5,58.

less population from 2015, estimated at 24,344 people in 2019 (SÃO PAULO, 2019b). Moreover, it may be observed that before 2015 it was possible to receive this benefit without prior justification (SÃO PAULO, 2015a), as long as it had been determined by the Coordination for Popular Housing (SÃO PAULO, 2010a) or by the Secretary's Office (SÃO PAULO, 2014).

With regard to the conditions for receiving this benefit, it may be observed that the subsidy is temporary assistance for extreme cases of social vulnerability, and provides coverage for a twelve-month period, being subject to a single renewal request for a further twelve months - an aspect that will possibly imply the termination of this type of situation for this group of people being attended as from 2021, given the criterion exclusion of 2019. However, in cases of resettlement or in an emergency situation in what is termed "consolidated occupation"³, the benefit recipient is linked to resettlement programs and the monthly payment becomes continuous until permanent housing is made available.

Lastly, under current regulations, it is forbidden to grant or even maintain payments for those who reside outside the municipality of São Paulo. Based on this guideline, Sehab suspended the benefits of 4,879 recipients in August 2019, after identifying the withdrawal of payments at branches of banks outside the municipality. This connection demonstrated shortcomings, especially since the activity in itself does not prove that the recipient is actually living in another municipality. One other aggravating factor was the fact that 80.5% of the said withdrawals were made in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, most of them in Embu das Artes, which borders the capital. The determination was barred by the Public Ministry of São Paulo and the city council was forced to pay the benefits that had been blocked. Nevertheless, the event illustrates the topicality of the subject and the existence of punitive practices in the manner with which recipients were treated (SILVA, 2019).

In a city of profound inequality, where the public administration estimates that as much as 27% of the population lives in slum conditions, the Rental Assistance is exhibited as a support service for implementing housing policy. However, based on studies conducted since 2016, the hypothesis of this article is that both the creation of the monthly pecuniary benefit for housing purposes and the constant changes identified in its use in the municipality of São Paulo are shown to be engendered by urbanistic strategies that expropriatively integrate the general reproduction process via the production of the built-up environment (HARVEY, 2013; 2011). The following sets out to develop this rationale.

3. The official definition of this is an unauthorized occupation of more than ten years, especially on public land (SÃO PAULO, 2019a). However, the concept is in constant dispute for being linked to the constraints for urban interventions, as well as to the possibilities of assistance offered.

1. Popular housing in perspective: the viewpoint of the municipal public administration

In order to refer to the condition of popular housing in the city of São Paulo, Sehab makes use of the concept of informal settlements (*assentamentos precários*⁴). Recommended by the National Housing Policy (PNH) of 2004, the adoption of the term aims to “encompass, in a category of national scope, the ensemble of inadequate urban settlements occupied by low-income residents, including the typologies traditionally used by public housing policies” (BRASIL, 2010, p. 9). It is understood, from the perspective of public administration, that housing conditions may present different levels of precariousness and should be compared with one another, even if subdivided into categories such as tenement, irregular subdivision, *favela* and nucleus.

For Sehab (PORTAL HABITASAMPA, 2020), tenements are properties that serve as rented collective housing, present a high density of occupation and circulation, shared sanitary facilities, have a high rent cost per square constructed meter and are most commonly located in the central region of the city. Irregular subdivisions are used to identify housing promoted by private agents and implemented with no minimum provision of infrastructure or official licensing, therefore, buildings are constructed on informal land structures; these occur more frequently on the periphery of the city, sometimes extending to municipalities within which the capital is contained. Favelas and nuclei, on the other hand, are categories used to define occupied areas of public or private land, with no prior order of plots or streets, and which are mostly made up of self-built dwellings, generally with a high degree of informal constructions. They are distinguished only by the range of the urban infrastructure network, since the official definition recognizes nuclei as being all favelas equipped with 100% of the necessary infrastructure for water supply, sewage and stormwater drainage, public lighting and garbage collection, a distinction that in most cases is unproven when the reality is verified⁵.

The official estimate of the number of tenement buildings is restricted to the sub-prefectures of Sé and Mooca. Thus, even counting 1,506 properties registered until December 2019 (PORTAL HABITASAMPA, 2020)⁶, the data is recognized as

4. The concept is linked to new ways of measuring the phenomenon and includes different situations of inadequacy and enables comparisons at a national level, as developed in MARQUES, E. (coord.). *Assentamentos precários no Brasil urbano*. Brasília, DF: Ministério das Cidades, 2007.

5. Federal Law No. 6,766 / 1979 links the definition of urban land to the provision of certain public services, which could justify the distinction between favelas and nuclei. However, the problematization is due to the unsatisfactory presence of the urban infrastructure network also in the existing nuclei.

6. Data from December 8, 2019.

being underestimated. In addition, much has been discussed regarding the possibilities of measuring the population living in tenements in terms of the dynamics of this form of housing. According to Kowarick (2009, p. 117):

Quantitative research data and interviews have indicated that more than half of its residents migrate from tenement to tenement, either because there may have been some change in the workplace, or because, which is more likely, some event at the place of residence caused the person to look for another home to live in, maintaining the decision to continue living in the central areas of the city.⁷

For this reason, municipal data on the population residing in informal settlements are concentrated within the 2,000 subdivisions, 1,727 favelas and 426 nuclei registered by Sehab until December 2019 (PORTAL HABITASAMPA, 2020)⁸. Using the Sehab cartographic bases and the last available Demographic Census (2010), the Center for Metropolitan Studies (CEM) estimated that approximately 27% of the municipality's population lived in favelas (considered as nuclei) or irregular subdivisions⁹, a proportion which, according to CEM, should remain in the next Demographic Census (2020/2021), as presented in Table 1.

Population	2010		2020	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
Total in the municipality	11,253,503	100.0	11,869,660	100.0
In informal settlements	3,046,625	27.1	3,260,428	27.5
<i>Favelas</i>	1,307,152	11.6	1,425,715	12.0
<i>Irregular subdivisions</i>	1,739,473	15.5	1,834,713	15.5

Table 1. Population projection for the total population and for the population in favelas (considered nuclei) and irregular subdivisions. Municipality of São Paulo: 2010-2020

Source: Estimates related to precarious housing and housing deficit in the Municipality of São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 2016a, p. 63). Produced by the author.

Estimates of the city's housing deficit are also added, understood as the total number of new homes made possible to face the housing problem, the calculation methodology of which was developed by the João Pinheiro Foundation. In 2016

7. This and all other non-English citations hereafter were translated by the author.

8. Data from December 8, 2019.

9. The analysis methodology employed enables the identification of precarious situations not classified by the Census as subnormal sectors. When relating socioeconomic data and cartographic bases produced by Sehab, the method approximates statistical inferences to the real housing conditions.

(SÃO PAULO, 2016b), it was estimated that it would be necessary to make approximately 358,097 homes available in the municipality to respond to the demand of the population receiving up to six minimum wages. The data refers both to housing in informal settlements that would require replacement (5.4%) and to the demand represented by family cohabitation (28.9%), the excessive burden with rent (52.4%) and the excessive density of rented properties (13.2%).

It would be possible to continue the debate supported by this first characterization and to explore precarious housing, as a particular manner of inhabiting the city, continuously produced and imposed onto a significant part of the population (ENGELS, 2015), and onto socio-spatial inequality, as an intrinsic product of the critical urbanization process (DAMIANI, 2009). We would begin immediately towards the foundations of the urban problem, in terms of the production of space. However, the analysis would run the risk of remaining generalist.

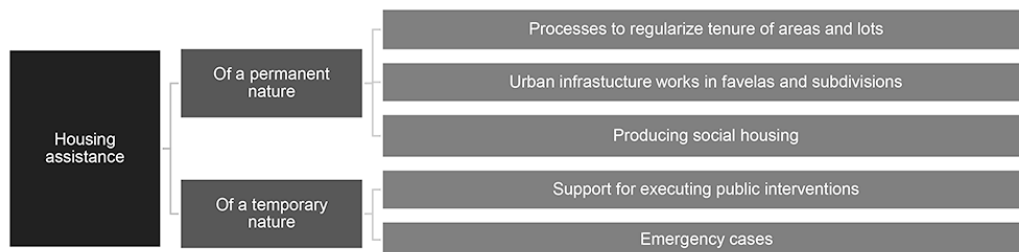
Concept and reality, the production of space makes it explicit that *organizing it* is a requirement of capitalist social reproduction. Space (social product) is declared political and, therefore, the object of a policy (institutional or not) that takes place as a class strategy (consciously or not), namely, urbanism itself (LEFEBVRE, 2008a). From this perspective, understanding Rental Assistance and the contradictions that arise from its use in the process of accumulation via the production of the built-up environment is, simultaneously, to explore its use as a mechanism for the organization of space.

For the municipal public administration, therefore, in terms of the organization of space, confronting precarious housing (a subsystem) involves understanding the problem (the diagnosis) and producing measures to mitigate it (a plan). Once the main characteristics have been identified and the housing conditions in the municipality have been calculated, it becomes the responsibility of the public authorities to draw up a housing policy (actions, programs and services) guided by the right to decent housing for the entire population (public policy). For this, the diagnosis must be equated along the lines of the State actions in the area of social housing, here summarized systematically in Flowchart 1¹⁰, based on the distinction between permanent and temporary housing assistance.

On the one hand, propositions related to permanent housing conditions. On the other, housing management services that aim to guarantee immediate hou-

10. It should be noted that the flowchart does not aim to present particularities of programs, services and modalities in force, nor to exhaust the complex structure that involves the performance of this secretariat, or even to cover interfaces between the identified fronts.

sing¹¹. The construction of urban infrastructure, the titling of subdivisions or favelas and the production of buildings or houses for subsidized sale, resettlement or promoting public leasing initiatives, such as the social leasing program, are presented as manners to guarantee permanent housing. However, it is stated that the consolidation of informal settlements through the provision of infrastructure and regularization may require removals; moreover, it is not uncommon for urban interventions from other sectors (mobility, urban development, sanitation, etc.) to justify the complete removal of a favela. Added to this, therefore, are the demands for immediate housing, as in disaster or emergency situations. Thus, to deal with these cases, the scope of the housing policy includes the provision of temporary housing, an aspect of particular interest for this reflection.



Flowchart 1. Public administration action fronts in the area of housing

Source: Produced by the author, based on an assessment of the actions undertaken by Sehab.

As stated in the introduction to this article, the demand for temporary housing in the municipality of São Paulo is concentrated within the Rental Assistance and, in January 2020, was responsible for subsidizing the housing expenses of 26,743 families (PORTAL HABITASAMPA, 2020)¹². To this end, in 2015 alone, this subsidy was Sehab's third largest investment, accounting for around R\$117 million of the budget earmarked for social housing in São Paulo (SÃO PAULO, 2016b, p. 99). The most recent annual value indicates a settlement of R\$ 120,374,500.00 (PMSP, 2020) in 2019 and an accumulated amount that exceeds R\$ 1 billion over the last ten years (2009-2019), if the IPC-Fipe¹³ monetary corrections are applied.

Within this context, one question stands out: ultimately, is it not surprising to note that in 2015 alone, more than 16% of the entire resource devoted to housing

11. As an example, the 2016 São Paulo Municipal Housing Plan proposes three programmatic lines: The Social Housing Service, related to transitional housing; the Integrated Intervention in Informal Settlements and the Provision of Housing, referring to the permanent assistance.

12. Data from January 10, 2020.

13. The consumer price index from the Institute of Economic Research Foundation.

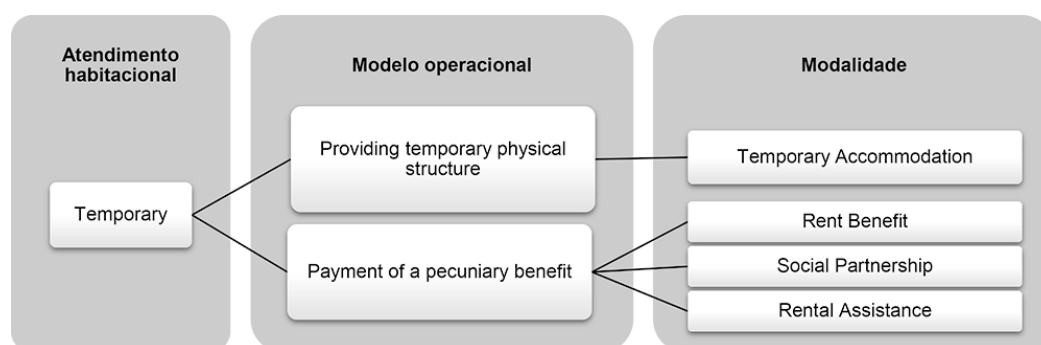
policies was invested in the monthly expenses of tens of thousands of rent installments in the private market (formal and informal)? In order to develop this question, it is necessary to broaden the debate on the guidelines for how the municipal public administration performs in the area of housing, especially with regard to temporary housing assistance.

2. Temporary housing assistance in retrospect

2.1 From temporary accommodation to the creation of Rental Assistance

From the perspective of public administration, the viability of housing assistance depends on the construction and regulation of operational models, whether temporary or permanent. Thus, in terms of the organization of space, the starting point is the creation of a model and, therefore, modalities are formulated that aim to detail the criteria of the demand to be met and the attributes of offering and maintaining the assistance via specific regulation.

Focusing on the city of São Paulo, Flowchart 2 summarizes the operational models and the modalities of temporary housing assistance that will be addressed below.¹⁴



Flowchart 2. Temporary housing assistance: operational models and modalities

Source: Produced by the author, based on the analysis of the reference legislation.

Initially, two operational models and four assistance modalities are observed: Temporary Accommodation, which is based on the provision and maintenance of physical structures intended for housing, and Rent Benefit, Social Partnership and Rental Assistance, which, despite being different modalities, share the same operational model, namely, the payment of a pecuniary benefit for housing purposes.

14. Again, the effort undertaken does not aim to exhaust the theme. Its function is only to distinguish what is understood by the operational model and assistance modality, based on the two major groups identified.

Launched in 2004, under the administration of Marta Suplicy¹⁵, Rent Benefit¹⁶ as the first type of temporary housing assistance with similar attributes to those of Rental Assistance. Structured as a program and conceived within the sphere of the Municipal Housing Council (CMH), it aimed to subsidize housing rentals through the monthly payment of variable pecuniary benefits of up to R\$ 300.00. It was deposited directly into the recipient's bank account, and was restricted to low-income families, who had faced removal through the urbanization program or for the purpose of popular housing. In order to receive the subsidy, a formal rental lease agreement was required, thereupon, the program also offered guarantees to regularize the situation between those receiving the benefit and the landlord. In addition to the criteria included in the demand, the modality also contained criteria for including the rented household, which defined minimum living conditions, and was only maintained with the presentation of proof of rental payment.

Legislation enables the main characteristics of the modality to be restored. However, by inaugurating the operational model under analysis, it is important to understand the context of its creation, related both to the structural failure of the Temporary Accommodations and to the urban strategies aimed at the São Vito Building. We begin with this last aspect.

Located in the central region of the city, where the Sesc Parque Dom Pedro II unit is currently located, the São Vito Building was expropriated in 2004, the same year that the Rent Benefit was launched, and was demolished in 2011, around seven years later. According to Alves (2011, p. 37), the disputes in which the property was locked are emblematic in understanding São Paulo, as they relate to “reincorporating devalorized areas in the real estate market”. Along the same lines as this author, Siqueira (2018) has analyzed the case and identified the integration of this building in an urban plan that began in the 2000s, with the declared intention of attracting tourists and residents from different income groups to the center of São Paulo.

With 27 floors and around six hundred home units, the property was home to a large number of people, with largely formal relations of ownership and tenancy, despite the different stigmas due to being a predominantly low-income population (SIQUEIRA, 2018, p. 276 -277). Due to these characteristics, the initial strategy for the building was via a housing project. The proposal required works of building

15. Marta Suplicy was the leader of the City Council of São Paulo between 2000 and 2004, for the Workers Party (PT).

16. Formalized through Resolution N°. 4 of the Municipal Housing Council (SÃO PAULO, 2004a) and regulated via Normative Instruction Sehab-G n. 01 (SÃO PAULO, 2004b).

requalification and demanded, therefore, the removal of all who resided there. Within this context, it was down to the city to enter into individual agreements to enable expropriation and to commit to prioritizing the residents themselves in the selection for the housing units produced, in order to guarantee “the return of some of the families after the reform” (SIQUEIRA, 2018, p. 279).

With attention on what took place, Siqueira (2018) indicated that, although the process was conducted by the municipality’s housing agency, from the very beginning, the proposal did not seem to respond to the housing demands presented by the affected population. In his words,

The residents of São Vito, who were eligible for the program were to be given priority in receiving the assistance, but would have to re-purchase the apartment, if they were already owners, or would need to purchase it, if they were tenants. In a country where property rights prevail over almost everything, this population was unfairly stripped of its guarantees as owners or tenants, in a project fueled by the erroneous but carefully elaborated idea that it was an informal, dangerous occupation, and therefore the intervention was legitimate (SIQUEIRA, 2018, p. 279).

The intervention required the total removal of the population and the government was committed to the return of at least some of the families after the work was completed. However, a significant part of the affected population was unable to support themselves after being evicted from the property. Consequently, the viability of the project, and, therefore, of the accumulation strategies engendered by this intervention, depended on the immediate provision of temporary housing assistance.

At the time, the current modality of provisional housing assistance was Temporary Accommodation. As mentioned, its operational model made the city responsible for building and maintaining physical structures for temporary housing. However, the non-permanent resettlement of resident families and the government’s precarious maintenance of the accommodation extended the use of these buildings beyond their capabilities. The public administration produced situations of highly precarious housing for its residents and, at times, initiated new areas of favelas. This is the case of Heliópolis, for example, where part of its territory originated by the construction of a Provisional Housing Village (VHP), accommodation provisionally built to temporarily serve families removed from the Favela Vergueiro and other areas of Vila Prudente (PASTERNAK, 2003, p. 104; MOREIRA, 2017, p. 3).

What stood out in this process was the declaration by the Metropolitan Housing Company of São Paulo (Cohab) on the Municipal Housing Council (CMH), in 2008:

[...] because this case is linked to temporary accommodation, which has brought 18 years of suffering to these families, we understand that it is necessary for this municipal council, with all its sovereignty, to approve this amount, this extra contribution, with a total sum of 587 thousand Real, and that we manage to go on and complete the works, where today there is open sewage, rats, today it presents subhuman housing conditions, next to the Interlagos Race Track [...].] In this administration [Serra-Kassab administration, from 2005 to 2008] there were approximately 1,800 families living in temporary accommodation, who were placed there by the city council of something like 15, 20 years ago [...] I believe that today, of the 1,800 families, there must be less than 500, 400 families in accommodation (SÃO PAULO, 2008, p. 4).

This excerpt exposes how families have remained within a temporary structure for more than fifteen years and reinforces the “subhuman” living conditions witnessed. The situation described is of highly precarious housing, and the record explains the intention to extinguish the existing temporary housing. Added to this is the recognition of a public commitment to the permanent housing of these people, reinforced by mention of the contribution to conclude the consolidation work of the housing on the site.

Even though this is a registration, which was postulated four years after the promulgation of the Rent Benefit, it is important to explain that the proposals for the São Vito Building coexisted with the collapse of this manner of offering temporary housing assistance¹⁷. It fell to the public administration, when faced with the serious limitations involved in adopting this model, to formulate an alternative without which it would have been difficult to guarantee that the property would be vacated. This is the context in which the Rent Benefit was created. Considering the high number of empty households in the central region of the city and the challenges to formalize lease agreements (SÃO PAULO, 2004a; 2004b), the city presented the payment of a pecuniary benefit as a viable alternative for subsidizing temporary conditions of housing within the formal rent market.

With regard to this specific case, linked to the eviction of the residents from the São Vito Building, it is important to note that the transitions of the municipal government¹⁸ radically interfered in the conduct of the strategies of “reincorporating depreciated areas to the real estate market” (ALVES, 2011, p. 37). The new

17. Information obtained during professional activity in the planning area of Sehab, between February 2016 and August 2018.

18. José Serra took over the City Council in 2005 under the Brazilian Social Democrat Party (PSDB), and was followed by Gilberto Kassab, Mayor of São Paulo between 2006 and 2012 under the Liberal Front Party (PFL), Democrats (DEM) and Social Democrat Party (PSD).

administration canceled the public commitments that had been assumed until that point, from the transformation of the property into social housing to the content of the negotiations established with the displaced residents on a compulsory basis. This episode was symbolically sealed by the demolition of the property in 2011. With regards to the agreements between the government and the residents, Siqueira (2018, p. 280) states that most of them were not fulfilled and that, “five years after the property was vacated, former residents confirmed they had not yet received compensation for the expropriation”. There remained, however, a new operational model to make temporary housing assistance possible, the payment of a pecuniary benefit for housing purposes.

Continuing with the formulation of analogous modalities to Rental Assistance, in 2007, during the administration of Gilberto Kassab, the city council launched Social Partnership (SÃO PAULO, 2007), based on the same operational model as Rent Benefit. In this modality, the rental contract remained under the responsibility of the recipient, but the monthly deposit of up to R\$ 300.00 was paid directly to the landlord. The benefit also presupposed the fulfillment of minimum living conditions of the property, and the continuity of payments depended on the presentation of proof of rental payment. In addition, there were duties to be performed, such as investing in a savings account and keeping children in school. It should be noted that the model maintained its character of support, targeting people affected by public interventions. However, the demand criteria were expanded to include (i) residents in temporary housing and (ii) families in extreme social vulnerability.

Rental Assistance was instituted shortly after the promulgation of the Social Partnership, during the same municipal administration, and both coexisted until the beginning of 2016. The pecuniary benefit paid, initially of R\$ 300.00 per month, was updated in 2015 to R\$ 400.00. Launched in July 2010, the modality was part of the Housing Actions program (SÃO PAULO, 2010a; 2010b), which expanded the ways of allocating pecuniary benefits to the housing area. In addition to Rental Assistance, the program included modalities no longer applied, such as Housing Support, Moving House Assistance and Purchasing a Home, known at the time as “check-eviction”.

The flexibility given to the subsidy was highlighted in this latest version of the model. Through Rental Assistance, the formalities of rental agreement and attention to the criteria of the living conditions of the rented household were no longer configured as requirements for receiving it. The city council completely denied any responsibility for the location of temporary residence for people displaced by public works, a fact that distances them even further from the real housing conditions of those who depend on this service.

Another reflex observed is the total absence of monitoring the destination of the invested resources, even with regard to their employability in the informal rental market. With regard to this, it is recognized as necessary to conduct an in-depth investigation into the consequences of Rental Assistance for the informal rental market. As an example, there is a possible relationship between the subsidy and an increase in rents in peripheral neighborhoods and in larger favelas, such as Heliópolis, Jardim São Francisco, Jaguaré and Paraisópolis, the last of which has been the subject of recent studies (CUNHA, 2019).

Lastly, until the Social Partnership, all investments destined for the provision of temporary housing, either through temporary accommodation or by paying pecuniary benefits, came from the Municipal Housing Fund (FMH), therefore, all legal and financial changes were subject to CMH approval. The Housing Actions program modified the model's source of funds, which was moved from the FMH to compose Sehab's funding, through the Municipal Treasury. In undertaking this change, the administration also removed any participation from CMH regarding guidelines on how the program was used and functioned.

2.2 From the residents of the São Vito Building to the thousands on Rental Assistance

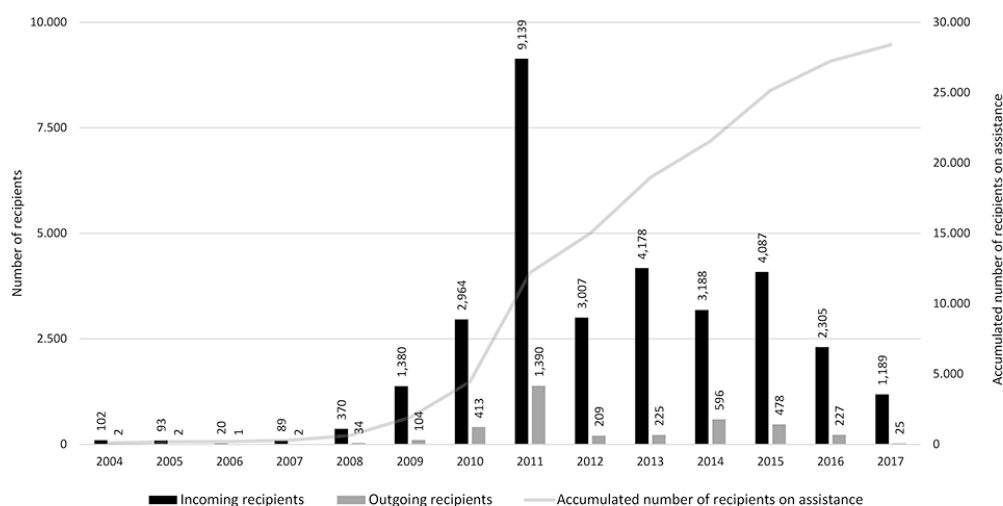
As identified above, in 2019, Sehab spent more than R\$ 120 million to fund Rent Assistance, an amount that over the ten-year period (2009-2019) exceeded R\$ 1 billion. The data are surprising, but they should not conceal greater in-depth reflections. The normative characterization of modalities similar to Rental Assistance and the recovery of their original context contribute to the discussion. However, in order to move forward, it is important to understand who depended on the subsidy and the events that led up to this situation.

From the beginning, it may be noted that the units of reference for the work of Sehab were the home and the family, and the latter is responsible for characterizing the grouping of people living in the same home. Despite the conceptual limitations that emerge as a result of this choice, it is worth noting that there are different formats of family composition, which, in the case of Rental Assistance, vary between one or more than eight associated people. As a result, if, in July 2018, the Secretariat registered 28,264 families¹⁹ on Rental Assistance, observing the family composition data of each of the recipients, it may be stated that in that same month, approximately 70 thousand people depended on the subsidy to guarantee, even if only partially, the cost of their housing.

19. Information on the family composition of the subsidy recipients is taken from the Rental Assistance registration base and was extracted from the Sehab information system in July 2018.

It is important to mention that Rental Assistance does not adopt an official policy to allocate this resource to female-headed family units, as occurs in programs such as Family Benefit (*Bolsa Família*) and My Home, My Life (*Minha Casa Minha Vida*); nonetheless, around 61% of the recipients are women, a higher proportion than the average for the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (SEADE, 2020). In addition, it appears that registration does not include the color and race of the recipient, which prevents characterizing this aspect based on the information acquired²⁰.

With regard to the volume of assistance, Graph 1 presents the movement of 32,181 families, who have received housing benefits, i.e., the accumulated total of families in receipt between 2004 and 2017.



Graph 1. Flow of temporary housing assistance, via pecuniary benefits (Rent Benefits, Social Partnership and Rental Assistance). The Municipality of São Paulo: 2004-2017

Source: Sehab, housing information system, 2018. Produced by the author.

The Graph 1 brings together information on granting and removing subsidies to recipients registered in the Sehab information system. In order to conduct an analysis, it should be considered that the entry record refers to the date on which the first payment was issued to the assisted family unit, even if the recipient had changed due to authorized circumstances. In turn, the leaving date of the family may refer to (i) the termination of the period for receiving the subsidy, in the case

20. The registration of this variable is essential so that the living conditions of the black population and their relationship with public policies do not become invisible.

of temporary subsidy, (ii) non-compliance with the criteria of the modality, (iii) the receipt of permanent housing or even (iv) unforeseen or unregistered situations.

The procedural growth of those who depend on Rental Assistance may be observed due to the difference between the annual volume of incoming and outgoing recipients recorded. An abrupt increase may be observed in the number of inclusions since 2009, an occurrence that reaches a record number in 2011, with the entry of 9,139 new families. If, to date, there is no official and detailed systematization of the situations that gave rise to granting and terminating the benefit, two interpretative paths may help this understanding. First, that the constant change in the criteria for granting the benefit may have contributed to this exponential increase, an aspect reinforced by the large number of ordinances regulating the studied benefit. Second, that, in its latest version, the operational model has become even more flexible than previous modalities, thereby enabling the volume of inclusions verified since 2011. Such processes will be developed in the final section of this article.

Lastly, studies initiated in April 2016²¹ demonstrated that around 82.8% of the total number of Rental assistance recipients lived in favelas in the capital before receiving the benefit, and more than one third had been removed because of urbanization works (SÃO PAULO, 2016b, pp. 40-43). In this context, it is relevant to consider that, of the total families served, more than thirteen thousand received the subsidy due to removals promoted under the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC)²², information on which is presented in Table 2.

According to the records, the undertakings carried out under the PAC urbanization of informal settlements were those that most interfered in the volume of people on Rent Assistance and account for the inclusion of more than ten thousand families in the modality. From an institutional viewpoint, urbanization works should minimize removals, ensuring infrastructure so as to consolidate settlements. In addition, the resettlement of all displaced families is a requirement for terminating contracts, an aspect that keeps old Sehab contracts open, such as PAC 1: Paraisópolis Urbanization, which dates from 2007 and whose works and resources have already ended, pending the resettlement of the removed families who are on Rental Assistance.

21. It is noteworthy that until 2016 there was no official systematization on Rental Assistance in the city of São Paulo. I joined forces towards this direction with the social work and information technology teams, during my professional career in the planning area of Sehab (2016-2018).

22. According to the official website of the program at the Federal Government Ministry of Planning, in summary, PAC promotes financing at the federal level, in order to promote works related to urban and social infrastructure, logistics and energy.

PAC	Original informal settlement	Subprefecture	Nº of families
Urbanization	Heliópolis	Ipiranga	1,866
Urbanization	Jardim das Rosas	Campo Limpo	30
Urbanization	Jardim São Francisco	São Mateus	1,250
Urbanization	Paraisópolis	Campo Limpo	*4,694
Slopes	Parque das Flores	São Mateus	429
Urbanization	Parque Fernanda I	Campo Limpo	8
Urbanization	Sapé	Campo Limpo	965
Drainage	Settlements affected by the Córrego Zavuvus project	Cidade Ademar	437
		Santo Amaro	
Drainage	Settlements affected by the Complexo Ponte Baixa project	Campo Limpo	1,237
		M'Boi Mirim	
Urbanization	Settlements in the area of the river sources – Billings	Capela do Socorro	**1,060
		Cidade Ademar	
		M'Boi Mirim	
Urbanization	Settlements in the area of the river sources – Guarapiranga	Parelheiros	1,499
Total			13,499

Table 2. Families on Rental Assistance compulsorily displaced by the PAC

* Refers to the total number of recipients on Rental Assistance, since there is no detailed information in the system on Paraisópolis.

** Subject to significant alterations due to the Espanha Housing Estate, constructed within the scope of the PAC Urbanization Program.

Source: Sehab, systematization for the Ministry of Cities, 2017. Produced by the author.

3. Perpetuating the temporary and administering the expropriation processes

As developed, of the number of families on Rental Assistance, more than 80% lived in slums in the capital before receiving the subsidy and about thirteen thousand of these, almost 50% of the total, were removed to enable PAC works. Within this context, it is questionable as to whether Rental Assistance should be defined as a benefit or a housing assistance service. In addition, if the vast majority of payments are directed towards this group, the magnitude reached by the subsidy proves to be perennial and difficult to change.

It was also observed that the assistance in question uses a significant part of the resources allocated to the housing area in the municipality of São Paulo. Although the sum paid annually is impressive, it is important to note that the São Paulo Court of Justice (TJSP) used a similar resource to Sehab in order to fund housing assistance for less than 2,500 judges and magistrates in 2018 (FERRARI; FONSECA, 2018). Characterized by the monthly payment of more than R\$ 4,000.00, it is noteworthy that the TJSP budget is intended for members of the judiciary whose

initial remuneration can reach up to twenty minimum wages. Diametrically opposed to the characterization of a benefit or privilege, the Rental Assistance analyzed herein subsidizes the household rental of almost thirty thousand already impoverished families, who, in their majority, have experienced emergency situations or forced displacement, as demonstrated. Thus, the established figures may have an impact, but they should not serve to criminalize users of insufficient assistance in order to promote minimally adequate housing conditions. With regard to this last aspect, it is worth emphasizing that, in the state of São Paulo, between the years 2017 and 2018, the part of the population whose income is compatible with Rental Assistance spent up to R\$ 633.83 on rent (IBGE, [sd]), thereby spending more than the monthly R\$ 400.00 paid to them.

In retrospect, it was found that creating the Rent Benefit exempted the municipal public administration from offering temporary housing assistance by constructing and maintaining the physical structures intended for housing, as was the temporary accommodation. The fact brought about cheaper conditions for offering temporary assistance, although the method that established the pecuniary benefits for housing purposes still maintained under the responsibility of the public administration (i) the fate of the recipient, (ii) the living conditions of the rented home, (iii) the formality of the rental agreement and, consequently, (iv) the destination of the amount used. Likewise, it was observed that the Social Partnership preserved the four original commitments, however its formulation incorporated cases of extreme vulnerability and former residents of temporary housing, two situations, which until then had appeared socially as a demand for permanent, and not temporary housing. By introducing this change, management expanded the scope of the assistance for this model and began to use the pecuniary benefit in response to the housing deficit in the municipality. It was also identified that the promulgation of Rental Assistance not only removed the responsibilities of the municipal administration regarding the commitments that originated the payment of the pecuniary benefit, but also added ambiguities to its destination, sometimes carried out without administrative process and justified only by the authorization of a secretarial office (SÃO PAULO, 2010a, 2014). Furthermore, it is in this modality that all decisions on scope, characterization of demand and budget are removed from the CMH, therefore, from the institutional sphere of control and social participation.

The systematic analysis of the legislation demonstrates a movement towards easing the supply conditions of this type of housing assistance. The identified transformations ensured legal conditions to abruptly expand the institutional capacities of offering an immediate, monetary subsidy for the housing portfolio, in addition to giving the municipal executive power total sovereignty over decisions regarding

the model, a fact verified by the subsequent changes via ordinance. (SÃO PAULO, 2010a; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2019). Amongst the reflexes of this process, there was an exponential increase in the number of beneficiaries, especially from 2009.

Highlighted within this context is the origin of the Social Partnership and Rental Assistance modalities during the same administration of the municipal council and their coexistence during the period with the highest number of inclusions. As presented in Graph 1, between 2011 and 2015, Sehab included more than three thousand recipients per year, 9,139 families in 2011 alone, the same year that the Rental Assistance was created. Data and documents alone do not explain the process, but detailing the phenomenon allows it to be related both to a “historical period of interventions guided by the mass removal of families living in informal settlements” (SÃO PAULO, 2016c, p. 33), in which “the number of units produced in these undertakings was much lower than the demand removed from the same place” (SÃO PAULO, 2016c, p. 16), as well as “the systematic occurrence of fires that ‘curiously’ were repeated during that same period [2010-2013] in regions of the city that concentrated urban interventions” (SILVA, 2015, p. 48).

In addition, a careful look at those who depend on the Rental Assistance clearly demonstrates that the resource is mainly used to cover housing expenses for people who should have access to permanent housing guaranteed by the State. In other words, the universe of care covered by this subsidy is composed mostly of poor families who experienced aggravated situations of this condition through forced displacement from slums, such as Paraisópolis, Heliópolis, Sapé, São Francisco, Rocinha Paulistana, Heliópolis, Viela da Paz, Jardim Letícia, Real Parque and Moinho, to name but only the ten places from whence most recipients originated.

Removal, expropriation and eviction, as well as fire, flooding and landslides, make the displacement of people living in informal settlements both compulsory and enforced. Therefore, they compose concrete forms of expropriation from a basic dimension of the reproduction of life, namely, housing. This same ensemble of situations makes up the inclusion criteria in Rental Assistance and corresponds to the origin of most of its recipients, except for cases of extreme social vulnerability, which represent less than 15% of the total and tend to decrease due to their exclusion from inclusion criteria (SÃO PAULO, 2019a). Thus, if the creation of the operational model under analysis and its flexibility through the modalities investigated were constantly justified by combating the housing deficit in the municipality of São Paulo, the research carried out identified the opposite. Engendered by accumulation strategies through the production of the built-up environment, the identified changes are connected before the need to make forced displacements feasible and, therefore, contribute to the increase of this deficit.

According to Harvey (2013, p. 479)²³, “the production of spatial configurations is necessarily an active constitutive moment in the dynamics of accumulation”, social reproduction. The formulation puts urbanization back into the general movement of capital, understanding it as a business field and, at the same time, a productive sector of great interest for the refuge of capital:

The production of space in general and of urbanisation in particular has become big business under capitalism. It is one of the key ways in which the capital surplus is absorbed. A significant proportion of the total global labour force is employed in building and maintaining the built environment. Large amounts of associated capitals, usually mobilised in the form of long-term loans, are set in motion in the process of urban development (HARVEY, 2011, p. 137)²⁴.

In his analytical developments, Harvey also drew attention to the practices of violence and despoiling engendered by urbanization and highlighted the overlap between urban planning and forms of expropriation. For Harvey (2011, p. 146)²⁵:

Financial powers backed by the state push for forcible slum clearance, in some cases violently taking possession of a terrain occupied for a whole generation by the slum dwellers. Capital accumulation on the land through real estate activity booms as land is acquired at almost no cost. Do the people who have been forced out receive compensation?

The debate is connected to the research conducted. Taxing the structural bankruptcy of temporary housing, the intervention in the São Vito Building required a new temporary housing alternative, the aim of which would be to administer the time between removal and the completion of the work. Part of an agreement coined by *urbanistic illusions* of those who “believe that they are determining and creating” (LEFEBVRE, 2008b, p. 141)²⁶, it may be stated that the origin of the payment of pecuniary benefits for housing in the studied municipality is linked to harmful strategies of accumulation by the production of the built-up environment. If the

23. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of HARVEY, D. *The limits to capital*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1982, p. 440.

24. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of HARVEY, D. *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 67.

25. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of HARVEY (2010, p. 80).

26. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 156.

demolition that took place in 2011 is the emblem of a “strategy for the valorization of the central area undertaken by the State and private initiative” (ALVES, 2011, p. 39), under the terms of the present reflection, the same episode also marks the formulation of the mechanism that it began to be used throughout the city to manage the volume of people affected by compulsory displacement.

With the inclusion of those affected by eviction from the São Vito Building, the Rental Assistance corresponds to an accumulation of approximately seventy thousand people expropriated from their past and precarious forms of housing and who have become dependent on resources that are often less than what they need to cover their rental expenses. It was also observed that the promises of re-settlement declared in the act of granting provisional care were rarely fulfilled, a phenomenon potentialized by a society whose “urban transformations can only take place as a steamroller that crushes all those who cannot afford to obtain the benefits injected into the city” (KOWARICK, 1993, p. 84).

Rental Assistance has been, until the present moment, the formulation with the greatest capacity to displace towards a future guarantee of housing for people affected by different forms of expropriation, most of them carried out by the government itself. Its use as a bargaining chip in negotiations to enable public works and interventions, in addition to lowering costs resulting from the reduced public administration responsibilities, has allowed simultaneous, large-scale removals to take place, even before presenting any concrete response to previous demands. Thus, the creation, regulation and use of a monetary subsidy for housing purposes have served to forge an illusionary link between the expropriated subject and the guarantee of a permanent home.

The movement of research has displaced the analysis of organization towards the production of space. If, in terms of the organization of space, Rental Assistance appears as a support to implement housing policy, from the production viewpoint, this modality has rather demonstrated itself as a necessary mechanism to manage forced displacement, whose constant reformulation enables the State to expand the territorial and temporal scales of urban strategies that involve removals. Thus, reiterating the temporary stands to reinforce both the links between the housing policy and urban planning strategies and their role in the social administration of expropriated bodies.

Lastly, it is important to recall and defend that any situation of forced displacement due to public works or emergency in an informal settlement presents the public administration with a direct responsibility to rehome the affected people. Housing is a social right recognized by the 1988 Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988) and regulated by the City Statute (BRASIL, 2001). Therefore, in terms of spatial orga-

nization and institutional policy, it is the duty of the State to ensure the payment of Rental Assistance until permanent housing is offered to each of its recipients. Within the context of an “impossibility of the urban for all, unless the bases of social production and reproduction are radically transformed” (DAMIANI, 2000, p. 30), the critical character of the urbanization process conceals the fact that actions of a state nature cannot overcome the contradictions engendered by capitalist social reproduction. Even so, and in spite of the limits proffered by planning (urban and financial) and its signs of fiscal responsibility, the urgency imposed by life enforces the need to defend the offer of permanent housing for all people who today depend on Rental Assistance.

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