

Government Investment and Quality Spaces: An opportunity for the Greater ABC Paulista?

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Recursos públicos e espaços de qualidade: cenário possível para o Grande ABC Paulista?

RESUMO

Objetivo – Esta reflexão pretende demonstrar, especificamente a partir do Grande ABC Paulista, sub-região sudeste da Região Metropolitana de São Paulo, a baixa qualidade do investimento público em urbanismo, que se contrapõe à existência efetiva de recursos, necessidades prementes e entraves administrativos para a melhoria das ações públicas que priorizem os espaços urbanos;

Metodologia – A investigação desta temática realiza-se a partir da constatação sensível da baixa qualidade dos espaços públicos do Grande ABC Paulista, mesmo apresentando ótimos indicadores econômicos e sociais. Nesta senda, a estratégia de compreensão desta temática analisou os investimentos públicos municipais em urbanismo a partir dos orçamentos das cidades estudadas, repasses federais extraconstitucionais e produção de riquezas na região.

Originalidade / Relevância - O Grande ABC Paulista, sub-região da Região Metropolitana de São Paulo (RMSP), historicamente impulsionada pela expansão industrial do século XX, possui indicadores econômicos e sociais relativamente favoráveis às médias nacionais. Contudo, essa riqueza não se traduz em espaços públicos de qualidade urbanística e arquitetônica. O investimento público em urbanismo é fragmentado, de baixa qualidade e retorno.

Resultados – A região carece de uma agenda urbana de longo prazo, permanecendo estagnada em modelos dos anos 1960 que privilegiam o lote em detrimento da cidade. A captação de recursos federais, além das verbas constitucionalmente obrigatórias, é modesta e travada por um sistema burocrático complexo elaborado pela Gerência Executiva de Governo (GIGOV) e a Caixa Econômica Federal, investindo-se muitos recursos em propostas de baixa qualidade e efetividade.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas – O pacto federativo brasileiro, em especial após a Constituição de 1988, ainda concentra o poder de decisão, sobre investimentos públicos estruturadores de território, no governo central. Este artigo questiona este modelo, apesar de discordar no protagonismo do poder local, sugerindo que precisamos discutir um novo modelo mais fluídico de investimentos entre o poder central e as estruturas regionais;

Contribuições sociais e ambientais – A revisão da matriz dos investimentos públicos em urbanismo, em seu mais nobre olhar, possibilita qualificar a discussão sobre ações em parceria entre os vários níveis de governo e, efetivamente, trazê-lo para um papel de protagonismo na produção de cidades com territórios mais equânimes e sustentáveis;

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Urbanismo, Produção de Espaço, Gestão Urbana

Government Investment and Quality Spaces: An opportunity for the Greater ABC Paulista?

ABSTRACT

Objective – This reflection aims to demonstrate, specifically based on the Greater ABC Paulista region—a southeastern subregion of the São Paulo Metropolitan Area—the low quality of public investment in urbanism, which contrasts with the effective existence of resources, pressing needs, and administrative obstacles to improving public actions that prioritize urban spaces.

Methodology – The investigation of this topic is based on the perceptible observation of the low quality of public spaces in the Greater ABC Paulista, despite the region presenting excellent economic and social indicators. In this context, the strategy for understanding the issue involved analyzing municipal public investments in urbanism through the budgets of the cities studied, extraconstitutional federal transfers, and wealth production in the region.

Originality / Relevance – The Greater ABC Paulista, a subregion of the São Paulo Metropolitan Area (RMSP), historically driven by the industrial expansion of the 20th century, has economic and social indicators that are relatively favorable compared to national averages. However, this wealth is not translated into public spaces of urbanistic and architectural quality. Public investment in urbanism is fragmented, of low quality, and yields limited returns.

Results – The region lacks a long-term urban agenda and remains stagnant in models from the 1960s that prioritize individual plots over the city as a whole. The capture of federal resources, in addition to constitutionally mandatory

funds, is modest and hindered by a complex bureaucratic system developed by the Government Executive Management (GIGOV) and Caixa Econômica Federal, resulting in significant resources being invested in proposals of low quality and effectiveness.

Theoretical/Methodological Contributions – The Brazilian federal pact, particularly after the 1988 Constitution, continues to concentrate decision-making power over territory-structuring public investments in the central government. This article questions this model, while disagreeing with an exclusive emphasis on local government protagonism, and suggests the need to discuss a new, more fluid model of investment between central power and regional structures.

Social and Environmental Contributions – Revising the framework of public investment in urbanism, from its most comprehensive perspective, enables a more qualified discussion on joint actions among different levels of government and effectively brings urbanism to a leading role in the production of cities with more equitable and sustainable territories.

KEYWORDS: Urbanism; Space Production; Urban Management.

Inversiones públicas y espacios de calidad: ¿un escenario posible para el Gran ABC Paulista?

RESUMEN

Objetivo – Esta reflexión tiene como objetivo demostrar, específicamente a partir de la región del Gran ABC Paulista —subregión sudeste de la Región Metropolitana de São Paulo—, la baja calidad de la inversión pública en urbanismo, que contrasta con la existencia efectiva de recursos, necesidades apremiantes y obstáculos administrativos para la mejora de las acciones públicas que prioricen los espacios urbanos.

Metodología – La investigación de esta temática se basa en la observación perceptible de la baja calidad de los espacios públicos del Gran ABC Paulista, apesar de que la región presenta excelentes indicadores económicos y sociales. En este contexto, la estrategia de comprensión del tema analizó las inversiones públicas municipales en urbanismo a partir de los presupuestos de las ciudades estudiadas, las transferencias federales extraconstitucionales y la producción de riqueza en la región.

Originalidad / Relevancia – El Gran ABC Paulista, subregión de la Región Metropolitana de São Paulo (RMSP), históricamente impulsada por la expansión industrial del siglo XX, presenta indicadores económicos y sociales relativamente favorables en comparación con los promedios nacionales. Sin embargo, esta riqueza no se traduce en espacios públicos de calidad urbanística y arquitectónica. La inversión pública en urbanismo es fragmentada, de baja calidad y de escaso retorno.

Resultados – La región carece de una agenda urbana de largo plazo y permanece estancada en modelos de la década de 1960 que priorizan el lote individual en detrimento de la ciudad en su conjunto. La captación de recursos federales, además de los fondos constitucionalmente obligatorios, es modesta y se ve obstaculizada por un complejo sistema burocrático desarrollado por la Gerencia Ejecutiva de Gobierno (GIGOV) y la Caixa Econômica Federal, lo que resulta en la inversión de importantes recursos en propuestas de baja calidad y efectividad.

Contribuciones teóricas/metodológicas – El pacto federativo brasileño, especialmente después de la Constitución de 1988, continúa concentrando el poder de decisión sobre las inversiones públicas estructuradoras del territorio en el gobierno central. Este artículo cuestiona este modelo, sin dejar de discrepar del protagonismo exclusivo del poder local, y sugiere la necesidad de discutir un nuevo modelo más fluido de inversiones entre el poder central y las estructuras regionales.

Contribuciones sociales y ambientales – La revisión de la matriz de las inversiones públicas en urbanismo, desde una perspectiva más integral, permite cualificar la discusión sobre acciones conjuntas entre los distintos niveles de gobierno y, efectivamente, otorga al urbanismo un papel protagónico en la producción de ciudades con territorios más equitativos y sostenibles.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Urbanismo; Producción del Espacio; Gestión Urbana.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article aims to discuss the production of urban space in the Greater ABC Paulista, a subregion of the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (RMSP), composed of the municipalities of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, São Caetano do Sul, Diadema, Mauá, Ribeirão Pires, and Rio Grande da Serra.

Historically, between 1920 and 1980, Greater ABC established itself as a prominent industrial hub due to excellent locational advantages, including large tracts of vacant land, proximity to the São Paulo market, a railway connection to the Port of Santos, abundant electric power, and a skilled workforce. These conditions were crucial to the production of its wealth. The region concentrates approximately 2.8 million inhabitants with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of just under 190 billion reais, based on 2023 data, as will be discussed in greater detail below, highlighting its significant role in the national context.

Despite reasonable economic and social indicators, the core of this reflection lies in the contradiction that this historical production of wealth has not been translated into public spaces of urbanistic and architectural quality. The lack of political prioritization to address the poor quality of urban spaces is evident in municipal public investment policies.

This article explores deficiencies in the urban investment model, especially in actions that structure the territory, which are carried out in a fragmented manner and are never preventive—always corrective, but not always with the best urban planning solutions.

2 OBJECTIVE

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To investigate, specifically from the perspective of Greater ABC Paulista, the fragility of public investment aimed at improving the quality of urban space, by examining, in percentage terms, the relationships between municipal budgets, public investment in urbanism, and the prioritization of the investment agenda. If there are resources, where are they invested? Is the public sector able to direct them toward another set of works and services beyond mere urban maintenance or the construction of ineffective works, such as river channelization, the production of stormwater retention reservoirs, or new avenues? Is this the sole agenda?

3 METHODOLOGY

The method employed was Action Research, based on the review of available materials, discussions among peers at CONJUSCS (the Observatory of Public Policies, Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Economic Conditions of the Municipal University of São Caetano do Sul), and the challenges faced by this author while serving as Director of Urban Projects (Municipal Government of Santo André) and as Municipal Secretary of Public Works, Housing, and Urbanism (Municipal Government of São Caetano do Sul).

The investigation of this topic is based on the clear observation of the low quality of public spaces in Greater ABC Paulista, despite its strong economic and social indicators. In this context, the strategy for understanding this issue involved analyzing municipal public investments in urbanism through the budgets of the cities studied, extraconstitutional federal transfers, and the production of wealth in the region.

4 DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Wealth production, density, and population in Greater ABC Paulista

The central argument of the article is based on a critical analysis of policies for the production of space in Greater ABC, divided into thematic axes: the quality of urban investments, bureaucratic obstacles to the use of federal resources, failures in addressing the housing deficit, and the choice of obsolete drainage models. Let us examine the following table, which combines data on area, population, and wealth production:

Table 1 – General Data: Greater ABC Paulista, State of São Paulo and Brazil

| Municipalities | Área (km²) | Estimated Population 2023 | Population Density | GDP 2023 (em R\$) |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Diadema | 30,73 | 403.579 | 13.133,06 | 21.787.401.005 |
| Mauá | 61,91 | 429.014 | 6.929,64 | 23.069.386.982 |
| R. Pires | 99,08 | 118.954 | 1.200,59 | 4.995.811.003 |
| R. G. Serra | 36,34 | 45.324 | 1.247,22 | 1.196.515.074 |
| S. André | 175,78 | 782.048 | 4.449,02 | 38.565.039.178 |
| S.B. Campo | 409,53 | 841.154 | 2.053,95 | 74.666.523.652 |
| S.C. do Sul | 15,33 | 172.693 | 11.265,04 | 23.511.651.140 |
| Grande ABC | 828,70 | 2.792.766 | 3.370,06 | 187.792.328.034 |
| State of SP (2022) | 248.209,00 | 44.411.238 | 178,93 | 3.444.814.033.000 |
| Brazil (2022) | 8.515.759,090 | 203.080.756 | 23,84 | 11.800.000.000.000 |

Prepared by the author. Source: São Paulo State Court of Accounts (2018), IBGE (2025) e SEADE (s/a).

The industrialization process of the state of São Paulo was a determining factor in shaping the regional space of the Greater ABC (Klink, 2001). This distinct scenario of regional wealth production is not translated into the urban qualification of public spaces. As an initial approximation, we may speculate that this regional GDP in 2023, divided by the estimated population of the same period, corresponds to a per capita wealth production of just under

R\$70,000.00—an extremely significant figure when compared to the approximately R\$52,000.00 produced per capita in Brazil.

There is no political prioritization to confront the very poor quality of public spaces in Greater ABC Paulista. Municipal public agendas do not present actions aimed at implementing such spaces, an issue that is prioritized in other countries.

According to Gehl (2013), these actions would involve clear investments in pedestrianized spaces, central areas, bike lanes, new squares and parks, standardized paving, lighting, underground wiring, sustainable technologies, the renaturalization of water bodies, and connections between fragmented areas; or, as noted by Maricato (2000), addressing the housing deficit, sanitation, drainage, and waste management.

4.2 Housing Deficit

The housing issue is also extremely significant, as the Greater ABC region of São Paulo shows a housing deficit affecting families with incomes of up to three minimum wages. These data were consolidated in 2016 by a study produced by the Federal University of Greater ABC at the request of the Greater ABC Intermunicipal Consortium. Thus, “[...] it is concluded that for the Greater ABC Region, the total quantitative housing deficit amounts to 100,362 dwellings, and the total qualitative deficit to 129,714 dwellings” (Denaldi, 2016, p. 295).

The clarification of the concept of housing deficit is addressed in this reflection:

[...] it is divided into two parts: the first is the deficit due to the replacement of the housing stock, related to the precariousness of buildings, including substandard dwellings and a portion of existing depreciated housing units. The second is the deficit due to the expansion of the housing stock, that is, improvised dwellings, cohabitation, and excessive rent burden (families with incomes of up to three minimum wages, living in houses or apartments that spend more than 30% of their income on rent) (Freitas; Baron; Gabriel, 2015, p. 134)

Understanding the concept of housing deficit is extremely complex, as it is a multifaceted issue involving relationships that range from family income levels to housing costs, housing quality, family types, areas at geological or environmental risk, property legalization, among others.

Based on the established standard of family income of up to three minimum wages, we will adopt a conceptualization under two aspects: quantification and qualification. Quantification refers to the direct need to build new housing units. Qualification, on the other hand, refers to the necessary adaptations to existing housing stock, such as renovations of inadequate dwellings or land tenure regularization, among others.

Thus, given the housing deficit in the Greater ABC region of approximately 230,000 housing units (HU), addressing this challenge cannot be reduced to official housing provision policies alone.

The dominant public-sector model for addressing this issue is completely inappropriate and inefficient, as it prioritizes actions mainly linked to the quantitative deficit—that is, the production and acquisition of housing units. This alternative requires large tracts of vacant land—which are increasingly scarce in Greater ABC Paulista—projects of low architectural and urban quality, and, most perversely, the transfer of financing burdens to a population whose income bracket can only be integrated through heavy subsidies.

Under this model, we observe actions by the Federal Government, with a significant portion of resources invested in the “Minha Casa Minha Vida” (MCMV) program; complementary actions by the State Government through interventions by the São Paulo State Housing and Urban Development Company (CDHU) under the “Casa Paulista” program (which, in summary, supports MCMV with partial funding); and, additionally, the heroic efforts of municipal housing companies.

Therefore, the housing deficit will not be addressed by the current solution matrix. The discussion must foresee a more contemporary agenda that goes beyond the mere production of new housing units, such as:

4.2.1 Social Rental Housing and Income Complement Subsidies

The establishment of a monthly amount allocated either to renting a property or to supplementing the portion of housing costs not covered by family income has a significantly lower impact on public budgets than financing the construction of new units. Programs of this nature dramatically helped reduce housing deficits in Europe starting in the 1960s. In Turin, Italy, for example, social rental housing is the main public policy for addressing the housing deficit, with notable success.

4.2.2 Retrofit

This anglicized term refers to a deep renovation of existing buildings aimed at adapting them to new functions—for example, converting an office building into housing. This procedure is much cheaper than acquiring land and constructing a new building specifically for housing, especially when accompanied by specific building legislation. Retrofit policies can focus on central areas, completely saving on foundations and structures and partially on installations and masonry. Buildings suitable for this purpose would be those that do not fulfill the constitutional principle of the “social function of property.”

4.2.3 Acquisition of Vacant Properties on the Market

According to IBGE data (2010), approximately 7% of properties in the city of São Paulo are vacant. Applying the same index to Greater ABC would identify more than 60,000 unoccupied properties that could be allocated to housing programs. The City Statute provides municipalities with instruments to occupy these units, a common practice in countries with at least minimal public regulation of land markets. In Brazil, directing part of the housing budget to this action would yield far more significant results.

4.2.4 Counterpart Requirements for the Real Estate Market

The North American housing provision model requires that any real estate development allocate a percentage of its production to public social housing programs. This value reaches approximately 4% of the total built area and is located within the same building. Thus, a middle-class building with 40 units, for example, would allocate two units to the low-income market. These units belong to the condominium but are designated for housing programs.

4.2.5 Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) for Social Rental Housing

The PPPs are joint arrangements between the public sector and private initiative to achieve common objectives. There is a comprehensive legal framework that provides adequate oversight of operations, making this a viable alternative. In summary, the private sector delivers the project, and the public sector reimburses it over the long term.

4.2.6 New Ways of Living

We remain constrained by the modern paradigm of the family and continue to reproduce this model. Housing programs should not produce standardized units but rather adapt to new housing needs: cohabiting families, young professionals at the beginning of their careers, single individuals, new family arrangements, among others.

4.2.7 Intermediate Housing

Housing provision models do not include transitional spaces with defined timeframes for populations whose family income cannot sustain condominium fees or utility bills. Alternative models should also be considered, such as container homes, trailers, capsule hotels, and small dwellings of up to 18 m², among others.

4.2.8 Technical Assistance for Social Interest Housing

Addressing both quantitative and qualitative deficits must involve the participation of the affected communities and be carried out by schools of architecture and engineering and professional associations, which could assist in renovations, construction, regularization, collective building efforts, and the use of alternative technologies with proper technical support.

4.2.9 New Technologies

The still artisanal and slow construction model is of low productivity—blocks, mortar, roofing tiles, frames. It is unacceptable that a car can be produced in three minutes while a house takes at least six months. Therefore, new technologies such as 3D printing for housing components, steel structures for residential assembly, engineered wood, or alternative materials urgently need to enter the public agenda for addressing the housing deficit.

In conclusion, there are clear alternatives for addressing the housing deficit, and the dominant model has already proven ineffective. The participation of the affected communities is essential to understanding the real demands of the target population. Architecture based on ready-made models is a disservice to a dynamic society that urgently needs increasingly customized solutions.

4.3 Revenue Collection, Budget Commitments, and Per Capita Investment in Urban Actions

Let us now examine, as a study model based on 2016 data, the profile of municipal revenue collection, committed expenditures, and per capita investment in urban actions in Greater ABC Paulista:

Table 2 - Revenue Collection, Urban Planning Committed Expenditures, and Per Capita Investment in Urban Actions in Greater ABC Paulista in 2016 (R\$)

| Municipalities | Municipal Revenue Collection | Committed Expenditure | Per Capita Investment |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Diadema | 1.121.875.420,71 | 196.292.108,87 | 469,74 |
| Mauá | 879.322.082,69 | 220.949.577,05 | 478,24 |
| Ribeirão Pires | 261.405.932,57 | 65.994.590,40 | 541,61 |
| Rio Grande da Serra | 79.384.434,41 | 12.340.251,10 | 249,76 |
| Santo André | 2.341.118.765,31 | 418.301.269,00 | 584,84 |
| São Bernardo do Campo | 3.803.676.099,27 | 770.711.549,83 | 931,44 |
| São Caetano do Sul | 1.233.674.691,28 | 280.590.004,00 | 1.757,99 |
| Total Greater ABC | 9.720.457.426,24 | 1.965.179.350,25 | - |
| Média Grande ABC | - | - | 713,72 |

Prepared by the author. Source: São Paulo State Court of Accounts (2018)

These data demonstrate that public investment in urban planning amounts, on average, to around 20% of municipal revenues, but this does not translate into qualified returns

for the population. Instead, urban planning ideals are reduced to fragmented works that fail to enhance public space, such as large stormwater detention basins (“piscinões”)—despite the existence of cheaper and more efficient solutions to urban drainage problems—along with repaving and renovation works, among others. This confirms a generalized lack of innovation in public investment in urban planning.

On the other hand, the Federal System for the Management of Agreements and Transfer Contracts (SICONV), which is a federal government management platform responsible for the entire life cycle of agreements and transfer contracts of the Union, shows that federal resources transferred to municipalities (excluding operating funds, constitutionally mandated expenditures, or loans) are very modest. These resources can generally be requested in two ways: through programs of the Federal Government’s ministries or through parliamentary amendments to the Federal General Budget, as shown in the following table:

Table 3 – Profile of Municipal Investments in Urban Actions with Federal Resources in Greater ABC Paulista, 2018

| Municipalities | Federal Resources | Investments in Paving | Investments in Public Facilities |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Diadema | R\$ 15.309.948,30 | R\$ 2.662.609,51 | R\$ 12.647.338,79 |
| Mauá | R\$ 5.939.625,23 | R\$ 4.709.387,14 | R\$ 1.230.238,09 |
| Ribeirão Pires | R\$ 29.035.326,15 | R\$ 14.177.810,00 | R\$ 14.857.516,15 |
| Rio Grande da Serra | R\$ 3.671.044,72 | R\$ 1.000.000,00 | R\$ 2.671.044,72 |
| Santo André | R\$ 2.055.314,94 | R\$ 1.645.717,95 | R\$ 409.596,99 |
| São Bernardo do Campo | R\$ 12.785.134,53 | R\$ 7.756.030,30 | R\$ 5.029.104,23 |
| São Caetano do Sul | R\$ 15.016.856,42 | R\$ 4.218.471,98 | R\$ 10.798.384,44 |
| TOTAL | R\$ 83.813.250,29 | R\$ 36.170.026,88 | R\$ 47.643.223,41 |

Prepared by the author. Source: SICONV – Ministério do Planejamento, Desenvolvimento e Gestão, 2018.

When analyzing 2018 specifically, we find that the region received only small amounts of federal investment for urban actions—approximately R\$80 million—which represents about 1% of municipal revenues. There is also an unfortunate prioritization of paving works, clearly evidenced by outdated technical specifications. In other words, it is the same asphalt used in the last century, with no room to implement, for example, ecological or permeable paving to mitigate the impacts of flooding, which so severely affects our region. Given the outdated quality of the material, these pavements will certainly need to be redone within a few years, perpetuating an unfortunate cycle of public investment.

In the same Table 3, “Investments in Public Facilities” are concentrated on construction works in schools, hospitals, primary healthcare units, sports courts, and a few public squares. All investments are punctual, disconnected, and unarticulated from a broader urban project.

Thus, investment in urban renewal actions is virtually nonexistent, with low creativity and effectiveness, condemning our municipalities to uniformity. It is evident that there is no political prioritization, proposals, or willingness to seek resources with greater impact and durability, such as urban projects that requalify public space.

Good architecture demonstrates that better spaces have positive repercussions throughout society. Investments in high-quality public spaces are extremely low and diluted in projects that fall far short of the possibilities for more pleasant cities with democratic spaces. Municipal administrations reduce the fundamental urban issue of public space to low-impact works and services that constantly need to be repeated.

Both the resource transfer model and the investment profile are far removed from any real possibility of improving public space. Instead, they merely reiterate, through palliative measures, the fragmentation with which municipal governments invest in urban actions—actions that would certainly improve urban living conditions in a more lasting way for all residents.

Specifically, under the new dynamics of public service contracting, the public servant is civilly and criminally liable in the event of any error in the procurement process, since “[...] public agents, in this context, must comply with the legal framework when conducting the bidding process and may be held liable for any damages caused to third parties, with the right of recourse in cases of intent or negligence” (Nakata et al., 2025, p. 6). Thus, in addition to having very particular technical specificities, urban projects do not have all of their components covered by the standard reference tables used for budgeting in public procurement, thereby creating an additional concern for the public agent.

4.4 Extraconstitutional Federal Investments

The matrix of extraconstitutional federal transfers is also very limited. Greater ABC Paulista requires federal resources for investments in housing, high-quality public spaces, light rail vehicles, uniform and accessible sidewalks, underground wiring, new forms of urban mobility, sustainability, among others. Table 4 demonstrates these low per capita federal investment values for urban development:

Table 4: Federal Investments in Urban Planning per Capita in Greater ABC, 2017 e 2018

| Municipalities | Population | Federal Resources Active in | Per Capita Investment (R\$) |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | 2017 | 2018 | |
| Diadema | 417.869 | R\$ 15.309.948,30 | 36,63 |
| Mauá | 462.005 | R\$ 5.939.625,23 | 12,86 |
| Ribeirão Pires | 121.848 | R\$ 29.035.326,15 | 238,29 |
| Rio Grande da Serra | 49.408 | R\$ 3.671.044,72 | 74,30 |
| Santo André | 715.231 | R\$ 2.055.314,94 | 2,87 |
| São Bernardo do Campo | 827.437 | R\$ 12.785.134,53 | 15,45 |
| São Caetano do Sul | 159.608 | R\$ 15.016.856,42 | 94,06 |
| Total Grande ABC | 2.753.406 | R\$ 83.813.250,29 | 30,44 |

Prepared by the author. Source: SICONV – Ministério do Planejamento, Desenvolvimento e Gestão, 2018.

The quality and efficiency in the use of federal funds transferred to the municipalities of the Greater ABC region of São Paulo for urban development projects are modest in relation to the wealth generated and the existing urban problems.

These federal resources are held hostage by the municipalities' weak role in diagnosing urban problems, designing projects, and securing funding, whose origin is primarily from the budgets of the Ministries or specific line items in the Union General Budget through parliamentary amendments.

Once a municipal request for resources for urban interventions is approved, a transfer contract is signed between the federal entity and the municipality, intermediated by Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF), the agency responsible for disbursing the funds.

Subsequent steps involve contracting the project—a major challenge for municipalities due to sophisticated technical and administrative obstacles that few municipalities in Brazil are qualified to handle: in addition to the Public Bidding Law, the rules of SICONV (Management System for Agreements and Transfer Contracts of the Federal Government), the originating Ministries, the Courts of Accounts, and a set of Interministerial Ordinances issued by the Federal Government's Civil House must all be followed. These are daunting barriers to using funds that were often generated in the very municipality requesting them.

According to Silva (2012, p. 19), "By automating voluntary transfers, the use of SICONV provides greater transparency to public fund transfers, since society can monitor the execution of contracts online." On the other hand, the bureaucratic procedure is extremely sophisticated, creating the need for municipalities to establish specific departments to manage these transfer contracts. The main obstacle is the protocol of the disbursing agent, managed by a specific technical department of CEF called GIGOV (Executive Government Management). Contracting GIGOV is mandatory and costs 2% of each contract. Its purpose is to monitor project stages and authorize the use of funds.

Currently, the relationship with GIGOV and its rules and regulations is the biggest obstacle to the implementation and progress of urban projects using federal funds. Below is a brief reflection on the main problems encountered and proposals to unlock this problematic model:

4.4.1 Shared responsibility in public bidding processes for projects

After signing the transfer contract, municipalities conduct public bidding for requested projects only after analysis and authorization from CEF/GIGOV. If any inconsistencies are identified afterward—which is extremely common, as the law allows bidding with a Basic Project rather than a more detailed Executive Project—CEF/GIGOV disclaims any responsibility and transfers the burden to the municipality, hindering project execution. To solve this recurring problem, either CEF/GIGOV should conduct the bidding and contract the company, since it is paid to do so, or it should fully limit itself to financial management of the transfer.

4.4.2 Immediate transfer of approved funds

Even after signing the transfer contract, funds are not always fully transferred to the municipalities in a dedicated account. In many agreements, funds are released in stages after verification that the service was indeed completed. This model would be reasonable if it did not

take about 120 days between municipal approval, CEF/GIGOV approval, and actual fund transfer.

This long delay discourages small companies, meaning only well-capitalized construction firms participate in such projects. Additionally, this delay can necessitate contract adjustments borne solely by the municipalities.

The proposal is that funds be immediately transferred to the municipality, as they are already budgeted in the Union General Budget, with auditing and inspection agencies given a maximum of 21 days to produce their reports and release funds. Any inconsistencies would be addressed in the next project stage.

4.4.3 Empowerment of the Courts of Accounts

The CEF/GIGOV enforces stricter rules than the very bodies responsible for ensuring public expenditure transparency—the Courts of Accounts. For projects funded entirely by federal resources, this responsibility lies with the Federal Court of Accounts; when projects combine resources from municipalities and states, the respective State Court of Accounts also assumes responsibility.

Their analysis criteria are extremely rigid, incompatible with the organic nature of construction projects and the low level of industrialization in Brazil's construction sector. CEF/GIGOV halts projects for any identified inconsistency until fully resolved. This oversight role is not CEF/GIGOV's responsibility but that of the Courts of Accounts.

The costs of such halts are borne by the municipality, e.g., through contract adjustments, contractor mobilization fees, and so on. This halt occurs regardless of the problem's complexity.

The proposal to unblock this stage is to hold municipal teams responsible for up to 10% of any identified inconsistencies, which must be resolved within 90% of project execution; in other words, minor issues do not stop the project.

4.4.4 Shared responsibility between CEF/GIGOV and municipal technical teams

Due to the complexity of CEF/GIGOV's technical and administrative requirements, municipalities have no option but to create dedicated teams. Larger municipalities can manage this, but smaller ones struggle to allocate a technician to handle the technical-bureaucratic leviathan of CEF/GIGOV. Many hire specialized management companies, adding further costs. The suggestion is that CEF/GIGOV focus on managing the funds and, for the fee it charges, provide objective support in the technical management of the project.

4.4.5 – Municipal leadership rather than financial manager: revising CEF/GIGOV's role

The CEF has exclusive authority to act as a federal disbursing agent and unfortunately does not have enough technical staff to adequately support all municipalities increasingly seeking federal urban development funds. Its role spans from pre-bidding analysis to project completion, with little proactivity, prioritizing technicalities over timely execution.

The suggestion is for CEF/GIGOV to reduce itself to the financial manager of the contract, empowering municipalities with support from professional associations, Municipal Councils, and the Public Prosecutor's Office, aligning more coherently with the model proposed by the City Statute. Implementing these changes would accelerate federal public investment in municipalities and could be institutionalized through an Interministerial Ordinance issued by the Federal Civil House. This solution would facilitate the resumption of halted projects and improve efficiency in ongoing works.

For reference, international loan rules for urban development projects are less restrictive and generally limited to municipalities' payment capacity rather than bureaucratic management like CEF/GIGOV.

The Spanish model is also instructive. Interested parties (municipalities, public service companies, and public and private investors) organize through a dedicated management entity, structure a project fund, and agree on deadlines and technical standards, all with transparency and efficiency. In this model, the banking institution is merely a participant, serving as a means rather than an end, not competing with municipalities or overriding public interest.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The illusory leadership of local governments, at the expense of state actions, encourages seductive and populist rhetoric that reduces public space to a residual role. Broader issues, such as more equitable distribution of income and land, remain distant. Federal tax reform, which among other measures could enable distribution of resources based on population rather than wealth generation, may offer new hope.

In short, improving the quality of public or collective spaces, understood as prioritizing an urban agenda, is fundamental in public administration. In a country where around 80% of the population lives in urban areas, democratizing access to more equitable territories cannot be limited to low-skill corrective actions—it must be approached as preventive urban planning for balanced spatial development. Therefore, beyond enabling urban projects, merely reducing municipal public investment to isolated projects, without planning fund sourcing, management, or stronger deadlines for execution, could compromise quality of life in Brazilian cities.

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DECLARAÇÃO DE CONTRIBUIÇÃO

Eu, Enio Moro Junior, declaro para os devidos fins que este artigo é de autoria única, desenvolvido a partir de interesses convergentes entre minha atuação como docente e pesquisador no programa de Mestrado Profissional em Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design do Centro Universitário Belas Artes de São Paulo e como gestor público de prefeituras do Grande ABC, nas quais exerci a Diretoria de Projetos Urbanos da Prefeitura Municipal de Santo André e também Secretário Municipal de Obras e Habitação da Prefeitura Municipal de São Caetano do Sul, além de diversas outras funções, que permaneço até os dias atuais, como a presidência do Conselho de Patrimônio de São Caetano do Sul e ainda como responsável acadêmico da elaboração do novo Plano Diretor de São Caetano do Sul.

Portanto, a ideia central desta reflexão partiu da necessidade de compreensão destes processos de decisão no poder público, inúmeras vezes sem profundidade teórica. Os dados são públicos, a partir de bibliografia teórica clássica sobre urbanismo, novos autores e bancos de dados abertos. Esta produção não contou com recursos públicos e este produto sintetiza um conjunto de entrevistas e notas técnicas produzidas para a imprensa local.

O programa de Mestrado Profissional da Belas Artes é coordenado pelo Prof. Dr. Marcelo Romero, ex-diretor da Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo.

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