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# THE HOUSING ISSUE AND PLANNING IN THE CITY OF NITERÓI-RJ (BRAZIL) IN THE EARLY 1970S: CONTRADICTIONARY ASPECTS OF A MASTER PLAN

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This research is part of a comprehensive study entitled 'Housing, plan, city: the housing issue in the city of Niterói and the process for the master plan (1960 – 1975)', developed at Fluminense Federal University (Universidade Federal Fluminense). The present article aims to discuss two issues that represented contradictory aspects in the Master Plan elaborated by Wit-Olaf Prochnik's office (1975-1977). The first one is that, despite the dramatic situation that resulted from an increase in favela growth in Niterói, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, along with the forced removal of over one thousand families due to the construction of the Rio-Niterói bridge, there is little mention to social housing in the Master Plan. The second one is that the Master Plan presented both traditional and innovative aspects. It obeyed, on one hand, the planning guidelines of the authoritarian military regime in methodology and broader proposals, but on the other hand, it also established other methods tentatively, seeking some kind of participation from local agents. The hypothesis was that this Master Plan presented evidence of a possible but still 'shy' transition on the planning process. The methodology included research from primary sources, particularly official documents from the municipality, and printed press.

## **Keywords**

Social Housing, Favelas of Niterói, Planning process in Niterói, Forced removal of population

## **How to Cite**

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## INTRODUCTION

The research that originated this paper was developed by the authors at Fluminense Federal University (*Universidade Federal Fluminense*), in the years 2014-2015. It started, in its first year, with an extensive study of the housing issue in the city of Niterói. This city is located in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1). The research revealed the existence of *favelas* since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the establishment of the first industries in the city. This study discussed the city planning process in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing in the graduation thesis of Attilio Correia Lima, which is considered to be the first major attempt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to organize Niterói's urban expansion. It analyses how the housing situation was dealt with within the city planning process<sup>2</sup>. The present article aims to provide an analysis of the Master Plan elaborated later on by the Wit-Olaf Prochnik's office (1975-1977), which was preceded by a large data collection and projections that were the base for an extensive list of proposals and projects.<sup>3</sup>

A remarkable increase in favela growth occurred in the city of Niterói, during the 1960s and the 1970s, following somehow what was happening in the neighbouring city of Rio de Janeiro, centre of a vast metropolitan area. In Niterói, as will be detailed in the first part of this paper, the residents of *favelas*, which were spreading over hills and public land, represented 7% of the city's total population. Also, in the years preceding 1975, the counterpart of this growth was the forced removal of more than one thousand families to other municipalities, mainly due to the construction of the President Costa e Silva Bridge (Rio-Niterói Bridge). At the same time, the real estate market, which by that time had been acting in the city for a few decades, was growing in size and aggressiveness. Real estate interest grew especially along the south and east coasts of the city, but also close to its central area, where the land was increasing in value with all the public interventions. Thus, it was clear that housing was a real important issue in Niterói in the 1960s and 1970s.

But housing in Brazil has always been a widespread national problem. So, it is no surprise that from the early 1960s the housing issue was the object of a National Policy implemented by the National Housing Bank (*Banco Nacional de Habitação*) and its agents. A first issue that arises from this context is the role of the housing problem as it appears on the diagnosis and guidelines of the Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan. A second point of debate is in regard of the nature of the plan itself. It is our hypothesis that the Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan presented evidence of a possible 'transition' in the planning process. Although it is in part a traditional plan that follows the guidelines of the National Planning System of the authoritarian regime, it presents aspects of an 'innovative' process, seeking participation of local agents and creating new possibilities for Niterói's future urban development. This discussion constitutes the third part of this text and links with the conclusion.

The Methodology included primary sources, particularly official documents from the municipality, the press (between 1960 and 1975), and interviews with experts and technicians that worked or were in some way related to the Plan and the municipality, besides the existing bibliography.

## THE HOUSING ISSUE IN NITERÓI

From 1950 to the late 1970s, but especially in the early 1960s, the housing issue acquired new dimensions. This was also the period when political and institutional situation in Brazil were transformed, following the military coup of 1964. In this same period, a national housing policy was implemented by the National Housing Bank and state housing agencies were created, highlighting the housing issue. It is important to mention that both national and local policies included building new social housing and *favela* eradication nationwide, especially after the experiences in the State of Guanabara. One of the main agents, that in fact was responsible for the forced removal of *favelas* in the States of Rio de Janeiro and Guanabara, was the Social Housing Coordination of the Metropolitan Area of Rio de Janeiro (*Coordenação de Habitação de Interesse Social da Área do Grande Rio - CHISAM*), a federal government agency created in 1968 and extinct in 1973.



FIGURE 1 Map of the studied area 2016. The map, elaborated by Mariana Corrêa and Bruna dos Santos, shows the location of the city of Niterói in the Brazilian map.

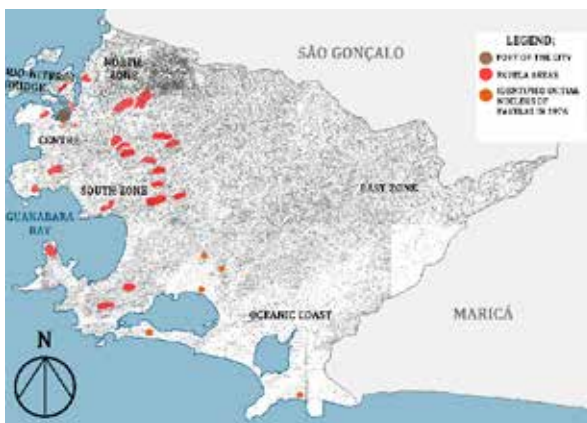


FIGURE 2 Favelas of Niterói. The map, elaborated by Bruna Bastos using a map of 1976, represents the older settlements, and the initial nucleus of favelas.



FIGURE 3 Favela of Maveroy, Niterói. The families from the favela of Maveroy were removed to social housing projects, most of them in the municipality of São Gonçalo.

At that period major changes occurred in the urbanisation process<sup>4</sup>, as well as in the institutional and political spheres in Niterói and Rio de Janeiro. In fact, in 1975, the city of Niterói lost the status of state capital because of the fusion of the States of Guanabara and Rio de Janeiro, which caused a ripple effect in the housing problem.

By the late 1960s, a remarkable increase in growth of the favelas happened, due to many reasons, but especially linked to migration and economic processes. This trend was also observed in Niterói. Some authors indicate that, by mid-seventies, the residents of these settlements represented 7% of the total city population<sup>5</sup>, and were spread all over public hills and land in the city.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2 shows that by the 1970s, the favelas had spread from the north of the city, a traditional area that since the beginning of the 20th century concentrated industries and the docks, to the south and east coasts, and the countryside of the municipality. The data obtained by Leão XIII Foundation<sup>7</sup> (Fundação Leão XIII) and included in Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan indicated that, from 1971 to 1975, there was a substantial increase in the number of favelas and its residents: in fact, going from 2% of the total population, to the aforementioned 7%<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, during the 1970s, the land from the south coast to the east coast, which had been previously divided in plots, started to be occupied. From 1975 to 1977, the real estate market pressured heavily the municipality, demanding big projects in the oceanic area, starting a new form of land occupation.<sup>9</sup> In that same period, very important public interventions on road and communication networks were happening. Among them, were Contorno Avenue (in the city of Niterói) and, most of all, the Rio – Niterói Bridge, that had been under construction since 1968.

This context reinforced the policy of forced removal of the *favela* population, which had been adopted since the early 1960s. In fact, several *favelas* had suffered partial or total eradication, due to public works or other reasons, some even linked to Real Estate Market interests. Forced removal was considered the main solution for the *favelas*, despite a fierce debate amongst planners and *favela* leaders that pointed out the urbanisation of the settlements as a better and more humane solution. In fact, the urbanisation of the *favelas* was a possible solution and a plea made by those dealing with the *favelas* since the 1940s, but, with few exceptions due to specific political contexts, it was always denied by the authorities. Obviously, this kind of urbanisation would be even harder to take place after 1968, when an authoritative decree called the ‘Act number 5’ established definitively the military dictatorship in Brazil.

According to press reports, there was a Fluminense Urbanisation Plan (*Plano de Urbanização Fluminense*) concerning the removal of *favelas* located in areas defined by the State as a priority. Thus, *favelas* and squatter settlements, especially those located close to or inside the areas intended for the construction of the accesses to the Bridge, were becoming more vulnerable and visible. In many newspapers, these settlements were beginning to be described not only as places of disease and epidemic outbreaks, but also as obstacles to the impending modernity and urban development<sup>10</sup>.

In this regard, the housing state agency called Social Housing Company of the State of Rio de Janeiro (*Companhia de Habitação Popular do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*), within a national policy, intensified surveys and studies to eradicate the *favelas*. The removed populations would be relocated to social housing projects that were usually in neighbouring towns, and were financed by the federal government. (Table 1)

SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECT	TOTAL HOUSES AND FLATS	MUNICIPALITY
Mahatma Gandhi	80 houses	São Gonçalo
Brasilândia	62 blocks/ 1340 flats	São Gonçalo
Jardim Catarina	192 houses	São Gonçalo
Nilo Peçanha	24 blocks/ 300 flats	São Gonçalo
Marquês do Paraná	12 blocks/ 200 flats	Niterói
Benjamin Constant	12 blocks/ 192 flats	Niterói

TABLE 1 Examples of Social Housing Projects for the people removed. As we can observe, only two housing projects were built in Niterói.

This process included the *favelas* of Maveroy (Figure 3), Maracanazinho, Lixo, and Contorno, located within the Bridge’s construction area. In this context, as in many others, public opinion was not unanimous. And in fact, the process of forcibly removing those families from their shacks in the *favelas* revealed precarious living conditions in both *favelas* and the new social housing projects. And it was even pointed by the press that most of the families residing in the affected areas could not afford the new houses built by the social housing agencies.

Besides not having enough resources to buy the new houses or flats, the people removed were also upset and confused, because they were left in the dark regarding municipal and federal plans for them, and didn't know what to expect, ignoring their destinies<sup>11</sup>. A number of families ended up rebuilding their shacks in other *favelas*.

All this shows that Niterói, in spite of its size, had a complex housing crisis, extensively reported by the press. In the same period (1960s and 1970s), an official position was announced by public authorities regarding urban planning in states and municipalities. A number of plans for several cities were developed following these national guidelines created by the federal planning institution named Federal Housing and Urbanism Service (*Serviço Federal de Habitação e Urbanismo*), that was created in 1964, around the same time the National Housing Bank was founded. In Niterói's case, the discussion and design of a Master Plan for the city was paramount, because of the situation it was facing, with the imminent construction of the Rio-Niterói Bridge, and all the interventions that were already in course.

The next session of this article aims to analyse how the housing issue was dealt with in Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan.

## THE MASTER PLAN OF WIT-OLAF PROCHNIK

Considering the removal process that affected several families and all the conflicts related to this situation, and considering the existence of a master plan elaborated for the city of Niterói in the second half of the 1970s, this part of the article aims to discuss how the Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan deals with the housing problems.

## THE DOCUMENTS OF THE MASTER PLAN

The documents developed for the elaboration of Niterói's Master Plan, to which the authors had access, are dated from 1976 and 1977. They encompass a diagnosis of Niterói, comprising physical geography, demography, and social aspects (health, education, culture, social service, cultural and historical heritage), infrastructure, road and transport networks, and land use. Another document includes prognostics for urban expansion and analyses the alternatives and proposals for urban development.

Regarding the social housing issue, the master plan dedicated one section of the Diagnosis<sup>12</sup> to discuss Niterói's *favelas*, including aspects related to their development in the 1970s and the removal process that affected some of these settlements, partly justified by the construction of Rio-Niterói Bridge. The document emphasises the lack of data about Niterói's *favelas*. The authors point out that this fact represented a strong limitation for developing a more accurate analysis of this issue.

Considering the aforementioned lack of data, the master plan used the forced removal process that took place in the neighbouring city of Rio de Janeiro, in 1962/1963, as a template on how to deal with the *favelas* problem. This section of the original document was divided in two subsections.

The first was an introductory subsection, where the history and the development of *favelas* in the State of Guanabara were presented, along with the many interventions these settlements had suffered from 1920 to 1968. This subsection indicated the existence of two lines of action usual in the 1960s: one consisting in removing *favelas* and reallocating the families; and the other one involving the urbanisation of *favelas*. It must be noted that, in this first part, all the references are exclusively from authors that studied the city of Rio de Janeiro and its specific situation.

The second subsection is the one that actually discusses the city of Niterói. It presents the demographic aspects of the *favelas* based on two censuses performed by Leão XIII Foundation in 1971 and in 1975. This subsection also describes the *favelas* of Moinho Atlântico, Maveroy, Maruí, and Nova Brasília based on scientific articles drafted by the School of Social Service (*Escola de Serviço Social*). It also contains data obtained in studies developed by the housing state agency concerning the removal processes that took place on earlier dates. At this point in the document, an analysis is presented, using different sources, and it demonstrates once again the growth of the *favelas* and the problems caused by the forced removals. The conclusion stresses that little official attention had been directed to the *favelas* in Niterói. They also present propositions, some of which are very detailed, suggesting the development of further studies about Niterói's *favelas*, and they also suggest some criteria to determine which *favelas* should be eradicated, and which ones could be preserved and urbanised. In a certain way, this represented an improvement, considering that the solution generally adopted was, in fact, the forced removal of the population and the destruction of their homes.

Although in this section of the diagnosis there are more concrete proposals to somehow solve the known problems of the *favelas*, in the document that really gives directions to the city's development, there are only general guidelines to deal with social housing and its problems.

## THE MASTER PLAN: NATURE AND PLANNING ISSUES

The context in which the Master Plan of Niterói was elaborated was unique, in the sense that the city had a special situation regarding its position. During the early 1970s, Niterói was being prepared for changes to come in the near future. Or at least there were some evidence of that. Although the city was still capital of the State of Rio de Janeiro, in 1974, the legislation that officially defined Rio de Janeiro's Metropolitan Area also decreed the fusion of the States of Guanabara and Rio de Janeiro. This situation would obviously bring about political and institutional changes in both cities.

On the other hand, since the early 1960s, there was a national debate about the possibilities and the importance of urban planning, which included national and regional Plans. This involved cities all over Brazil and was mainly put forth by public authorities and technicians, represented by professional associations of architects, engineers and so on. After the 1964 coup, the government established the National Development Plan (*Plano Nacional de Desenvolvimento*) based on a federal system, and created the Federal Housing and Urbanism Service (SERFHAU) in order to develop plans for the municipalities. The various critics of this system draw attention to the fact that the national plans were elaborated targeting exclusively the economic growth of the main metropolitan cities. Furthermore, contradicting the initial intention to plan locally, defined by the SERFHAU, the dictatorship gradually created laws that effectively took from the municipalities their economic and political autonomies. Therefore, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, there were several plans that did not have political or economic resources to be implemented.

Another aspect criticised by many authors was that the Federal Government defined, in broad terms, the guidelines that should be used in all those plans, in order to manoeuvre the country and its cities to achieve the dictatorship's own goals (especially its economic and political goals). Lastly, there was also an attempt to define a unique methodology, focused on quantitative data.

The Commission of the Urban Development Plan (*Comissão do Plano de Desenvolvimento Urbano*) was created in Niterói, in 1965, in order to propose urban regulations for the city, and was constituted by members of professional associations of architects, engineers, and others. In the following couple of years, a Preliminary Urbanisation Plan (*Plano Preliminar de Urbanização*) was elaborated. These important initiatives preceded Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Plan. Right after the fusion of the States, in the heat of the debates about the consequences of the Rio –

Niterói Bridge construction, the Urban Planning and Development Coordination (*Coordenadoria de Planejamento e Desenvolvimento Urbano*) was created, coordinated by the architect Ferdinando Rodrigues. This was the main agency involved in the public bidding won by the office of Wit-Olaf Prochnik<sup>13</sup>.

The documents of the plan to which the authors had access included a number of partial reports, a final report that consolidated the diagnosis of Niterói, and a volume that included diagnosis and development alternatives. There was also a volume that synthesised the propositions of the plan.

It is important to note that in the beginning of the final volume, it is clearly stated that the national and regional guidelines were being followed. This, in a certain way, linked the plan to the federal frame of work, contemplating the usual contents and priorities directed by the planning system.

On the other hand, the master plan presented two basic aspects that announced new methodologies that only in further years would be vastly used by planners. In the first place, rather than define final propositions going only in one direction, the plan develops five alternatives for the urban growth of the city, based on projections and diagnosis.<sup>14</sup> The second aspect is a somewhat participative process, drawing attention to the importance of involving in the discussion of the proposed alternatives not only public planning authorities, but civil leaders, professional associations, dwellers associations, and so on. To achieve this, the planning team and the municipal government organised a number of public seminars. Some authors call attention to the fact that there were severe limitations to the debate, due to a lack of basic information about the plan by most of the population, in such a way that the discussion ended up being mostly restricted to planners and technicians.

The ideas above pave the way for some conclusions in this article.

## CONCLUSION

Considering that the initial hypothesis was that the Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan presented evidence of a possible transition on the planning process, even under dire political circumstances, the results of this research were mainly positive. In fact, regarding the role of the housing issue on Wit-Olaf Prochnik's Master Plan, it is clear that there was a real attempt to observe the broader situation of the *favelas*, and that its diagnosis even presented concrete and important propositions. Nevertheless, what did not happen was the proper use of more specific results from the report. That happened, as mentioned by the team of planners, because of the lack of basic data from the municipality, so that their final analysis ended up using different and secondary sources.

The plan, in fact, can be looked upon as a transition between technocratic planning, and a more political and innovative planning. This can be understood by the events of the mid-seventies, among other causes, and due to the political changes that were already being announced and occurred in further years: the debate about public participation, the reorganisation of civil associations. In the urban planning field, there was also already a discussion of new methodologies in planning courses. So the entire decade can be somehow considered a transitional period. In this case, the Wit-Olaf Prochnik's plan clearly represents a pivotal moment for this transition.

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There was no conflict of interest.

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## Image sources

Figure 1: Google Earth, 2016.

Figure 2: FUNDREM (Foundation of the Metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro), 1976.

Figure 3: National Archive (Arquivo Nacional), Correio da Manhã, 1971.

Table 1: National Library (Biblioteca Nacional), Correio da Manhã, January 6th, 1970.

## Endnotes

- 1 When the Federal Capital was moved to Brasília, in 1960, the city of Rio de Janeiro became a new state, the State of Guanabara. The extinction of the State of Guanabara, in 1975, resulted in the fusion of the States of Guanabara and Rio de Janeiro. Niterói, that was the capital of the then State of Rio de Janeiro, lost its condition of capital to become a municipality of the new State.
- 2 Silva, Corrêa, and Werneck, "Housing and Plans".
- 3 Azevedo, Benedicto, and Leal Junior, "planejamento urbano global".
- 4 In the decades of 1950 and 1960, occurred the expansion of the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro.
- 5 In the 1960s, the population of Niterói totalled 245,4 thousands of inhabitants.
- 6 Niterói had many public lands remaining from the period when the city was the capital of the State of Rio de Janeiro and due to the appropriation of the indigenous land of Araribóia by the Government.
- 7 The Leão XIII Foundation was created in 1940s by the catholic church and transferred to the State in the 1960s. It aimed the expansion of social work on the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and was an important agency on local housing policies.
- 8 Wit-Olaf Prochnik Arquitetura e Planejamento, *Caracterização do município*, chap. 7, pp. 16-17.
- 9 Azevedo, "L'impact des politiques urbaines".
- 10 For instance, the *Correio da Manhã* article 'Favela, obstáculo número 1' ('Favela, obstacle number 1') on April 22, 1970.
- 11 As mentioned in article published by *O Fluminense*, 'Problema em favela é renda' (The problem in the favela is income), on November 2, 1971.
- 12 Wit-Olaf Prochnik Arquitetura e Planejamento, *Caracterização do município*, chap. 7, pp. 5-32.
- 13 The architect and urbanist Wit-Olaf Prochnik had already developed urban plans in other cities, having also relations with the Brazilian Institute of Administration (*Instituto Brasileiro de Administração Municipal*).
- 14 Salandía, "O papel da Estrutura Fundiária".