

**Open Spaces and Transformations in the Territory of the Encosta Norte
Housing Complex, East Side of São Paulo**

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ABSTRACT

This article consists of an analysis of open spaces network in the Encosta Norte Housing Complex, located in the city of São Paulo. The complex accommodates a series of open areas in its extensive area that can be grouped into three categories: programmed spaces, spaces of spontaneous use and spaces of potentiality. The first group consists of squares conceived in the original CDHU project and which contain equipment and furniture for permanence, leisure and physical exercise. The second group is the result of the transformation processes that the area has undergone since the installation of the complex and whose uses have been adapted gradually. Potential areas are empty awaiting definition of form and use. This article aims to understand how the network of open spaces is constituted and consolidated from the use that residents make of it. To this end, the methodology applied uses technical visits to the site, interviews with technicians from the CDHU, in addition to the analysis of documents such as maps, projects and literature review. As a result, a fragmented territory was found, with free spaces included in the different categories listed, and which, at times, distanced itself from the planned condition during the idealization of the set. It is possible to understand that this network of open spaces in the Encosta Norte Housing Complex is diversified and made more flexible depending on how residents use each of these spaces: sometimes as a permanence, sometimes as a crossing, sometimes as leisure, sometimes as a latency void.

KEYWORDS: Programmed spaces. Meeting territory. Open spaces. Urban Life Quality.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to understand the system of open spaces in Encosta Norte Housing Complex, that was built by CDHU - Housing and Urban Development Company, São Paulo State - between the 1980s and 2000, and to verify the prediction of those spaces in the original project, as well as the way they were built, appropriated and transformed over time by the local population. To accomplish that goal, it was made use of drawings provided by CDHU, interviews carried out with CDHU technicians during 2020, in addition to field visits carried out during the pre-pandemic period and the pandemic period, between 2019 and 2021.

By comparing the CDHU project to the current physical configuration of the Encosta Norte Housing Complex, it was possible to report how the open areas (designed as streets or green and leisure areas) have changed progressively, acquiring spatial and use characteristics that are different from those initially designed.

ENCOSTA NORTE HOUSING COMPLEX

An extensive area of 53 hectares in the district of Itaim Paulista, in the East Zone of São Paulo city, accommodates São Miguel Paulista E Housing Complex, also known as Encosta Norte. Along with other housing states that were implemented in the region, this complex was part of a housing plan coordinated by CDHU that became known as the “great tracts”.

Encosta Norte Complex [Figure 1] combines more than three thousand housing units, using two main types: a single-family embryo-house and H shaped apartment buildings. The embryo-houses, in individual plots, are located in the northern portion of the area, occupying a more favorable topographical condition that resulted in a regular arrangement of blocks. The apartment buildings are located to the south, in a more hilly topography, distributed in large lots which compose very extensive blocks with irregular shapes. The whole set was executed in 14 independent phases that belonged to different governmental housing programs and adopted different typologies according to CDHU standards.

Figure 1 – São Miguel Paulista E - Encosta Norte Housing Complex perimeter.



Source: Images produced by the authors.

The design for the general implementation, besides the provision of areas reserved for housing use, included the definition of the road system, the coordination of the infrastructure networks implementation and the demarcation of lots destined for institutional use, leisure use and green areas. Institutional areas [painted in light blue, Figure 2] received equipments such as schools, day care centers, a CIC (that provides documental and social support for citizens), a UBS (Health Service Building) and a Culture Factory Building. The main green areas [painted in green, Figure 2] were related to three stream sources and were reserved as environmental preservation areas.

Figure 2 – São Miguel Paulista E Housing Complex. Residential use (light yellow and orange), Institucional use (light blue) and green areas (painted in green).



Source: Map produced by the authors.

The three green areas originally planned have developed differently over years as it will be further explained. The system of public streets and passages also impacts the net of free spaces and will take part of the analysis, since they not only guarantee access and traffic but are characterized differently and may temporarily assume certain roles, as will be seen throughout this report.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to comprehend the system of open spaces in the Encosta Norte Housing Complex (São Miguel Paulista E), built by CDHU between the 1980s and 2000s, to verify the relation between the idealization of certain spaces during the design process for the area, and how those spaces were appropriated and transformed over time by the population that inhabits them.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis of open spaces proposed for the research uses a comparison between the initial project and the current condition of spaces. For this purpose, maps and drawings provided by CDHU were used, and several field visits were carried out at different times (pre-pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic), in which the occupation of spaces and their rapid transformation were observed and reported.

Categories of Analysis

The transformation of use and occupation of open spaces inside the perimeter of Encosta Norte Housing Complex over the last four decades requires the use of conceptual categories to facilitate their understanding and characterization, regarding their use and physical constitution, the intention at the design phase, the present situation and the potential that these areas represent. This research differentiates programmed use areas from those of spontaneous use, and recognizes areas that remain empty, with latent use and still poorly defined, which represent a will of potency to be developed.

Areas of programmed use are the ones that followed the shape and activities as determined during the design process, when both spaces and uses were planned. Examples are four squares that received a landscaping project and were equipped to provide specific types of use and leisure which were reiterated by the population over time. In Figure 3, the four spaces are shown in light green.

Areas of spontaneous use are those that have received some intervention not foreseen during the design process, or were the result of unofficial interventions. These areas are divided into: informal settlements (painted in red, Figure 3); provisional appropriations of unbuilt open areas (in yellow, Figure 3); and appropriations with negotiated and/or granted use of the space (in pink, Figure 3).

In addition, **areas of potentiality** (under control or undefined ones) are those that are on hold due to legal obstacles. These areas represent the greatest potential development but also the greatest landscape and environmental risk. (figure 3, dark green).

Figure 3 – Open space types at Encosta Norte Housing Complex.



Source: Map produced by the authors.

RESULTS

1. Areas of programmed use

This category includes the squares designed by CDHU that were consolidated as leisure spaces in the complex. Within this category, four squares located close to the single-family houses' fabric were identified (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Areas of programmed use.



Source: Map produced by the authors.

Two central squares, located between the housing blocks, are currently widely used by residents. These spaces were improved with urban furniture such as exercise equipment, playground equipment, benches and tables for picnics and games, in addition to vegetation.

Two squares further to the east were established on the border of the fabric, located in streets with higher traffic where neighboring residential lots have been transformed into commerce and service uses. Those squares house, in addition to leisure equipment and vegetation, elements that make them attractive to people, such as some market stalls, informal commerce and bus terminals that serve the region.

Properly as a planned design that was once constructed and effectively used, these programmed areas have consolidated progressively, in terms of shape and location. Useful to local residents, their roles have been reinforced by an action of dynamic inertia¹. [Figure 5]

Figure 5 – Squares settled in the residential area.



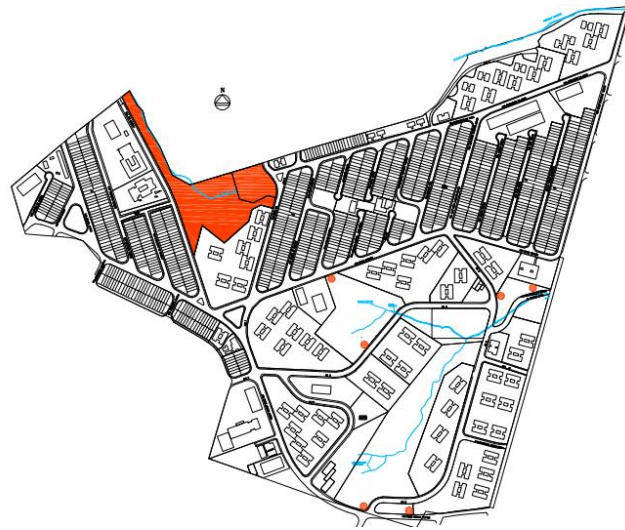
Source: Rita Pinheiro, 24.07.2021.

2.1 Areas of spontaneous use: informal settlements

Informal settlements of Encosta Norte Housing Complex occur: occasionally, through built additions on the border between the parceled areas and the green and open areas; through the implementation of informal use along the plinth and the public fronts of residential lots; and also, concentrated in the occupation of a large green area at the northwest of the complex, along the source of Tijuco Preto stream.

¹ Milton Santos reclaims Sartre's concept of inert practice (the practice deposited in things, becoming a condition for new practices), and creates the concept of dynamic inertia, stating that "the social process is always leaving legacies that end up constituting a condition for new ones phases". (SANTOS, 2006, p.91)

Figure 6 – Areas of spontaneous use: informal settlements at Tijuco Preto stream.



Source: Map produced by authors.

Irregular constructions spread on the territory, dispersed in the green and leisure areas of the complex, as indicated in Figure 6 through red dots. Informal businesses and services were settled, such as grocery stores and bars which are located in strategic points, with their doors facing the sidewalks.

Figure 7 – Stores and bars installed by green areas.



Source: Maria Isabel Imbronito, 27.12.2019.

However, the most extensive settlement occurs at the Tijuco Preto stream source area. Tijuco Preto community precedes the complex implemented by CDHU. Nonetheless, the Jagatá² community was established later, in an area initially planned by CDHU to receive institutional and leisure/green uses. CDHU original plans demarcated the areas at the source and the banks of Tijuco Preto stream as protected, where buildings were supposed to be avoided. Gradually, this entire area has been occupied, representing risk of flood for the residents and lack of adequate infrastructure.

² It is important to point out that this entire region was part of land occupation conflicts by social housing movements in the eastern part of São Paulo in the 1980s. These actions and events had major consequences, which culminated both in the formation of the Encosta Norte Complex itself, and in the emergence of various informal settlements spread throughout the region, such as slums.

Figure 8 – Jagatá Slum. Entrances.

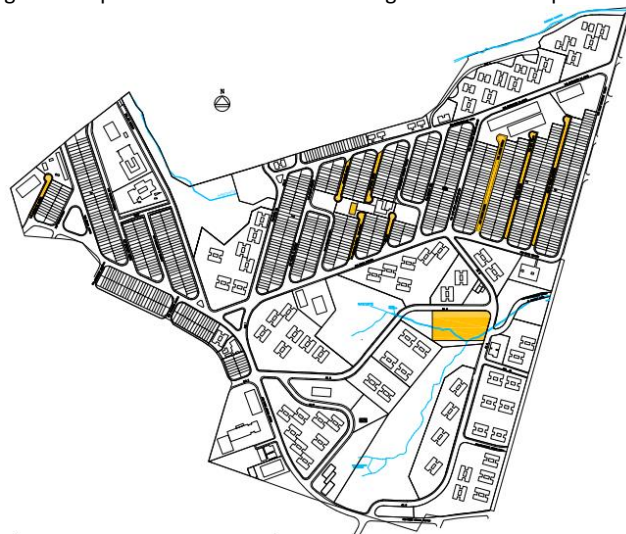


Source: Maria Isabel Imbronito, 27.12.2019.

2.2 Spontaneous use areas: making use of unbuilt space

Another condition that was observed in the open spaces system of Encosta Norte Housing Complex has been the use of open areas by the population, without implying the implementation of restricted space, closed buildings or physical limits. Three areas fit that category: part of the central green area that was transformed into a soccer field by the local community; another sports court beside the former community center (equipment once active and now in a state of disrepair); and also the appropriation for leisure of local streets next to single-family house areas. Those areas are marked in yellow on the map [Figure 9].

Figura 9 – Spontaneous use areas: making use of unbuilt space.



Source: Map produced by authors.

In the central area of the complex, in a lot delimited during the design process as an institutional area by CDHU, the community implemented a football field, known as Arena Pirelli³

³ An interview with local residents revealed that the mobilization of the community was essential. Based on self-management, the landfill of the site that gave rise to Pirelli Arena was carried out. In addition to the arena, the community also started a construction of restrooms and changing rooms that would support people using the site. However, due to its irregular (non-official) condition, the headquarters were removed shortly after the beginning of the construction and the possibility of implementing similar equipment was never addressed again.

[Figure 10]. Due to its central condition, this space has become a meeting place, where children ride their bikes and fly kites, and where some events organized by local associations take place (solidarity football, collection and distribution of food, etc.). This is an area that has been established in response to the organized desire of the community. Kept as an open field and placed at an strategic point, this space asserts itself as a *terrain vague*⁴: empty, available, undefined and, therefore, transformable and appropriable.

In the midst of the residential area, another site draws the attention. Initially designed by CDHU to receive institutional use, amidst the initial fabric on the set, consisting of houses of typology 011/87 (embryo-houses), the former Community Center has been important in the past as the meeting point of a social movement that claimed for improvements to the area, such as public transportation, pavement and water supply. Currently abandoned and partially in ruins, the site contains an intramural sports court [Figure 10]. In all the visits made by our research team to the site, this court was being used by children who lived in the surroundings. The access to this area is free, although isolated and miscared, sheltered from the surroundings by walls.

Figure 10 – Arena Pirelli at the geographic center of the complex, and sports court located by the abandoned Community Center.



Source: Maria Isabel Imbronito, 27.12.2019 and Rita Pinheiro, 20.02.2021.

Another activity that stands out when one visits Encosta Norte Housing Complex is the leisure that takes place on the local streets ending in *cul-de-sacs*. In Encosta Norte Housing Complex, two types of fabric were implanted. The first single-family houses (typology 011/87, single-storey semi-detached embryo-house with 37.00 m²) were placed in individual lots figuring up narrow and long rectangular blocks, intercalated by local streets, also narrow and often with no exit [Figure 11]. Nowadays, only a few houses retain their initial configuration. Most of them, enlarged, occupy the front and back recesses of the lot, reaching up to three or four floors. This condition led to a condition of use that brought the experience between the house and the street together in this type of fabric.

The other typology implemented later in the set, resulted in different urban fabric: medium-rise apartment housing with an “H” arrangement and 4 to 5 floors [Figure 11]. This typology takes place in very large city blocks among environmental reserved areas and hilly topography. The buildings were placed into equally large lots that were, later, surrounded by

⁴ Solà-Morales, in his book “Territories”, defines the French term *terrain vague*: “void as absence, but also as a promise, as an encounter, as a space of the possible, expectation”. In this way, the idea of *terrain vague* can be affirmed here as a potentially empty space, a potential space for “events”.

extensive walls. From these design principles a more rigid fabric has emerged, with little potential for transformations and no relation between the dwelling and the streets.

Figure 11 – Street among unfamiliar housing tissue and collective housing fabric.



Source: Maria Isabel Imbrono, 27.12.2019.

Therefore, there is a difference in the use of the public space of the streets in these two types of fabric. In the first one, the relation between houses and street becomes more direct and powerful, as residents use the streets as an extension of their houses that recovers the suppressed backyard, receiving both: activities of socialization with others and of the domestic sphere. In addition to being a place for access and passage, the street is a place for neighbors to meet, for children to play, where parents wash their cars, people sit on chairs and talk while monitoring the movement [Figure 12]. This kind of activity does not happen on the vertical housing fabric, where buildings are separated from the streets by walls which condemn the streets to an isolated, dangerous and lifeless condition.

Figura 12 – People using the street as leisure area by the unfamiliar housing fabric.



Source: Rita Pinheiro, 24.07.2021.

2.3 Spontaneous use areas: negotiated or granted use of space

There is another category of space use observed in the set of Encosta Norte, where spaces received activities under circumstances of negotiation or granted by concession, in general to third sector organizations. Two areas in poor condition of use, that were initially built by the state for institutional use, received social institutes and neighborhood associations [in pink, Figure 13].

Figure 13 – Spontaneous use areas: negotiated or granted use of space.



Source: Map made by authors.

The first one is located in the southern part of the complex, occupying an abandoned building in the top of the biggest green area [Figure 14]. Different neighborhood associations, whose names are painted on the exterior walls next to the street, have made use of this space, despite the fact that it was always closed on our visits. Those associations were supposed to support children and teenagers, elderly population, women, mothers and literacy projects, but they do not seem to work actively.

Another area that makes use of the same mechanism is the aforementioned community center [Figure 14], built by CDHU in the core of the single-family houses fabric, to the north. This space was partly abandoned, while a wing of it housed a child care center that belonged to the Child and Hope Foundation. In recent visits of our research team, however, this child center has been deactivated and abandoned. By the other hand, the once abandoned part of the building now houses the Black Brazil Social Institute, an organization dedicated to STD/AIDS.

Figure 14 – Empty buildings in poor conditions of use, demanded by third sector organizations.



Source: Maria Isabel Imbronito, 27.12.2019 and Rita Pinheiro, 20.02.2021.

This mechanism of concessions could be better explored, providing existing spaces for the support of organized and active groups in the community, which, at the same time, would guarantee the maintenance and constant use of these spaces. In practice, however, this solution proves to be insufficient, as it does not meet the entire demand of local organizations, much

larger and more active, and also does not guarantee, by itself, the maintenance and good condition of buildings, easily converted into restricted spaces closed to community use.

3. Potential areas (areas under state control, or undefined ones)

Within the category of areas with potentiality - areas under state control, or undefined ones- are the large central green areas remaining on the set. Those areas were reserved empty during the urbanization design process due to the existence of sources of tributary streams of Três Pontes river. Today, these large empty areas are still under the domain of CDHU - a housing state company not capable to keep them properly -, due to irregularities in the legal approval process of the complex, that leads to the lack of management and destination that prevents those areas to reveal all their sustainable potential, whether from a social or environmental aspect [areas painted in green, Figure 15].

Figure 15 – Potential areas (under state control, or undefined ones).



Source: Map made by authors.

The first of these areas, to the south, can be appreciated from both the soccer field, in the lower part of the site, and from the highest point of it, on Avenida Padre Virgilio Campelo. This green area represents the greatest imageability space of the complex, due to the strong presence of the landscape and the wide views it provides. While the football field was installed on the flat part, the sloping part remains untouched under surveillance of the security hired by CDHU to prevent its occupation.

The second green area, in a contiguous block, contains a secondary source of the same stream, and serves as a shortcut for the local residents who scratched a path that has no maintenance. The trail demarcated in the site remains with no paving, security or lighting amidst the vegetation.

The paths along the streams continue leaving residual areas to the east, which serve for disposal and are constantly at environment and new occupation risk. They are, however, important areas to consider on the creation of a system of open spaces, as they potentially represent the extension of green areas to the neighborhood beyond the limits of the complex.

A desire for power is outlined in these areas, that could increase identification by the locals and the establishment of flows that could activate the place. Instead, control and

abandonment prevail in the undefined space whose destination needs to be discussed and made feasible, before being implemented. [Figure 16]

Figure 16 – Two main open green areas on the set.



Source: Rita Pinheiro, 24.07.2021.

CONCLUSION

It is expected that the concepts developed and the analyzes on the Encosta Norte territory contribute to the understanding of the types of open spaces that comprise it. Community actions have transformed the idealized space from the design process into lived spaces, but the place still retains the latent potential of *terrain-vague*, with obstacles to be faced before the powers of that place achieve a proper configuration.

The observed result is a fragmented, segregated and multiple space. Programmed and consolidated free spaces, spaces appropriated by locals and potential open spaces on hold coexist in the territory. All of them can change configuration and contribute to improve and bring great impact on the community and living quality, depending on actors' actions, their dynamics and negotiations.

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