

**Impacting quality of place:
the case of self-organised initiatives in São Paulo, Brazil**

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Statement of authenticity of material

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the research contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

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Abstract

Recent studies and reports have highlighted the importance of lively, safe and inclusive public spaces for the achievement of better quality of life in cities. The current emphasis on quality urban public spaces is not only restricted to academic debates, but increasingly urban residents around the world are engaging in improving the places in the cities they live. In the Brazilian context, self-organised initiatives of citizens acting in the improvement of public spaces have emerged in the country in recent years, especially in the city of São Paulo. This research aims to understand how these initiatives are impacting the quality of places by investigating the main features of the groups and analysing how the place-making processes promoted by them are affecting the relationship between people and places.

The analysis is based on the concepts of Self-organisation and Place-making. A qualitative research approach was used; semi-structured interviews were conducted with organisers and participants of the activities and with local residents. The results demonstrate that self-organised initiatives are able to contribute to the improvement of quality of place, since their activities increase social interaction, raise awareness about the importance of public spaces and provide physical betterments that create more opportunities for people to use the places. Nevertheless, this study reveals that place-making processes developed by self-organised groups cannot be considered as a long-term urban solution since they are not able to ensure on-going management and maintenance of quality of place. Therefore, activities tend to have more spontaneous and short-term characteristics. Despite the lack of sustainability of activities and projects, this research concludes that place-making processes carried out by self-organised initiatives are important for experimentation and to test possibilities about changes in public spaces.

Key words: Self-organisation, place-making, quality of place, public spaces, civil society

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the background information of the research and introduces the research context, research problem, objectives and questions. It explains the significance of the study and summarizes its scope and limitations.

1.1 Background

With more than half of the global population living in cities (United Nations, 2014), the world has become more urban than ever before. Brazil, the country where this research is focused, is one of the most urbanised countries in the world (The World Bank, 2014). Rapid urbanisation has affected cities around the world and the way people use and interact within the urban environment. In this context of fast growth and densification, public spaces have become important and scarce assets, thereby cities are facing new challenges related not only to quantitative aspects of space but also to qualitative demands. Public spaces are considered vital elements for the success of cities, as they can enhance social interactions, promote civic identity and ensure liveability (UN-Habitat, 2014). However rapid and unplanned urban growth has resulted in a decrease of the shares of public spaces in many cities around the world. In addition, some local governments' inability to cope with the challenges of fast urbanisation has affected directly the quality of places in cities.

The attention given to public spaces has increased in literature research and academic discussions, as well as the importance of active participation of citizens. Access to quality places is crucial to sustainable urban development, since well-designed and maintained public spaces contribute to social, cultural and economic activities improving mutual trust and social cohesion (UN-Habitat, 2014). Furthermore, participation in decisions regarding public spaces is the first step towards the empowerment of urban residents, which enables them to have voice and express their needs, and helps to construct the city for the people. By engaging in urban transformation processes, citizens are reclaiming the city and shifting the focus to a human scale in urban planning and development (UN-Habitat, 2015).

The current focus on public spaces is not only restricted to academic debates, but more and more citizens around the world are engaging in improving the places in the cities they live. However, the traditional idea of public participation has been converted into a much more complex set of reasons why people get involved in activities to reclaim public spaces and to improve its qualities. Initiatives emerging from civil society are making use of creativity and autonomous social engagement to reshape the city and promote transformations in public spaces that are not receiving adequate attention from formal structures.

Research context

The geographic focus of this study is São Paulo, Brazil's largest city with more than 11 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2015). Considered a metropolis in constant mutation, it is “a world city linked to global networks, and a local city, where public spaces manifest social inequality and urban dereliction” (Urban Age, 2009, p. 7-4). The consequences of uncontrolled and unplanned rapid urbanisation are exposed in its fragmented territorial patterns, environmental degradation, and neglect of the public spaces.

For many years, urban development strategies in São Paulo focused on highways, buildings and shopping malls, sacrificing urban public spaces and contributing to a more isolated society. Nevertheless, in recent years, there appears to be a new movement emerging from civil society intended to re-establish the relationship between people and public spaces in the city (Paiva, 2015; Rolnik, 2012; Wisnik, 2015b). Initiatives coming from self-organised groups of citizens became a catalyst of considerations about the use of the city and its public spaces, not only reclaiming the city for public use through manifestation and protests, but actively engaging into transformations of public spaces by promoting activities that aim to make meaning of places.

1.2 Problem Statement

The importance of lively, safe and inclusive public spaces is an emerging topic in the urban development agenda nowadays. For the first time, a resolution on public spaces was adopted by UN-Habitat in 2011, recognising the significance of quality urban public

spaces for sustainable urban development (UN-Habitat, 2014). However, citizens around the world are not willing to rely solely on authorities strategies anymore. Through alternative ways of communication (e.g. social media) and self-engagement, civil society is becoming more active and implementing their own ideas to make better places for people. Place-making processes are being conducted by self-organised groups that decided to act and promote activities to revitalize public spaces that were neglect or not functional for the people in the city.

In Brazil, the number of self-organised groups promoting activities and reclaiming the use of public spaces has increased in the last years (Albertoni & Fagundez, 2015; Escola de Ativismo, 2014). São Paulo is part of a current trend spread worldwide, influenced by social movements reclaiming the city such as Occupy Wall Street¹, in 2011, in New York, and the June Events², in 2013, in São Paulo, which contributed to the discussion about what kind of city people want to live in (Wisnik, 2015b). However, currently civil society are aiming not only to engage in protests demanding changes from the government, but also to actively revitalise and provide alternative uses to public spaces (Albertoni & Fagundez, 2015). Self-organised initiatives evolving from the bottom up are in the position to strengthen the ties between citizens and public spaces through social activities as well as to improve the quality of places. The phenomenon is relatively new and the lack of knowledge about how self-organised initiatives affect the urban environment has been stressed in recent studies (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Meerkerk, Boonstra, & Edelenbos, 2013). Therefore, it is important to understand what the implications and impacts of these self-organised activities are and how they are contributing to urban transformation processes.

¹ The movement Occupy Wall Street began as a small group of protesters camping out in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park, on September 17, 2011, and originated a national and global movement to fight against social injustice, corruption of political system and economic inequality (Levitin, 2015).

² The "June events" were mass demonstrations that began in São Paulo, in 2013, to protest about the raise of bus fare, and spread throughout Brazil gaining different connotations such as fighting against bad quality of public services, World Cup expenses, lack of safety and corruption (Martins, 2014).

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to examine how self-organised initiatives promoting place-making processes are impacting the quality of places in São Paulo. The idea is to contribute to knowledge about the role of civil society in current urban transformation processes and to gain a better understanding about the influence of place-making processes in the quality of places.

1.4 Research Question

The study aims to answer the following main research question:

How do self-organised initiatives impact the quality of places through place-making processes in São Paulo?

This research understands that quality of place is defined by subjective characteristics. Therefore the focus of this study is on the perception of quality of place by organisers, participants and local residents. The research acknowledges that there are spatial qualities that can be measured in order to address quality of place, however spatial measures are not part of the scope of this investigation.

In order to guide the research and delineate its scope, three sub-questions are presented as follows:

1. What are the origins, characteristics and motivations of self-organised initiatives to promote the use of public spaces in São Paulo?

The study aims to identify the main features and purposes of self-organised groups emerging from civil-society that are acting in public spaces in the city.

2. What are the main strategies, goals and challenges of self-organised groups in transforming public spaces in Sao Paulo?

The research intends to understand the way self-organised initiatives work, their engagement and collaboration patterns. The selected initiatives will be assessed under aspects of place-making, which are identified as social and physical processes.

3. How do these self-organised urban projects manifest? What are the meanings and perceived benefits in the understanding of the organisers, participants and local residents?

The research also looks into the ideas, ideologies and values of the people acting in public spaces. Why they get involved in these activities (organisers, participants) and how the transformation processes affect their relation with and within the place (organisers, participants, local residents).

1.5 Significance of the research

Researchers in recent years have used theories about self-organisation in an attempt to understand contemporary urban transformations processes emerging from the complexity of cities (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Portugali, 2012). At the same time, other authors have sought to understand places and place-making activities in order to analyse the meanings, values and ideas in the relationship between people and places (Cresswell, 2009; Healey, 2010). However, interrelations between these concepts have not been explicitly recognised in theoretical studies, therefore this thesis aims to contribute with more specific connections between these concepts.

In the Brazilian context, groups acting without formal structures of organisation have emerged in the country in recent years, especially in the city of São Paulo. Instead of formal employees, these groups are formed by activists and volunteers mainly focused on local urban issues (Escola de Ativismo, 2014). Therefore, this research aims to contribute to urban development studies in Brazil since it analyses a recent phenomenon of civil society autonomously acting in public spaces in São Paulo from the concepts of Self-organisation and Place-making, which is a novelty for Brazilian studies. The research also has the objective of contributing with new knowledge to the existing theories of Self-organisation and Place-making, since the lack of precise definitions for both of them.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

Nowadays, in Brazil, there is a variety of groups promoting urban interventions with different emphases, such as artistic, political, social, cultural and spatial approaches. This thesis focuses on self-organised groups acting to improve the quality of public spaces. It aims to analyse the interactions between these groups and the city of São Paulo, in particular the relationship between civil society and public spaces. The relationship between self-organised groups and other urban actors (public and private sector) is acknowledged during the interviews and explored in combination with secondary data.

Due to time constraints this research is limited to three cases in the city of São Paulo. Therefore, it will not be possible to provide generalizable findings for all population of self-organised groups promoting place-making processes in public spaces. The familiarity of the researcher with the cases and the city's context were important since the impossibility of visiting Brazil during the research.

1.7 Thesis outline

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework centred on the concepts of self-organisation and place-making. The chapter explores topics relevant to examination of the emergence of self-organised initiatives in cities and the role of civil society in the improvement of quality of public spaces.

Chapter 3 explains the choice of methodology used to investigate the phenomenon, including variables and indicators that are used to explore the scope of the main concepts. It presents the research strategy, data collection methods, methodological limitations and challenges.

Chapter 4 focuses on the research context and the cases being studied. The chapter is aimed at presenting the findings and analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of the research and suggests opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Rapid urbanisation in recent years has affected how cities and places within cities were planned and shaped. Urban megalopolises now face the challenge of achieving liveability, accessibility and sustainability in places where people meet and live (Healey, 2010). This chapter will present the main theoretical concepts used in this thesis: self-organisation and place-making. Self-organisation will be explored in the context of *complexity theory of cities*. Place-making will be analysed in the context of urban transformation processes, where people are reclaiming and reshaping public spaces through local engagement and active participation.

More than 50 years ago, Jacobs (1961) had already stressed the importance of understanding cities as complex systems that “involve dealing with a sizeable number of factors which are interrelated into an organic whole” (p. 432). In other words, cities are systems that can be analysed by their different situations, problems and segments, which are all interconnected and complex. Furthermore, Jacobs (1961) claimed that self-organised groups of citizens are able to develop an interconnection between social and physical aspects of public spaces by grasping the complexity of cities.

2.2 Self-organisation

Urban transformation processes around the world are moving away from top-down approaches towards models that recognize the complexity of cities (Portugali, 2012). In the current research debate, the necessity of understanding what motivates citizens to actively contribute to urban development and management in local public spaces is emphasised, turning the focus to self-organised initiatives (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011).

Self-organisation and Complexity Theory

The *complexity theory* is described by Portugali in his article *Complexity Theories of Cities* (2012) as an overarching concept of open and complex systems that have self-

organisation as one of their main features. In the *complexity theory* context, cities are seen as the result of interactions between a variety of urban agents and their plans and interventions. Currently, several studies are making use of this concept to analyse emerging self-organised initiatives in urban areas (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Meerkerk et al., 2013). The *complexity theory* argues that cities are open and complex systems, far from equilibrium, consisting of an immense variety of elements and interactions that are not predictable and difficult to manage (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Portugali, 2012).

The ground-breaking message of organised complexity in cities

The pioneering notion of cities as complex systems was presented by the urban writer and activist Jane Jacobs, in her work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), in opposition to theorists of traditional modernist planning who “have consistently mistaken cities as problems of simplicity and of disorganised complexity, and have tried to analyse and treat them thus” (p. 435). According to her, cities are problems of *organised complexity*, as situations in cities present a number of aspects that are changing simultaneously, and that are all interrelated. In addition, Jacobs (1961) argues that the complexity of a city is defined by the interdependencies between its different aspects and elements.

Christopher Alexander also contributed to this discourse in his classic essay *A city is not a Tree* (1965) emphasising that urban development processes of the modern city concept were leading to *artificial cities* that failed in providing liveable and sustainable public spaces. The urban environment, he added, cannot be seen as an element working in a hierarchical and mechanical system, instead it should be considered as a cluster of units, which influence each other and are interconnected by a complex whole (Alexander, 1965).

2.2.1 Self-organisation and the city

Portugali (2012) presents cities as self-organising systems with different urban agents acting at the same time and influencing the nature of urban processes. Cities are seen as dynamic processes of interactions and unforeseen changes in a system far from

equilibrium. Boonstra and Boelens (2011) explore the idea of city as “a reciprocal product of the initiatives of actors, influenced by personal/individual motives (...) interacting with spatial developments that are in their turn products of collective actions” (p. 110).

Self-organised citizens as urban agents

The rise of a stronger civil society, as well as the increase of complexity in cities, have influenced the way urban transformation processes are occurring in urban areas. According to Portugali (2012), single actors can have considerable impacts on urban landscapes, as much as planners and architects. The author proposes a new view on the dynamics of the city, in which all actors are seen as equally capable, and there is no qualitative difference between large (e.g. government), middle (e.g. NGOs) and small-scale (e.g. individuals) agents. In his words:

... each agent is a planner – be it a single individual, a firm or the city’s planning team – and the city comes into being out of the interaction between the many agents *and their plans*. Similarly to small-scale urban agents/planners, the official planners are participants in the overall urban game. (Portugali, 2012, p. 129)

Some researchers suggest that governments – and urban planners working under the authority of governments - need to support the actions and encourage citizens to participate actively in urban transformation processes (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2014). However, other studies explore the idea that people are becoming more active in urban environment out of their own motivation (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Portugali, 2012), and that self-organisation in cities could lead to new governance and planning realities (Meerkerk et al., 2013).

Historically, structural problems in public participation have been imposing real limits to urban development and management processes. Standard participatory processes, according to Boonstra and Boelens (2011), are still conducted under the control of public governments, thus governments make use of this control to remain in central positions and influence the outcome of urban processes. Often, participation processes can be seen

as manipulative or biased tools (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010), which do not cooperate for inclusive and sustainable outcomes. These studies identify self-organised initiatives emerging from civil society as a response to insufficient actions adopted by governments.

Collaboration x independence

Meerkerk et al (2013) consider that the success of self-organised initiatives is related to adaptive changes in the formal structures of government, market and society. Thereby, the need of collaboration between non-state and state actors is stressed, since the lack of resources can influence the outcome of self-organised activities, affecting the quality of urban areas. Nabeel Hamdi, in his book *Small Change: about the art of practice and the limits of planning in cities* (2004), it is suggested that community based structures bring creativity, novelty and flexibility that need to be incorporated into a social construction with the formal structures. Self-organised activities coming from civil society must be in constant collaboration with top-down government-led structures to achieve the necessary stability. The energy and actions coming from the bottom, emphasises Portugali (2012), must be incorporated into a new way of participation that allows planning democracy.

Boonstra and Boelens (2011, p. 100) present a much more independent view of self-organisation by defining it as initiatives originated “in civil society itself, via autonomous community-based networks of citizens outside government control” and that they are able to contribute to urban development and management independently. Globalisation, increased access to information, technology and new forms of social communication (e.g. social media) are pointed out as important elements, which gave rise to a heterogeneous and multifaceted setting. The role of governments has changed and they “simply cannot act on their own any longer”, and in order to address the increasing complexity of civil society, participation must be free from government control (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 101).

2.2.2 Reclaiming public spaces through self-organisation

Self-organised initiatives represent the “actual motives, networks, communities, processes and objectives of citizens themselves, at least initially independent of

government policies and detached from participatory planning procedures” (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 109). Public spaces have a significant role in contributing to social and sustainable development in cities. When governments and urban planners oversee this role, empowered citizens can provide a new form of planning and management of places (Swyngedouw & Moulaert, 2010), and this is the essential difference between collaborative planning and self-organisation.

Sorensen and Sagaris (2010) state that although it is noticeable that citizens and communities must be seen as important actors and their views need to be taken into account for the achievement of more sustainability, equity and democracy in urban transformation processes, in practice urban planning and city-building usually undermine their significance. According to Healey (2010), many studies emphasise that local communities should be able to make decisions about what happens in their place, since “there are moral reasons relating to the rights to a ‘voice’ that people should have where their daily living environment is affected” (p. 41).

Efforts coming from civil society to get involved and to solve issues in the urban environment through collective actions are a worldwide phenomenon. In recent years, a renewed interest in academic and public discourse in the *right to the city* approach was noticed. The concept is based on the ideas developed in the 1960s by Lefebvre, a French philosopher who argued that citizens must take a central role in decision making regarding all changes in the urban space in order to transform the relationship between capitalism and citizenship (Purcell, 2003). Moreover, Schmid (2012) emphasises that Lefebvre’s purpose is about the right to urban quality, which means the right to access to resources and the possibility to experiment in urban spaces and discover alternative ways of life. Therefore, the right to the city can be accomplished by a “generalised form of self-management (*autogestion généralisée*) as the basis and expression of that right” (Lefebvre, 2003 as cited in Schmid, 2012, p. 59). Drawing on Lefebvre’s work, David Harvey (2008) claims that the right to the city is more than people having access to urban resources, in his words:

... it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. (Harvey, 2008, p. 23)

According to Schmid (2012), nowadays, the *right to the city* reveals a focus on the local level, since local and regional instances gained force with the decrease of influence of the national state from many areas of social life. People in cities are exploring *collective constructions* based on experiences, perceptions and qualities of the urban environment, making use of new forms of communication and arrangements in order to reclaim and reshape urban public places. In this context, the *right to the city* discourse can be understood as the right to participate in the transformation of the city through self-organised initiatives acting locally; it is the right to democratic engagement in the governance and management of particular places in the city (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010).

2.2.3 Definitions of Self-organisation

The following list collects a summary of the approaches to the concept of Self-organisation discussed in the previous sections. Self-organisation has been characterised and analysed as:

- Self-motivated activities emerging from civil society in the urban environment that must be incorporated into a new way of participation that allows planning democracy (Portugali, 2012).
- Activities triggered by governments – and urban planners working under the authority of governments – who encourage citizens to participate actively in urban transformation processes (Nederhand et al, 2014).
- The success of self-organised initiatives is related to adaptive changes in the formal structures of government, market and society. Thereby, the need of collaboration between non-state and state actors is stressed (Meerkerk et al, 2012).
- Self-organised activities coming from the bottom that must be in constant collaboration with top-down government-led structures to achieve the necessary stability (Hamdi, 2014).

- Initiatives originated “in civil society itself, via autonomous community-based networks of citizens outside government control” and that contribute for urban development and management (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 100).
- Empowered citizens that can provide a new form of planning and management of places (Moulaert & Swyngedouw, 2010).

Definition of Self-organisation concept for this research:

In this research, the main characteristics and motivations of self-organised groups acting independently in public spaces in São Paulo will be analysed in order to understand how their internal organisation works, what channels of communication they use, what goals they are aiming for, and what the impacts in the quality of places are. Since these groups are emerging through autonomous community-based networks, the definition chosen is based on the concept proposed by Boonstra & Boelens (2011): “**Self-organised initiatives emerging from civil society, outside government control, that aim to reclaim the use of public spaces and promote transformation processes**”.

2.3 Place-making

Over the years, place-making has been conceptualised in a variety of ways. From a scholarly perspective, it is a broad and multi-layered concept, and the classical notion of it derives from the work of Jane Jacobs. In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), she offers a wide-ranging criticism of the modernist masterplanning approach in an attempt to provide new values for city planning and rebuilding. In order to create better places for people, Jacobs (1961) advocates for dynamic public spaces and mixed-use urban areas. In addition, she develops the concept of “eyes on the street”, which suggests that increased public life not only helps communities to flourish socially, but also contributes to the safety of cities.

Following the same chain of thought, William H. Whyte in his research *The Social Life of Small Urban Places* (1980) focused on a study based on observations of how people use places and how they would like to use them. The emphasis, according to him, should be given to public spaces and social life, since these are the main sources for achieving

better quality of life in cities. Both authors proposed a change of perspective on *city-making* from the high modernist approach to a bottom-up collective process that is focused on the importance of lively local public spaces. Healey (2010) defines place-making as a collaborative approach with multiple stakeholders in which all interests must be taken into account. “It is a complex task of collective social construction, often over a long time period, to create an enduring and widely-shared meaning of place” (Healey, 1998, p.5).

Recent research publications emphasise the idea of place-making as a process, not an end product. Karacor (2014) suggests that it is a process of physical environment improvement, which contributes to social and economic development drawing on the assets and skills of local community instead of relying on professional experts. In order to enhance quality of life and sense of place, she points out the process of physical improvement of public spaces needs to be combined with social engagement, taking into account social and political aspects of places to avoid exclusion and gentrification processes. Additionally, Karacor (2014) stresses that place-making is a locally-oriented and collectively constructed process, therefore it cannot be operationalised and applied to different places in the same way, as it needs to be contextualised.

From a political-geographic perspective, Pierce, Martin, and Murphy (2011) define place-making as “the set of social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live” (p. 54). Moreover, they inform that place-oriented studies have already emphasised that the politics of place-making need to be taken into consideration to understand the relationship between communities and their urban environment. Thereby, place-making is a process, made of social and spatial interactions that connect people and bring them together through a common place-frame (Pierce et al., 2011).

There are also several organisations, companies and local governments exploring the ideas around place-making. PPS - Project for Public Spaces - is one of the most prominent nowadays; it is a non-profit organisation that collaborates with local communities, public and private sector to facilitate transformation processes in public

places. Their approach is based on the ideas of Jane Jacobs and William Whyte, and they focus on developing places that are successful, which means places that function for the people who use them. According to them, an effective place-making process is based on community participation to create quality public spaces that are sustainable, safe, and can enhance happiness and well-being (PPS (Project for Public Spaces), 2015).

The complexity of cities has increased and society has become more dynamic, demanding transformations in the urban environment that could be able to respond to peoples' needs and preferences. Therefore, to change life and improve living conditions, first public spaces need to be changed, and place-making can assist with that (Cilliers, Timmermans, Goorbergh, & Slijkhuis, 2015). The concept developed by Project for Public Spaces is used by Cilliers et al in their recent academic research about *green place-making*: "Place-making is the process by which people transform the locations they inhabit into places where they live" (PPS, 2007 as cited in Cilliers et al., 2015, p. 351). In other words, the process of place-making is intended to develop a connection between citizens and places in the city. Additionally, they underline that the aim is to create more sociable and interactive places, focusing mostly on urban public spaces as they represent the extension of communities.

The question of making better places for people is discussed in the context of urban planning and design by Palermo and Ponzini in their recent work *Place-making and Urban development: new challenges for contemporary planning and design* (2015). The authors indicate the necessity of a broader view of place-making practices, features and contexts, taking into consideration that they are a result of the limitations imposed by current understandings and methods of urban planning and design. It is argued that research should not focus only on traditional and formal solutions and that fashionable and simplistic approaches and conceptualizations of place-making should be avoided, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the potential contributions and challenges of this practice for urban development in the complexity of contemporary society. Even though a clear definition of place-making is still being searched, the topic is considered of obvious symbolic, civic and social interest in the current rhetoric of regeneration of public places, and therefore needs to be critically studied (Palermo & Ponzini, 2015).

2.3.1 Understanding place

As many studies emphasise, it is argued that the benefits of place-making come from the process, not the final product. The process itself intends to lead to deeper social experiences that could enhance the connection between people and place. Place-making is seen as a practice that, through social engagement and active participation, intends to make meaning of places, therefore it is important to consider the question of what is place and how it can be defined.

The notion of place has been explored in a variety of ways from different disciplines. Most of the theories are based on the relationship between meaning and experience. Cresswell (2004) draws on the pioneering work of the human geographer Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the perspective of experience* (1977), to explain the dichotomy between space versus place. Space, he argues, is an abstract concept to describe a realm without meaning, whereas place is a space after people have attributed meaning to it. Tuan (1977) makes a comparison linking space to movement and place to pause. He clarifies that:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value (...) Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan, 1977, p. 6)

A meaningful place is a combination of *location*, *locale* and *sense of place*. Location indicates where the place is positioned, referring to coordinates and distances that can be measured. Locale refers to the form and the shape of place where people interact, such as parks, streets, squares etc. Sense of place is more subjective as it is defined by the way people emotionally connect to a place (Cresswell, 2009). Sense of place, according to Tuan (1977) and Cresswell (2004), is strictly related to place experience. Through a process of learning and acting, combining feelings and thoughts, the experiences people have with and within a certain space are what make them feel attached to it.

A neighborhood is at first a confusion of images to the new resident; it is blurred space "out there". Learning to know the neighborhood requires the identification

of significant localities, such as street corners and architectural landmarks, within the neighborhood space. Objects and places are centers of value. (Tuan, 1977, p. 18)

The meanings attributed to a place can be individual or shared. Cresswell (2009) claims that mediation and representation originate shared senses of place, and because they are shared, they are not static, but always submitted to other representations. Moreover, it is stressed that places are constructed by practice, by people doing things, and their actions define, in some ways, the meanings a place may have. “The sense we get of a place is heavily dependent on practice (...) Space becomes a place when it is used and lived” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 2).

Place as process

Doreen Massey’s paper *A Global Sense of Place* (1994) claims that contemporary time-acceleration and globalisation have an influence in the sense of place. It goes further than Tuan’s theory and brings to discussion the idea of an interconnection of flows in place. Assuming that places are a continuum result of practices and movements, the author describes them as open and hybrids, as processes that are never complete. In this regard, Massey (1994) also highlights the importance of the uniqueness of place, however she explores the notion of different identities and histories giving form to a place. Because places do not have a single unique identity or sense of place does not mean that they are not unique. The specificity of a place, she argues, does not come from an extensive and rooted history, but it is persistently reproduced. Therefore, a place identity – sense of place - is not something stationary, but always in construction.

The concepts of place and sense of place presented are crucial to this research as places are understood as the result of meaning and values people attribute to them. Shared local experiences and activities promote a collective construction of meaning, which can help to recognise and promote place quality.

2.3.2 The importance of quality of place: social and physical aspects

For many years, projects worldwide were developed to create extravagant physical symbols instead of places that would facilitate human interactions with and inside the city. In response to that, Jacobs (1961) stresses that places should be designed to encourage people to use them for social relations and activities, which enhance engagement and sense of belonging. Likewise, Whyte (1980) promotes places that are healthy and attractive to a variety of users. It is noticed that particular *materialities* have an influence in the quality of place. Nevertheless, as important as a well-designed place, are the meanings people accredit to this place through social interactions with other people and with the physical objects. Healey (2010, p. 34) explains that:

... a sense of place and of place quality can be understood as some kind of coming together of physical experiences (using, bumping into, looking at, hearing, breathing) and imaginative constructions (giving meanings and values) produced through individual activity and socially formed appreciations.

Place-making intends to focus on the conjunction of physical and social aspects of a place, improving its qualities in accordance with the local needs. Madureira (2013), stresses that even though changes in the urban environment are seen as strategically important for the improvement of the quality of life in cities, the focus solely on physical conditions of public spaces does not bring sustainable development for communities and neighbourhoods. Moreover, she argues that often government-led projects tend to focus mainly on the physical part, developing “flagship place-making projects” planned to attract investments to the city. Consequently, local people’s needs and aspirations are not tackled by it.

Healey (1998) states that, in the last years, functionality has been seen as more important than interconnection of activities and social conditions. Besides that, recent planning processes were focusing primarily on “economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability”, reasons that explain why places – and its qualities - have been neglected.

The questions about the qualities of places are emerging from the current complexity of the cities, “as lifestyles differentiate, people seek out places which provide supports for particular lifestyles and come to symbolise particular qualities” (Healey, 1998, p. 4). Place quality is, then, decided by a complex set of inter-relationships occurring in a socially mixed world that involves different values from different groups of people (Healey, 2010). The concentration on physical planning produces places that deny the local and individual cultures as well as ignore requests and wishes of different groups (Madureira, 2013), therefore place-making proposes to make use of the combination of physical and social aspects in order to give voice to people’s needs and aspirations and enhance place quality.

Healey (2010, p. 33) claims that “places and place making are deeply social and political concepts and activities, in which meanings and values are created in interaction with lived experiences”. Citizen participation in decision-making processes in the city was encouraged by Jacobs (1961) as she stressed that citizens should take ownership of public spaces and have freedom to implement their own ideas in order to improve quality of life. According to her, “cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 238). Healey (2010) explains that current planning processes claim for people’s participation on place qualities in order to enhance inclusiveness and sustainability in the long-term. Yet, she stresses that citizens’ empowerment should acknowledge the fact that exclusionary acts may also appear, as some people can play dominant roles and enforce their decisions over a less powerful group. Citizen engagement in urban transformations is crucial for the improvement of the quality of places, since self-organised civil society acting locally can play the role of informal experts, which are considered as capable as formal experts (Jacobs, 1961; Portugali, 2012).

2.3.3 Definition of Place-making

The previous sections presented a variety of approaches to place-making, which expose that the concept is complex and multi-dimensional. The main aspects incorporated in the literature review are summarized as:

- The aim is to create better places for people, since increased public life helps communities to flourish socially and contributes to safety in cities (Jacobs, 1961).
- Public spaces and social life are the main sources for achieving better quality of life in cities (Whyte, 1980).
- Bottom-up collective process that is focused on the importance of lively public spaces (Jacobs, 1961).
- Collaborative approach with multiple stakeholders in which all interests must be taken into account (Healey, 2010).
- Collective social construction aiming to give meaning to places (Healey, 1998).
- Local oriented and collective constructed process of physical environment improvement (...) drawing on the assets and skills of local community instead of relying on professional experts (Karacor, 2014).
- It is based on community participation to create quality public spaces that are sustainable, safe, and can enhance happiness and well-being; “Place-making is the process by which people transform the locations they inhabit into places where they live” (PPS, 2007)
- “The set of social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live”; social and spatial interactions that connect people and bring them together through a common place-frame (Pierce et al, 2011, p. 54).
- The aim is to create more sociable and interactive places, focusing mostly on urban public places as they represent the extension of communities (Cilliers et al, 2015).
- It is a deeply social and political concept, in which meanings and values are created in interaction with lived experiences (Healey, 2010).

Definition of Place-making concept for this research:

This thesis will focus on the perceptions that express how social and physical conditions of place-making are interrelated, emphasising the aspects of citizen engagement and quality of places. In this research, place-making will be characterised as: **“a social collective process that intends to make meaning of places through improving the qualities of public spaces”**.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This research investigates the way in which transformation processes in public spaces are being conducted by self-organised initiatives that are emerging from civil society. Furthermore, this study examines possible patterns of interactions and the impacts of these interactions (place-making processes) with and within the urban environment where they occur. The concepts of self-organisation and place-making were explored in the previous section, which investigated how they have been discussed in urban studies, and presented the definitions chosen to be used in this research. The conceptual framework indicates the linkages between the two chosen concepts in order to explore how self-organised initiatives are impacting the quality of places in São Paulo through place-making processes.

This study proposes an analysis that connects the two concepts of self-organisation and place-making and suggests a framework to investigate how the place-making activities conducted by self-organised initiatives impact on the quality of places, as well as to understand how the interconnections and interaction patterns, developed through place-making processes, affect the organisation and the evolution of the self-organised groups. Based on the literature review and on the concept of self-organisation chosen in the previous section, three main aspects of self-organised initiatives were selected to conduct the explorative research: 1. Origin and motivation; 2. Internal Organisation; 3. Strategies and goals. Regarding place-making, four main aspects were identified during the theoretical investigation to analyse how place-making processes affect the quality of places: 1. Participation and citizen engagement; 2. Sense of Place (Sense of belonging); 3. Shared meaning of place; and 4. Place experience. Figure 1 shows how all the elements discussed in the previous sections come together to guide the research.

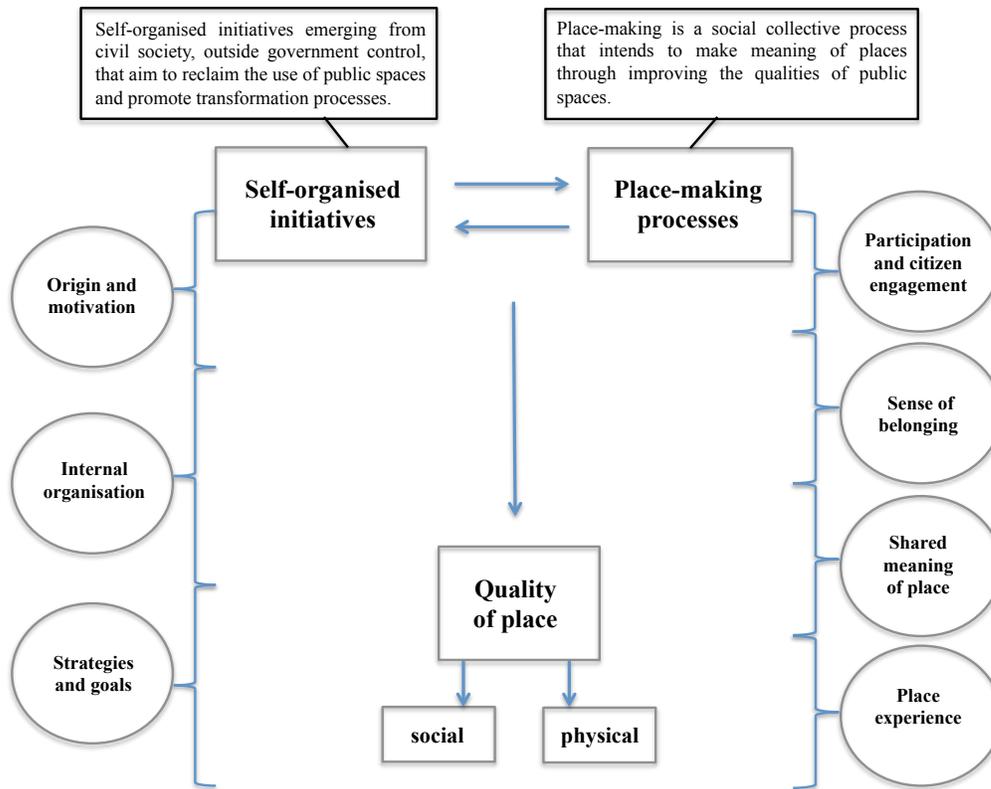


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework address the interactions between the concepts of self-organised initiatives and place-making processes, showing that one influences the other mutually, since the self-organised groups are conducting place-making processes, and these processes interfere in the features of the self-organised groups. The conjunction of these two concepts promotes an impact in the quality of places, which is determined by social and physical aspects.

Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter presents the methodology used to conduct the study and to answer the research question and sub-questions. The research strategy was based on the assumption that self-organised initiatives are impacting the city of São Paulo through place-making processes in urban public places. The data collection methods are presented and the main limitations and challenges are also discussed.

3.1 Operationalization: Variables, Indicators

The operationalization was based on the theoretical concepts described in Chapter 2, which were transformed into components of analysis. Variables were identified to explore the scope of the concepts, followed by measurable indicators. Self-organisation will be analysed in the scope of self-organised initiatives emerging from civil society outside government control that aim to reclaim the use of public spaces and promote transformation processes. Place-making is conceptualised as social collective processes that intend to make meaning of places by improving the qualities of places. Therefore, the following tables identify the indicators for the main variables of the concepts of Self-organisation and Place-making adopted in this thesis.

Concept	Variables	Indicators	Data Collection Methods	Source
Self-organised initiatives	Origin and motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social and political context - Discourse of the self-organised groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Data: Interview - Secondary Data: Websites, newspapers, videos, published materials, scientific articles, social media 	Organisers, participants, other researchers
	Internal organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Members - Features - Funding sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Data: Interview - Secondary Data: Websites, newspapers, videos, publications, social media 	Organisers, participants
	Strategies and goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities, projects - Communication methods - Cooperation channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Data: Interview - Secondary Data: Websites, newspapers, videos, publications, social media, documents, 	Organisers, participants, local residents

Table 1: Operationalization, variables and indicators of Self-organisation

Concept	Variables	Indicators	Data Collection Methods	Source
Place-making processes	Participation and Citizen engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patterns of involvement: frequency, types of activities - Qualitative changes in social life - Values (individual and shared) 	- Primary Data: Interview	Organisers, participants, local residents
	Sense of belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of perception of a place - Sense of ownership 	- Primary Data: Interview	Organisers, participants, local residents
	Shared meaning of place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Variety of users - Awareness of variety of values of different groups 	- Primary Data: Interview	Organisers, participants, local residents
	Place experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical interventions - Change of use of space - Social interactions in the place - Perceived changes in quality of life 	- Primary Data: Interview	Organisers, participants, local residents

Table 2: Operationalization, variables and indicators of Place-making

3.3 Research Strategy

The emphasis of this research is on the impact of self-organised initiatives, emerging from civil society, on the urban environment and in its transformation processes. In order to understand more about this contemporary phenomenon, the study makes use of explorative and descriptive approaches, focusing on the main settings of self-organised groups and the configurations of place-making activities.

The case study approach

The choice of a case study design in this thesis is justified since the activities of self-organised initiatives in public spaces cannot be isolated from the contextual conditions in which they manifest. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). The case study strategy is also appropriate when there are not enough or clear theories developed in a particular area of study, and when the aim of the research is not only to explore but also to understand and contextualize specific phenomena (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) assert that case studies provide in-depth understanding of circumstances and meanings for those involved, and that multiple sources of evidence must be used. In addition, it is argued that the results can contribute to policies, processes, and future studies.

In the case study research, through the analysis of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), it is possible to understand a larger set of equivalent units (a population of cases) (Gerring, 2007). According to Yin (2003), multiple cases may be preferred over a single-case study, because they are considered more compelling and robust as they allow comparisons. Therefore the analytic conclusions coming from two or more cases are stronger than those arising from a single one. However, it is also argued that the number of cases may not be significant to define the richness of the results, and that when more than one case is being analysed, it is important to preserve the specificity of each case.

The designs of case studies can be divided in: single case or multiple case, and holistic or embedded (Yin, 2003). In this thesis, the multiple holistic case study design is applied to analyse three cases of self-organised initiatives acting in public spaces in São Paulo. The aim is to allow comparisons, enhance the possibility of replication and external validity, and help increase the understanding of the overall phenomena (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2003).

The selection of the cases

The starting point of this research comprises literature review and readings of newspapers, magazines and social media webpages from where the selection of the cases is based. The three self-organised initiatives were chosen as representative examples of self-organisation of civil society in São Paulo that aim to improve the quality of urban public places. In the next chapter, further data is presented to describe the cases.

The selection of the cases was related to the initial research questions and based on secondary data. The limitations and challenges are acknowledged in this research, since the cases do not represent all self-organised initiatives acting in different urban public places in São Paulo, however they were chosen as diverse examples exploring a range of variation of typologies, approaches and different projects and urban sites.

The first criterion for the selection of the cases was based on the nature of the self-organisations; the three cases are examples of autonomous self-organised initiatives coming from civil society without any kind of formal regulation. Secondly, the type of activities promoted was also considered; the focus was on self-organised groups that are not only reclaiming the use of the space, but also actively making transformations that are intended to improve the quality of the place.

The third criterion used to choose the cases was that the self-organisation should be developing on-going activities in the public spaces for more than one year, categorizing as more than just one-off interventions. The criteria chosen represent the idea of comparing similar cases that are unique in their specific context and features, but which

configurations and factors influencing the outcomes of the phenomenon are not completely known.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Yin (2003, p. 59) asserts that “case study data collection does follow a formal plan, but the specific information that may become relevant to a case study is not readily predictable”. Therefore it is important to make use of multiple sources of information, which may include interviews, observation, documents, newspaper reports etc. In order to conduct the examination of a contemporary phenomenon and meet the explorative nature of the research, two data collection methods are used in this thesis: qualitative primary and secondary data.

Qualitative data: interviews

In order to collect reliable and valid information, this research makes use of a systematic approach for qualitative data collection. It is argued that interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence (Thiel, 2014). Therefore, the method of semi-structured and in-depth interviews was adopted to get more understanding of the main characteristics of self-organised initiatives and to explore the relationship between civil society and transformations processes in the urban environment.

Semi-structured interviews are made of open-ended questions that are asked in a flexible order. The researcher follows a consistent line of inquiry that guides the conversation in a fluid way without rigid structure. The format allows spontaneous questions that might appear after new insights are received; in addition, it encourages the respondents to express their thoughts, perceptions and even suggest new sources of information (Thiel, 2014; Yin, 2003).

The selected type of interview is suitable for this research as the indicators provided in the operationalization part demand questions that encourage interviewees to give their personal opinions and views, providing important insights and bringing new knowledge

about the phenomenon. Furthermore, the in-depth format assesses the complexity of the cases and their context, and it is usually applied when limited information is known about the phenomenon being analysed. 20 interviews were conducted, in Portuguese, with three main sources of information: organisers, participants and local residents, to help in understanding the increasing role of civil society in reshaping the city and how these transformations are being made and perceived.

The first contact with organisers and participants was done through the Internet, mainly social media and emails. In each self-organised group, a key informant person was decisively important on helping to find more sources of information and to make contact with other people involved. Due to the impossibility of visiting Brazil during the research, the interviews with organisers and participants were conducted via Skype using video and audio devices. In order to enrich the investigation, interviews with local residents were made in a joint research work with a bachelor student from Escola da Cidade University in São Paulo who visited the sites and approached local people from the neighbourhoods.

Interviewees	Case 1 Movimento Boa Praça	Case 2 A Batata Precisa de Você	Case 3 Ocupe & Abrace	Total
Organisers	2	2	1	5
Participants	2	4	2	8
Local residents	2	3	2	7
				20

Table 3: Qualitative data collection – interviews

The interviews began with closed questions seeking to have a background of the respondents. Subsequently, the semi-structured interview guide (see Annex 3) was comprised of topics that serve as guides for the open-ended questions and it was divided in two main parts: Self-organisation and Place-making. Following these steps, the first part - Self-organisation – was divided in questions addressed to organisers and

questions designed for participants and local residents. Concerning the section about Place-making, the questions apply to all interviewees.

Secondary data

The secondary data collection was used to support the primary data and it includes different types of sources: newspaper articles, web pages, online publications and magazines, policy reports and documents from government side, videos and online social media network. During the interviews, secondary data was provided by some of the respondents and gathered in parallel to the primary data collection.

Data analysis method

The interviews were transcribed and combined with the secondary data to create a case study database, which allowed the conduction of the analysis of data. The research design of this thesis generated some challenges and limitations that are acknowledged in the following section.

3.5 Methodological limitations and challenges

The research strategy adopted in this thesis followed the recommendations cited in the previous sections by authors considered relevant for the design of a case study research. Moreover, challenges and potential limitations were taken into account during the whole course of investigation, in order to avoid problems of validity and enhance reliability.

Fuzzy concepts

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is argued that Self-organisation and Place-making are ambiguous concepts without clear and objective definitions. Therefore, measurable variables and indicators were defined in order to allow the operationalization of the research.

Construct validity

Critics of case study design usually claim that researchers make use of subjective judgments without the adoption of sufficiently operational set of measures, which expose the research to the risk of selectivity about the context and phenomenon being studied (Thiel, 2014; Yin, 2003). In order to improve the validity of findings, this research approach makes use of multiple sources of information to explore different contextual settings, aiming to reveal common patterns between the cases and discover potential tendencies.

External validity

One of the main limitations of the case study approach is the difficulty of generalisation. Due to the nature of this explorative study design, which makes use of a small number of cases, the external validity of the research is limited. Generalisations are possible only regarding the analysis with replication of the process, not being representative for all population of self-organised initiatives working in public spaces. In order to address this limitation, an adequate theoretical framework was adopted to conduct the research.

Even though the investigation results apply to the specific context and are limited in offering generalisation of the findings, the case study approach provides a deeper understanding of specific situations influencing the relationship between civil society and public spaces, and helps to discover patterns of interactions.

Internal Validity

This thesis acknowledges that possible external factors may influence the patterns of interactions and outcomes and that inferences may lead to mistaken conclusions. In order to deal with these limitations and challenges, the comparison of the three cases enables pattern matching to a certain degree (Yin, 2003), making use of primary and secondary data collection and linking the data to the existing theory.

Reliability

According to Yin (2003), the most common way to deal with the *reliability problem* is to turn the research into an operational process. Therefore, in order to minimise potential biases and inaccuracies and to ensure that the process is comprehensible and understandable, the study makes use of detailed procedures and documentation of the steps developed throughout the investigation in this thesis.

Time and sampling

This research acknowledges that interview is a time-consuming method of data collection, however interviews are seen as one of the most important techniques to be applied in a case study research. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were considered an adequate mechanism to get access to valuable information for this research. Due to time constraints the scope of the study is limited to three initiatives. Nevertheless, the research design that was adopted provides an in-depth view of the cases selected and the multiple sources allow different perspectives of the same phenomenon.

This thesis focuses on the interactions between self-organised groups and the city, considering directly the public spaces and civil society. Therefore, organisers, participants and local residents were selected as the main sources of information for interviews. However, it does not exclude the relationship between self-organised groups and the government, which is acknowledged during the interviews and explored in combination with secondary data.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the main findings based on the analysis of the data collected. The rationale for the choice of the case studies has been introduced in the third chapter and is expanded in this section. First a brief outline of the context is given, followed by the research focus of this study. The analysis of the data collected through interviews and secondary sources is presented based on the concepts of self-organisation and place-making. Therefore the variables and indicators defined in Chapter 3 are used to structure the analysis. For each concept, the findings are compared and discussed in order to identify differences and similarities between the cases. All interviews were translated from Portuguese to English by the author of the thesis.

4.1 Public spaces and the emergence of self-organised initiatives in São Paulo

Social and political context

The city of São Paulo has more than five thousand squares and plazas defined by the municipality as urban public spaces, consisting or not of green areas, that aim to provide lively, enjoyable and friendly spaces for people, fulfilling a social and environmental function (São Paulo Aberta, 2015). However, in a city with more than 11 million inhabitants, the lack of safety and the historically persistence of investments in mega infrastructures such as highways, skyscrapers, gated communities and shopping centres resulted in the neglect by the government of the public spaces and in the adoption from the civil society of an isolated lifestyle (Calliari, 2015). For many years, public spaces were seen as not belonging to anyone rather than belonging to everybody.

Nevertheless, in the last years, the importance of open convivial spaces in the city has been increasingly perceived by different sectors in the urban sphere, as well as a new tendency towards the appropriation and revitalisation of public spaces is being observed in São Paulo. The increase and upgrading of public spaces is one of the main objectives of the city's master plan developed in 2014 (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2014), as well as efforts to transform São Paulo in a more pedestrian and bike friendly city have been adopted by the current administration of mayor Fernando Haddad, showing the

intention of restoring the relationship between urban residents and urban public spaces within the gigantic metropolis (Bonduki, 2015). Recently, the private sector has been showing interest also in promoting cultural events in parks, squares and plazas in the city, as well as parklets³ have been sponsored to expand the sidewalks and provide more spaces for people to use the streets (Albertoni & Fagundez, 2015).

At the same time, the number of activities, events and urban interventions promoted by self-organised groups of citizens has increased in the last decade in Brazil. According to researchers and urban specialists, this phenomenon arose in the beginning of this century with the emergence of *coletivos*⁴, groups of people that focused on the demands of civil society related to cultural, social and urban issues and that have decided to act by themselves instead of waiting for the authorities (Albertoni & Fagundez, 2015). Furthermore, increased access to worldwide information through the Internet, as well as the use of social media platforms supported citizens to inform, communicate and organise themselves, which stimulated the booming of these groups (Sobral, 2015).

Various types of activities have been conducted by different self-organised initiatives acting in São Paulo, from voluntary cleaning force of squares and plazas to leisure activities such as concerts and picnics that aim to gather the local community and encourage the use of public spaces. Due to their autonomous and spontaneous characteristics it is difficult to precise the number of self-organised groups acting in the city and to map all areas where activities are being held. Guilherme Wisnik (2015b), architect and professor of University of São Paulo, points out that central areas of the city are the ones receiving more attention from these groups, which generated some

³ The term "Parklet" was first used in San Francisco, in the US, to define an urban intervention that provides more space and amenities for people to use. It is the transformation of a car parking space into a sidewalk extension. The idea is to provide more spaces in the city for leisure (Cidade que queremos, n.d.). Retrieved from <https://cidadequequeremos.wordpress.com/parklet/>

⁴ Type of social organisation that makes use of the Internet as a platform for communication and self-organisation, and replace protests for creative activities and interventions in public spaces. The *coletivos* have little or no hierarchy and are volunteer-based (Bublitz & Gonzatto, 2013).

criticisms about the nature of these initiatives, considering them as an elitist movement. However, in Wisnik's opinion, centre and periphery should not be seen as antagonistic areas and concepts, and that especially in large cities, the centre should consist of places of coexistence and self-recognition not only for local residents, but for all city's inhabitants (Wisnik, 2015b).

Research focus

In this research, three cases of self-organised initiatives were selected in order to analyse how these activities are impacting the quality of places. The first case, the *Movimento Boa Praça* (Good Square Movement)⁵ is recognised as one of the pioneering groups acting in the revitalisation of green squares in São Paulo since 2008, as well as enhancing the awareness of the importance of public spaces (Albertoni & Fagundez, 2015). The second case is one of the most prominent nowadays in the media, *A Batata Precisa de Você* (The Batata (Square) Needs You) started in the beginning of 2014 and has been working in the transformation of the Batata Square, a place that had relevant importance for the city in the past, but which in the last years was mainly used as a space to pass by not to stay (Wisnik, 2015a). The third is the case of *Ocupe & Abrace* (Occupy & Embrace), which was formed in 2013 and has a focus on reconnecting the neighbourhood with its green spaces and water springs. The location of the sites of the three self-organised initiatives is the west part of the city of São Paulo in the neighbourhoods: Lapa, Pinheiros and Pompéia. Figure 2 shows the map of São Paulo and highlights the location where the self-organised groups promote activities.

⁵ The names of the self-organised groups were translated by the thesis author.



Figure 2: Map of São Paulo and the areas where the self-organised initiatives promote activities

(base map source: Map data ©2015 Google)

4.2 Analysis of cases - Self-organisation

In this section, the main characteristics of the self-organised groups are described and analysed according to the variables and indicators defined in Chapter 3. The findings are compared and discussed in order to identify differences and similarities between the cases.

4.2.1 Movimento Boa Praça – ‘Good Square Movement’

“The ‘Good Square Movement’ is an initiative of people who want to live in a more human city.”⁶ (Movimento Boa Praça, n.d.)

Origin and motivation

The *Movimento Boa Praça* emerged in 2008 from the idea of improving the conditions of squares in an area comprising two neighbourhoods in São Paulo. The group points out the dissatisfaction with the conditions of public spaces in the city and the neglect from local government as the trigger to start the self-organised initiative (TV Cultura, 2014). The first activities promoted in the square were communal picnics, held every month, initially in one square in the neighbourhood and later in two other ones, in order to engage neighbours and raise awareness of the importance of having people taking care of urban public spaces. The main focus of the initiative is to mobilize citizens to use and revitalise the squares, in order to ensure lively and pleasant places for people to socialize and interact. Their idea is to transform the places by changing the citizens, improving the relationship between citizens and the city (Multishow, 2010).

The lack of attractive, friendly and safe public places in the neighbourhoods of São Paulo is a problem well-known, which contributed for the adoption of an individualistic life style, with citizens locked in cars, apartments and gated communities (Calliari, 2015). According to the interviewees, the *Movimento Boa Praça* aims to fight against this isolation, since there are public spaces that could be used and that despite their bad

⁶ All direct quotations from documents and media in Portuguese and all interviews were translated to English by the thesis author.

conditions could be improved by the society. The group stresses that it is inconceivable to let plazas and squares being neglected in any city, particularly in a city like São Paulo, which is a concrete jungle full of traffic congestions and without many options of pleasant places (Multishow, 2010). The objective is to connect people, help neighbours to get to know each other and provide shared moments in an open space that is supposed to be for everybody.

One of the organisers joined the group in 2010 and emphasises that the idea of social interaction with neighbours was the reason why she and many others engaged in the initiative, since the fast pace of life in a metropolis like São Paulo tends to keep people distant from the idea of convivial public places (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Moreover, it is stressed by the organisers that the desire of transforming underused and neglected public spaces into places for people combined with the growing feeling of empowerment perceived by the organisers and participants motivated them to self-organise and to take the responsibility of improving other public spaces in the neighbourhood.

“Nowadays, you cannot wait for the government to act alone anymore. If we want the government to act, we have to organise ourselves and come up with ideas for the improvement of places, to request what we want or to simply do it by ourselves.” (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015)⁷

Internal Organisation

The group started with few members sharing the common desire of revitalizing places in their neighbourhood. At the beginning, about 10 people, of different ages, used to meet weekly to discuss new ideas and projects. Besides that, every month, events and activities were promoted in each square to attract the local residents, enhance social

⁷ This thesis uses the APA Style Referencing. There are citations from literature and citations from interviewees. Citations from literature are preceded or followed by their author(s) and date. Citations from interviewees are in italics, identified as “personal communication” and followed by date.

interaction and participation, and call attention from the local authorities. Over time, with the increased access to the Internet and social media, the initiative gained more popularity and attracted also ‘virtual’ members who support the idea and give suggestions online. However, it is stressed by the organisers that from the more than 3000 online members of the *Movimento Boa Praça* community⁸, only a few number of people engage frequently in the meetings and discussions held outside the virtual world, the others have a more passive presence online and occasional participation in the events.

The roles are flexible and everybody helps in different ways, according to their own motivation and skills. Nowadays, between four and five people are identified by the participants as group leaders or organisers. Moreover, the group claims to be completely open to new members and participants. Due to this hybrid and volunteer-based characteristic of the initiative, the organisers also take turns in promoting activities, contacting the subprefecture, and posting new information on the website and social media platforms. All organisers reside in the neighbourhood and live close to the square where they are promoting activities and are engaged in the improvement of the places, according to them, this is the key for the success and consistency of the activities. *“It is essential for the success of our group to be formed by people who live close by; taking care of the place, paying attention to what is needed to change”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). The activities promoted are volunteer-based and the materials come from donation from individuals, companies, and institutions. Some of the events promoted by the initiative have received help from some local businesses and institutions who partnered with the group providing funding, helping on advertising the events or providing voluntary labour work. The group succeeded in establishing a relatively good relationship with the subprefecture since the beginning of the activities, which created a channel of communication that did not exist before between citizens and the local government. Although the group emphasises that it is still very incipient the level of connection and interchange between them and the subprefecture, their activities are seen as positive by the local government.

⁸ Online community of *Movimento Boa Praça*: <https://www.facebook.com/movimentodaboapraça/?fref=ts> Accessed 2 November 2015)

Strategies and goals

The first strategy adopted by the group was to promote leisure events to bring people to the squares and remind them that, first of all, squares and plazas are public and are there to be used. The idea was that by socialising, interacting and experiencing the place, people would start paying more attention to its qualities and identifying what could be done to make it better, as well as understanding the challenges of transforming it into something better for the neighbourhood (Movimento Boa Praça, n.d.). Communal picnics started to be held every last Sunday of the month along with cultural and recreational activities, such as crafts workshops, open air cinemas, games, live music etc. Local residents, friends and people working in the neighbourhood are always invited to join and share their abilities and knowledge to promote betterments, and all activities are open to citizens in general. The purpose of these events is to socialise and use the urban public space, but also to leave the place in a better condition than it was before (Multishow, 2010).

Over the years, the group increased in number of participants and started to promote activities in three other squares in the neighbourhood. The focus shift towards the recuperation and revitalization of the physical aspects of the squares, since the group noticed that people were more aware about the place and willing to engage more, the picnics turned into open air meetings to discuss what could be done next (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015). The ‘do-it-yourself’ message is part of the discourse of the group, in *Movimento Boa Praça’s* website there is a list of tips on how to participate, what kind of help is needed and what type of activities people can contribute with. Community gardens, cleaning force, furniture making, repairs, and painting are some of the activities carried out; all these actions were promoted by the self-organised group and accomplished with volunteer workforce and donation. *“It is possible to make things happen, to transform places, and many times there is no need to invest a lot of money on it”* (C. Tarrío, personal communication, October 4, 2015). Every time a new project or activity is about to be developed, the initiative asks the cooperation of volunteers, helpers and donators through its communication channels (blog, website, social media platform). Furthermore, most of

the changes promoted in the squares by *Movimento Boa Praça* have been done without consulting the local government.

The group claims that the neglect from the municipality allows them to act by themselves. “*We have never asked for permission to make small changes, the municipality and the subprefecture are not doing their jobs, the squares are abandoned*” (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Therefore, most of the physical improvements were done by the citizens themselves. “*We put swings for the kids, benches, a table, we took care of the plants (...) the subprefecture thinks it is nice that we are doing that*” (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015). The municipality is contacted only when projects are related to structural changes in the squares. Despite the relatively good relationship the group has with the trades of the neighbourhood and with the local government, all organisers emphasise the difficulties of maintaining a long-term plan in cooperation with the authorities, since the person in charge of communicating with them changes very often and every time it happens they have to build a new relationship and explain their ideas again.

4.2.2 A Batata Precisa de Você – ‘The Batata (square) needs you’

“We dream about a more democratic and participatory city, with more shades and pleasant places.” (A Batata Precisa de Você, 2015)

Origin and motivation

In the beginning of 2014, a group of friends created a webpage named *A Batata Precisa de Você*, on the social networking site Facebook, inviting people to use and revitalise the public space called Largo da Batata. The “Batata square”⁹ is considered by many historians as the starting point of the neighbourhood of Pinheiros (Dantas, 2010). In the 20th century, it became a lively commerce place, and later on an important converging spot for public transport in the city of São Paulo. However due to a redevelopment plan the square was transformed in a construction site for almost 10 years, and when the

⁹ Translated by thesis author.

renovation was finished in 2013, the result was an arid open space (A Batata Precisa de Você, 2015). One of the organisers stresses that the process of renovation of the place was very disappointing and even traumatic for some of the local people, as they waited for many years and received only a concrete surface with few small trees, in the end the result was far from expectations (MUDA, 2015). Therefore, the initiative decided to promote weekly activities to stimulate citizens to stay and use the space, and to instigate them to collectively think about what could be done there to make it a better place. According to the description in the webpage, the main objective is to create and test possibilities to transform the square into a quality place with adequate infrastructure. The group defines it as an exercise of democracy on a local scale, a movement of citizenship, social and urban achievement, it is also a possibility for people to speak up and act in an alternative and creative way for better quality of place (A Batata Precisa de Você, n.d.).

The dissemination of information through the Internet potentialised the response from local residents and after some weeks the movement was already growing fast. What started with a group of family and friends promoting small-scale activities every Friday night, turned into one of the most popular self-organised initiatives currently promoting the improvement of public spaces in Brazil (Eiroa, 2015). The media coverage, always emphasising the positive aspects of the activities being held in the square, helped the self-organised group to get more popularity. The need for more lively and vibrant places in the city is one of the main concerns of the initiative. According to them, squares and plazas in São Paulo only exist physically, but most of the time people do not even notice them, since there is a lack of connection between citizens and urban public spaces. The focus of the self-organised group is to promote the use of the Batata square in order to learn how to improve its qualities; it is an *experimental territory* (A Batata Precisa de Você, 2015).

Internal organisation

“What is ‘A Batata Precisa de Você’? I am not sure. Some people say it is a ‘coletivo’, some people say it is a movement, others say it is a group.” (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015)

Organisers and participants state that since the beginning of the activities, the idea was to create an organic and horizontal process of autonomous self-organisation. In order to respect the notion that public spaces are for everybody, the group stresses that they do not intend to have any control of the activities being held, on the contrary, the purpose was always to encourage people to use the place as they would like to. One of the organisers declares:

“After we started doing the activities in the square, many people came to us and asked if they could do a concert in the square or how could they give a yoga class (...) most people are not aware that they can do it whenever they want, and not only here but anywhere else” (Sesc TV, 2015).

While transformations are being conducted by the self-organisation in the square, changes are also happening in the structure of the initiative. Many sub-groups were created as the number of topics of discussion increased and the types of activities expanded. *“It is a group, a movement in constant motion, and by experimenting and observing the responses, new demands appear which lead to new actions”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015). Nowadays, the sub-groups are divided and named by type of activities and actions, such as *Batatas gardening*¹⁰, responsible for the community garden and the green areas of the square; *Batatas builders*, in charge of building urban furniture; *Batamemo*, group focused on recollecting the memory of the place, etc. During this research, other groups were formed and the discussions and agreements could be followed by the initiative’s Facebook page. Moreover, existing self-organised groups from other areas of the city joined the idea of improving the *Batata square* and started to promote their own activities there also.

¹⁰ Names of the sub-groups were translated by thesis author.

According to the interviewees, the number of people joining the activities varies especially according to the weather and to what type of activity is being held. However, all organisers and participants emphasise that these number keeps increasing and even when it is raining it is possible to find some groups there promoting activities or simply chatting, using the place. People with different backgrounds, such as architects, filmmakers, artists, engineers, are part of the initiative and everyone contributes with their own area of expertise, always trying to promote low-cost events and improvements. Usually the costs are shared by whoever wants to participate and help. On their website, the group emphasises the intention to have an open dialogue with the public sector to discuss a process of shared responsibilities between citizens, institutions and local government (A Batata Precisa de Você, n.d.).

Strategies and goals

“The logic we propose is to transform the square into a lively place. To transform a non-place into a place.” (A Batata Precisa de Você, n.d.)

Due to its characteristic of being a completely empty open space in the middle of a busy area of the city, all types of things were needed to turn it into a place where people would consider to spend more time than just crossing from one bus stop to another. The strategy was to start with recreational and leisure activities to make people feel comfortable using the square and to develop a sense of awareness of the place and its possibilities. However, the necessity of providing some physical infrastructure to transform the square into a less inhospitable place was immediately noticed. Therefore, the initiative decided to create urban furniture for temporary use as a test, making use of improvised materials, thereby less durable. The organisers explained that as soon as the first benches were built, people were already sitting on and using them; a video called *The Batata square needs benches*¹¹ was made by one of the participants showing the importance of the experiment with temporary urban furniture.

¹¹ Name of the video was translated by thesis author. Original title: A Batata precisa de bancos. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/85982454>

After that, more people engaged in the sub-group called *Batatas Builders*, stronger materials started to be used and different types of furniture made of more resistant materials were provided. Interviewees emphasise that, nowadays, the place does not look empty as it was before the initiative started the improvements. Benches, community gardens, bicycle parking spaces, a stage for concerts, garbage bins and other types of urban furniture are present there, as well as activities which are continuously being held not only by the self-organised group, but also by other people. The organisers stress that the goal is to learn by doing, by living the experience of using and acting in public places through promoting cultural activities and physical improvements. The focus is on the process, which allows them to experiment different possibilities and to collectively make the square a better place.

Interviewees assert that regularity of activities is the key for the initiative's success. According to the organisers, the actions need to be continuous to generate results and to have an impact in the urban dynamic. In order to enhance participation and facilitate the communication between all participants, an online open calendar was created where anyone could edit and insert the activities they would like to make. Although the calendar is a strategic tool for communication, many participants assert that it is not an obligation to share the activities there; it just serves as another way of interaction.

Besides the donations collected between the organisers and participants, this year the initiative was granted from a public notice for urban projects in São Paulo, which allowed them to invest in equipment for cultural events, such as microphone, sound table, small trolleys, that are available for everybody to use (A Batata Precisa de Você, 2015). The interviewees state that in the last years the municipality is more open to dialogue with civil society, which in turn is more articulated in requesting its demands. The subprefecture asserts that the activities promoted by the group are beneficial and meet the proposal of the new master plan of São Paulo, which indicates the importance of adequate public spaces in the city (TV Sesc, 2015). Nevertheless, the organisers emphasise the need of more collaboration from the local government in order to share responsibilities with the self-organised groups.

4.2.3 Ocupe & Abrace – ‘Occupy and Embrace’

“We wanted to occupy the space but we didn’t want to give a connotation of fight and war, we wanted to do it with love. So we put “embrace” in the name of the group.” (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015)

Origin and motivation

The idea of creating a self-organised group to revitalise the Homero Silva square arose in 2013 during a competition for proposals for a project called *A New Image for the neighbourhood of Pompeia*¹², which was promoted by a non-profit organisation in order to encourage people to think about what they would like to change in their neighbourhood. The revitalisation of the square, proposed by a local resident, was one of the most voted projects. A group of people joined her and they began to think about how to make it a better place (Santos, 2014). According to the interviewees, the biggest green open space in the neighbourhood of Pompeia was completely neglected by the local government. Therefore, the organisers intended to show that there was a solution for it and that local residents could be the main actors. *“People just need to understand their role in the city, it’s a question of how conscious you are about the place you live in”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015).

Since 2013, the group has organised seven thematic festivals to celebrate the change of seasons, inviting people to join and engage in the recuperation and maintenance of the place. On their webpage, the idea of peaceful and inclusive occupation of the space is emphasised, and it is stressed that the main focus is on reconnecting the urban residents with natural resources, the water springs and the green areas of the square, to create a sense of community and connectedness (Ocupe & Abrace, n.d.).

Internal organisation

The initiative started with 12 members and the meetings took place at the square. Nowadays, according to one of the organisers there are four or five people who

¹² Translated by thesis author.

participate frequently in the weekly meeting. *“There is a core group, naturally, of people who have a deeper commitment with the square, but it is totally open to anyone who wants to join”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). The organisers and participants play different roles according to their skills and motivations, *the idea is to function without hierarchy or any formal structure.* However, one frequent participant emphasises that the core group of organisers is seen by most of the participants as the responsible for the overall organisation of the activities, for the communication with subprefecture and for the advertisement of activities. *“I believe the group of organisers is defined. In my opinion, they do not need more people now to make decisions, but they have to build a clearer structure, a plan, because sometimes things are not so well organised”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015). All organisers are local residents, which is stressed by interviewees as an important characteristic to maintain the cohesion of the group.

One of the organisers stresses that it is a deep learning process of how to live in society and how to make decisions together, which sometimes create some internal conflicts, resulting in some people leaving the main group and participating on a more spontaneous basis. According to the interviewees, the number of people participating in the events promoted by the self-organised initiative increases every time as well as the number of other self-organised groups joining the activities and promoting different actions. The festivals are open to anyone who wants to participate, however the main effort is to engage with the neighbours. The community makes the social activities and most of the physical improvements in the place without any funding from local government or private sector.

Strategies and goals

The initiative began focusing on the recuperation of the natural environment, keeping the place clean, taking care of the water springs and preserving the green areas. However, since the place was known as an abandoned square, full of garbage and used as a meeting point by drug dealers (Santos, 2014), some neighbours were sceptical and not willing to engage in their project in the beginning. In order to attract more people to

join the cause, the group decided to promote festivals in the square to show the potential of the place for social activities. *“People were scared to come here, so the group decided to mix nature and culture in the festivals to attract more people to come and take care of the place”* (Studio 3, 2015). The Facebook page is the main channel of communication to ask for help and donations, all events and activities are shared in the social media networking and are based on creativity, voluntary work and solidarity (Studio 3, 2015). Besides the festivals, other cultural activities such as *tai chi*, drumming lessons, art interventions and dance classes are held monthly with the help of volunteers, all activities are free and open to everybody.

The organisers share the idea of focusing on the natural environment, prioritizing the recuperation and maintenance of the green spaces for the local residents. However the festivals have got more popular than expected and there were events with more than five hundred people attending, which have risen concerns among the organisers of rather keeping the activities more local in order to preserve the natural environment. For them, social interaction is important, but it should come in second place. The main goal is to promote the use of the square in a sustainable way, engaging neighbours to help on the improvement and maintenance of the place, which was renamed by them as *Praça da Nascente (Square of water springs)*¹³. *“We used social activities as a strategy to bring people here, to start looking and thinking about the place. But the square comes first, the nature comes first, then us”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). According to one participant, by focusing more on the natural environment, on its physical and natural aspects, the initiative leaves the social aspect in second plan. *“Nowadays, the group is focusing too much on preserving the green areas, the water springs, which is also nice, but they cannot forget to focus on strengthening social relations”* (P. Suzuki, personal communication, November 12, 2015).

In order to preserve the natural environment, the initiative developed actions focused on improving structural conditions. First, the place was completely cleaned, then a lake was created to drain the water that comes from the water springs, a community garden

¹³ Translated by thesis author.

was made to attract neighbours to share food and leisure time, walls and stairs were painted in order to turn it into a more friendly looking place, trees and flowers were planted, and benches were installed (Santos, 2014). Actions and events were made essentially with the help of other self-organised groups and people from the neighbourhood. One of the organisers asserts that after two years working autonomously and pressuring the local government, today the subprefecture is more open to listen to the communities' needs and are willing to help. *"We reversed the way things were usually done, the subprefecture says we motivate them to act. After many years, the money to invest in the square finally appeared"* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). Nonetheless, the revitalisation of the place done by the self-organised initiative together with other citizens has attracted the attention of the private sector, which is now willing to invest in the area. Currently, the group has organised a petition against the construction of apartment buildings around the square, which according to the initiative would damage the natural environment, and sent it to the Minister of Environment of São Paulo, entity responsible for analysing the case (Fontanelli, 2014).

4.2.4 Findings – comparison of cases

Discussion – origin and motivation

The dissatisfaction with the conditions of public spaces in São Paulo, due to lack of attention from the municipality, is identified as the main trigger for the three initiatives. Moreover, interviewees revealed that the use of Internet and social media was crucial to connect people who did not want to live an isolated lifestyle anymore and were willing to take action in the transformation of the local urban environment, no longer waiting for government interventions. The role of public spaces in the city has been clearly undermined, therefore the lack of actions from the local government towards the improvement of public spaces generated a response from these self-organised groups (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010), which are making use of creative, flexible and innovative solutions to transform the squares in the city (Swyngedouw & Moulaert, 2010). All groups express concerns about the scarcity of attractive, safe and lively public spaces

for people to socialise and interact in the city of São Paulo. *Ocupe & Abrace* stresses the idea of recovering the natural environment through the development of a sense of community, *Movimento Boa Praça* focuses on the fact that public spaces are convivial places and should be used by the local community to promote greater social interactions; both groups focus more on the neighbourhood scale. *A Batata Precisa de Você* differs in the sense that the main idea is to serve as an *experimental territory* of what can be done in the square to make it a better place and that could also be replicated in other parts of the city, to improve public spaces and transform them into quality places. In their discourse, it is emphasised their capacity to contribute independently to urban development and the right to participate in the decisions related to public spaces and the city. In alignment with Boonstra and Boelens (2011) ideas, the initiatives are showing that participation can be detached from formal participatory methods and done by autonomous engagement in urban processes.

Discussion – internal organisation

The three self-organised initiatives do not have any kind of legal structure nor explicit hierarchy. Organisers and participants of all initiatives take different roles according to each person's area of expertise and skills. The discourse of all groups is to have a horizontal way of organisation, where there is not a specific leadership and everybody is welcomed to join and get involved. However, organisers of *Movimento Boa Praça* and *Ocupe & Abrace* emphasise that naturally some people tend to be more proactive and become informal leaders. Interviewees from both groups could clearly identify the founders of the self-organised group as the main leaders, the ones who participate in the decision-making of what is being implemented and speak in the name of the initiative. *A Batata Precisa de Você* has more people engaged in organising activities and the founder is not seen as the main organiser since there are many different sub-groups acting at the same time. Nevertheless, conflicts of interest appear from time to time, as stressed by the organisers. Although most of the interviewees have positive views about the freedom of structure in the initiatives, one participant from *Ocupe & Abrace* asserts that the organisers are not so open to receive ideas from people who joined the activities recently, as they see themselves as more capable of making decisions about

the place. Moreover, all organisers affirm that it is difficult to take all ideas and concerns into consideration. Healey (2010) asserts that the empowerment of citizens as local experts may result in exclusionary outcomes, favouring one group on the detriment of others. Therefore, it is noticed that in this kind of “free structure” there is the risk of empowerment of some groups of people, the ones who are usually in charge of the decision-making processes of the self-organised initiatives, which can cause conflicts of interests.

Interviewees stress the fact that it is important to have people from the neighbourhood involved in the self-organised initiative in order to succeed in the implementation of activities, strengthen the relationship with the local government and ensure commitment with the cause, and this is a characteristic of all groups analysed. Costs of physical and social activities are usually shared between organisers and participants; social media is used for campaigns to attract more people to help not necessarily financially, but also using their own skills.

Discussion - strategies and goals

Although some characteristics of the self-organised initiatives differ to some extent, they have three main goals in common: 1. to remind citizens that the city has public spaces for people to use; 2. to show the benefits of collective use of public spaces, in opposite of the isolated lifestyle adopted by many people in the city of São Paulo; and 3. to mobilise and engage citizens to collectively transform the squares into lively, vibrant and safe places. The strategy adopted by the three groups was to combine social activities and physical improvements to achieve better quality of place.

Cultural, recreational and leisure activities are seen by the self-organised initiatives as the best instruments to attract people to the public spaces. Thus, the squares are used not only for social activities, but also for discussions about new possibilities of actions, for mobilisation, consideration of what could be done collectively and for active engagement in physical improvements. All groups make use of social media to post

pictures, videos and to communicate with people who are interested on helping and supporting.

Type of activities:	Examples
Cultural and leisure	Picnics, workshops, open air screening, live music, festivals, dance classes, yoga classes, open air classes about the history of the place, photo exhibition, discussions about the conditions of the place etc.
Physical interventions	Community gardens, cleaning force, street furniture making workshop, painting of pathways, sidewalks, benches, bicycle parking space, stage for concerts, garbage bins etc.

Table 4: Types of activities promoted by the self-organised groups



Figure 3: Example of activity of *Movimento Boa Praça*.
(Source: webpage of the self-organised group)



Figure 4: Example of activity of *A Batata Precisa de Você*.
(Source: Facebook page of the self-organised group)



Figure 5: Example of activity of *Ocupe & Abrace*.
(Source: Facebook page of the self-organised group)

The initiatives believe that it is important for all citizens to understand their rights and responsibilities regarding the use of public spaces in the city, therefore the three of them share information about these issues in their blogs, webpages and social media networking. *“We must be informed, we need to know our rights so we can come up with strategies and creative ideas together, and fight for the right to make the city we want”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015). In their webpages, blogs and social networking communities, they share government reports, explain rules and regulations, show projects implemented in other cities and countries and discuss different issues related to public spaces.

The effort is raising awareness about the importance of public spaces in the city. According to the interviewees, more and more people are participating in the discussions, online and directly in the public space, proposed by the groups. Their actions are reminding people about public spaces that were not being used in the city due to lack of maintenance, bad conditions and lack of attractiveness. Moreover, the media has been an important ally of the self-organised groups to disseminate their ideas about activation and revitalisation of public spaces in São Paulo, and to show the importance of social interaction in local open spaces in the city. However, even though their actions towards the rise of awareness are being successful, the groups are having difficulties to go beyond that and stimulate an effective engagement from citizens in activities to improve the places. *“Most of the people come to join the social activities, to have fun, but they do not even think that they can be the ones creating things or promoting activities here”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

A positive aspect stressed by the interviewees is the interaction with other self-organised groups. The three initiatives interviewed for this research have already cooperated with each other, and have received help from other groups focusing on temporary urban interventions, mobility, social justice, art, gender equality etc. *“The city is a great experimental laboratory for all of us, and it is beautiful to see the achievements of each group”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). The three groups have the same idea of “learning by doing”, which means that there is no fixed outcome to be achieved; on the contrary, the process is the focus. Therefore, it

is stressed the necessity of regularity of activities to keep the process going on and allowing adjustments and changes during the course. *A Batata Precisa de Você* is the case with more success in this regard; the group has been promoting weekly activities since they began to act in 2014, which contributed for their popularity, additionally they are also the group with more number of activities distributed between thematic sub-groups.

The characteristics of being spontaneous and without a clear plan are highlighted by some interviewees as an appealing aspect, since people are free to experiment and test different possibilities. Nevertheless, the fact that there is no clear plan or strategy for stakeholders and actions has been proved also prejudicial, since the groups have to face problems such as scarcity of resources, people leaving projects and activities incomplete, conflict of interests between different groups of people that want to use the space differently and volunteers not being able to engage on a regular basis. Therefore, the initiatives cannot ensure a sustainable process of improvement of the places.

All groups have an activist background; they share the idea of “occupying” a space that is public and for everybody, but their actions are focused on promoting betterments and pressuring/motivating municipality to help, instead of creating animosity and conflict with the local government. By improving and creating new physical structures and social activities, these groups are being able to call the attention of the local government and demonstrate what they want in the spaces, what are their demands, their needs and their ideas to transform the squares in better places. All groups emphasise that the relationship with the local government has improved since the beginning of the activities and that the subprefectures are more open to talk and listen to their demands. *“The municipality has a good impression of our activities, but it is more like a relationship of empathy and understanding, which is very ground-breaking for São Paulo”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Even though the communication with municipality has increased, all groups stress that the real means of support are still insufficient, since only few projects were made in collaboration with the local government, specifically the ones related to structural

changes in the places that cannot be done by the groups themselves. Moreover, most of the organisers complained about being tired of having to deal with large amount of bureaucracy and constant changes of staff in the subprefecture, which overburden their actions and make long-term agreements difficult to be implemented. The fact that the local government approves their activities to improve the places has provided the self-organised groups the chance to act freely and be innovative. However, the fact that the municipality is not effectively giving professional assistance and financial support to the groups can be seen as risky, since the local government is transferring its responsibility to citizens, instead of collaborating with them. Consequently, most of the physical improvements carried out by the groups have a short-term duration because of the lack of adequate materials, labour skills and proper planning and management of physical improvements and activities, which characterise them as short-term solutions and interventions that need to be replaced from time to time.

4.3 Analysis of cases - Place-making

In this section, the analysis of place-making processes is shown for each case according to the variables and indicators defined in Chapter 3. The findings are compared and discussed in order to identify differences and similarities between the cases.

4.3.2 Movimento Boa Praça – ‘Good Square Movement’

Participation and citizen engagement

Organisers and participants emphasise that the combination of continuous social activities and activities to promote physical improvements are key for the success of place-making processes in the squares. *“Social engagement takes time, but we finally realised that the place is ours and we can change it”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). All participants point out that participation in activities and events contributes to the establishment of new friendships and provides the opportunity to interact with different types of people of different ages. Significant changes in social life were particularly emphasised by organisers and frequent

participants: *“It had a huge impact on my social life. I know many more people in the neighbourhood now”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015).

The idea of making the place together was highlighted as positive experience by all organisers and some of the participants who engage on a more frequent basis in the activities. *“I have never participated in something like this before, something done by the people for people. I made new friends, I feel like I am part of a community”* (M. A. Pandolfo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). The processes of working together for the improvement of the squares is defined as empowering and socially fruitful: *“It is a way to make new friends, to meet people from the neighbourhood, but besides that we realised we have to do our part, we have to get together and make the changes we want to see in the place”* (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015).

All interviewees assert that the initiative helped to develop a different notion of the place. Awareness and better understanding of the importance of public spaces in the city were underlined as significant aspects. *“I pay attention to the things in the city, to the conditions of sidewalks, for example, I understand the city better. Moreover, I brought this awareness to my work life, I am researching about these things now.”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). One participant emphasises: *“the activities made me realise how disconnected I was from the city, I was always in my car, at home or at work”* (M. A. Pandolfo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). Even local residents, who do not engage in the activities, also reported changes in the way they see the place, since the bad image they had about the square was replaced by a good one. *“My idea of the city, the way I see the city and its public spaces has also changed. Before the activities, I did not even think about this square as a public space, as a place I could use for leisure”* (R. Camilo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). Organisers assert that the initiative plays the role of connecting people and bringing them together in order to achieve a collective goal. Although participation in the events has been increasing steadily, organisers point out that it is difficult to promote an overall deeper engagement, since people mostly rely on the self-

organised initiative to propose activities and physical reforms, instead of taking the lead and promoting new activities by themselves.

Most of the interviewees stress the positive image the group has between local residents and in the media. Organisers emphasise that usually the changes promoted by the initiative are well accepted by the local community. Yet, the process is not simple, thus internal and external conflicts appear from time to time. *“We have some internal conflicts sometimes, but we share the same values and so far we have been able to surpass the difficulties”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). The fact that different groups share the same space sometimes result in animosities, and some interviewees reported being disappointed about other people being careless with what have been built there. One frequent participant stresses that people are learning how to share the space, because before it was not being used like it is nowadays. *“When I found out that one of the benches I had built had been damaged, I went to the square to get it fixed. However, when I got there it was already fixed by someone else. But this is rare, usually I have to go back and repair things”* (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015).

Sense of belonging and shared meaning of place

Sense of place or sense of belonging is related to using the place, interacting with and within the place and giving meaning to it (Healey, 2010). Organisers and participants of activities and events declare that the place has become part of their lives. *“I feel very welcomed and relaxed when I am here, I can come anytime I want. It is a place that now makes part of my life, it is very important for me to have this place here.”* (M. A. Pandolfo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). According to the organisers, the changes on their own perception about the place are expressive. *“I think that to be engaged in the transformations and decision-making processes helped to create a close tie between myself and the square”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). One of the local residents, who does not participate in the activities, reveals that he appreciates the changes in the square, but does not feel any strong connection with the place. *“I do not mind it so much, I still do not come here very often, but I do think it*

is nice that they are improving the place, it is really good for the kids in the neighbourhood” (J. Xavier, personal communication, November 15, 2015).

All interviewees emphasise that since the activities started to be held in the square, the place is attracting more and more people. Most of the interviewees recall seeing and/or talking to people from different ages and with different backgrounds that were using the place for different purposes - kids, elderly people, families, young people, homeless etc. The fact that the square is a place for everybody was highlighted in most of the interviews as a positive aspect. “It is a place for all and it is free, we should be happy to share with many types of people” (M. A. Pandolfo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). By sharing moments and experiences with different kinds of people, organisers and frequent participants accentuate that the way they interact in the city has also changed. *“Everybody who participates in the activities has changed a lot. By seeing how other people use the space, the different ways of using the space, we understand each other better, and by using the place together we get closer to each other also”* (C. Tarrío, personal communication, October 4, 2015). However, one local resident emphasises that some people from the neighbourhood are still afraid of using the square when, for example, they see homeless people there or a big group of young people drinking there.

Place experience

The physical interventions were mentioned by all interviewees as essential and significant transformations that are attracting more people to use the square. A local resident emphasises that even when there are no activities, it is possible to see people playing, talking, eating, using the space. Increase of safety, or sense of safety with more people using the place, better accessibility since structural reforms were made, presence of urban furniture and cleanliness were the main aspects people refer to.

“It was empty, dirty and not safe. Only after the group initiated the activities and improved the physical conditions of the site that people started to come here.

Nowadays, you see it is busier, we have more accessibility, more leisure activities, you see people here.” (R. Camilo, personal communication, November 15, 2015).

Interviewees refer to the squares as beautiful, clean and full of green areas, perceptions that have arose in the last years. *“I work in front of the square, so I used to pass by here before but it was not nice. Nowadays, I really like it here, I take a lot of pictures, it is a good option of open green space”* (M. A. Pandolfo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). The contact with the natural environment, plants, trees, community garden, is also emphasised as an important asset for quality of life. *“The possibility to be in contact with nature, to have a place like that close to my home, especially in a city like São Paulo, is very beneficial”* (T. Mauad, personal communication, November 13, 2015). *“I feel very lucky that I have this place to come and enjoy, it makes me happy”* (M. A. Pandolfo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). Organisers stress that the biggest challenge is the management and maintenance of the place, which requires time and effort. Since the group is formed by volunteers, it is difficult to have a fixed schedule to make repairs, keep it completely clean etc. Moreover, the materials used to make physical improvements come from donation and sometimes are not completely adequate to be used outdoors. One participant points out that some parts of the urban furniture are easily deteriorated by rain, wind, overuse etc. Local residents and participants have also stressed the fact that the government should be helping more. *“The group is doing what is possible, but this place is the responsibility of the municipality, they should be involved”* (R. Camilo, personal communication, November 15, 2015). The lack of resources is, therefore, one of the biggest challenges to achieve improvements in the long-term in the place.



Figure 6: Amadeu Decome Square. (Source: webpage of *Movimento Boa Praça*)

4.3.3 A Batata Precisa de Você – ‘The Batata (Square) needs you’

Participation and citizen engagement

The diversity of events and activities happening in the square is highlighted by all interviewees as an important aspect to attract and engage different types of people. *“People from all parts of the city and of different ages, come here to enjoy and meet new people”* (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015). Moreover, the regularity of activities in the square is also mentioned as a crucial aspect for the improvement of the place. *“You can always find something here to help with, to learn about or simply to enjoy”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015). One of the interviewees emphasises that the organisers and participants who are more active and frequently engaged in the activities developed strong ties of friendship

and respect among each other. *“I made a lot of friends, I met people who share the same values and ideas that I have, which is great”* (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015). To have a place to share ideas, to be creative, to experience the city and to enjoy with friends are the aspects mentioned by all participants for their involvement in the activities. *“In a city like São Paulo, where everybody is always in a hurry, it was wonderful to find people that were also searching for a different way of life like me”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

Besides the leisure activities that use to attract many people - some events have more than 1000 attendants - the free courses in urban furniture and urban gardening promoted in the square by the self-organised group helped to attract and to engage more people in the activities related to physical transformations in the public space. *“Since I joined the activities to build street furniture, my social life got better. I have new friends and even new potential partners for projects”* (F. Pesquero, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

The social interactions and the idea of making the place together are highlighted by organisers and most of participants as transformative experiences. *“It has been very important for me to have this experience with different people from all over the city. When I see people enjoying the place, I feel really good about it”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015). *“I have so many friends here now, it is great to find people who with you can share common interests”* (R. Schein, personal communication, November 11, 2015). Despite the positive aspects reported regarding social interaction in the place, all organisers emphasise that it is still difficult to engage people on a more frequent basis. One interviewee, who participates in a more occasional way, asserts that most of the people like to come to the events, to see people, to have fun, to meet up with friends, but they are not willing to promote activities. *“I come when there is music or any other event, but I do not want to have the responsibility to take care of the place, I do not have time for that”* (J. Silva, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

One of the organisers points out that it is not easy to cope with the plurality of ideas, voices and desires expressed by all sub-groups of the self-organised initiative. According to him, some discussions have resulted in people, who were very active in promoting changes in the square, leaving the group. *“Here we learn to deal with all kinds of people. In order to be heard you have to develop your power of argumentation, it is like training for your professional life and a laboratory for your personal life too”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015). Moreover, the organisers also declare that to be engaged on a frequent basis is time consuming, which sometimes influences their personal lives. *“I love to be engaged in the group, but I have to take some distance from time to time, because it consumes a lot of my time, and some other times we just get tired of being there all the time”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015). *“I was participating more often some time ago, but I have some other projects also, work, family, I am not always available”* (R. Schein, personal communication, November 11, 2015).

Organisers reported that it is very difficult to maintain the urban furniture and urban gardens in good conditions at the place. Due to the fact that it is a huge open space and a point of connection of public transport in the middle of the city, many people pass by the square daily. Often the interventions made in the place would last only for some days. *“It was very frustrating at the beginning, many things were destroyed. It is a place with a huge flow of people everyday and most of them did not even think about the importance of the square”* (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015). Interviewees state that episodes of vandalism are less frequent than when the activities had just started in 2014, but it is still common to find things damaged or to have some things stolen from the place. *“It is happening less and less, but is still difficult to maintain things here”* (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015).

Sense of belonging and shared meaning of place

Most of the interviewees state that the social and physical changes in the place happened very fast. Organisers and frequent participants assert that along with these

transformations, their relation with the place was also modified in an intense way. *“The strongest change I can think of was the emotional change that happened to me in relation with the place. I feel at home here now, people know me here, I feel safe”* (R. Schein, personal communication, November 11, 2015). *“I can say that I am discovering myself here, the place is changing me”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Organisers and frequent participants also demonstrate a feeling of ownership of the place. *“The Batata square is my place, the place I chose to go for leisure, to develop new projects. I am very happy being engaged in the activities.”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015)

“When I saw that some things we built were destroyed, I felt sad. This feeling made me realise how attached I am to the square. It is like this place is mine, I want to take care of it, and I want everybody to feel the same way.” (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

Local residents and occasional participants emphasise that the activities in the square changed their perception of the place and of the city in general. The self-organised group helped to raise awareness of the place and of the importance of quality public spaces in the city.

“Only after I saw all the urban furniture here and people using the space, I realised how these things are important, specially in a frenetic city like São Paulo. It made me reflect about my style of life.” (L. Gonçalves, personal communication, November 10, 2015)

The relation with the place is categorized as positive by all interviewees. *This is my favourite place for leisure in the neighbourhood, I am always inviting my friends to come here because it is a place where you always feel welcomed”* (J. Silva, personal communication, November 10, 2015). The fact that different types of people share the space is seen as beneficial by most of them. *“The mix of people you see here is amazing, you see old and young people making the place, making the city together, it is very inspiring”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

Nonetheless, participants report that most of the people who engage in the activities are young people, and that different groups tend to cluster in different areas of the square.

Place experience

All interviewees refer to the benches as the most important physical interventions made in the place. The urban furniture fulfilled a demand, which allowed people to stay in the place and not only pass by it. *“It was a concrete desert before and now is full of benches, some umbrellas, some trees”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Due to its characteristics of being a connection point of transportation and of being located in an area with local commerce and businesses, the space was always used, but only for passage. Interviewees emphasise that since the group began with activities and physical improvements, the way people use the square changed completely: *“Accessibility is not a problem, the problem was that nobody wanted to stay there”* (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015). *“We can say that there are two different places: the Batata square before the activities of ‘A Batata Precisa de Você’ and the square after the improvements, the difference is immense”* (J. Silva, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Increase of quality of life was mentioned by all organisers and participants, since adequate public spaces are rare in the city. The square functions as an open and free place for leisure, for meeting people, for engaging in collective activities. *“The way I use my free time changed entirely. It is really good to have the option of having fun outdoors without spending a lot of money and being inside of a shopping mall”* (L. Gonçalves, personal communication, November 10, 2015). The ones engaged with the urban gardens state that the place provided them the opportunity to reconnect with the natural environment in the middle of the city.

“It had a huge impact in my life, this connection with the plants, with the food I plant, it changed my lifestyle. Made me think about pollution in the city, about how we affect the city, I have even bought a bike to come here.” (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

An increase in safety is mentioned by all interviewees as an important consequence of having more people using the place. Even local residents, who do not participate in the activities, emphasise that the place has had significant changes. *“I have lived in this neighbourhood for more than 15 years and only now I feel safe to bring my children here because we can see people here”* (L. Henrique, personal communication, November 10, 2015). *“We see many children playing around, families, young people, elderly people and even homeless people, all sharing the space”* (M. E. Carvalho, personal communication, November 12, 2015). Lack of sufficient street lighting and green areas are the biggest complains of the interviewees, who stress that the local government should be more active and provide structural changes that the group are not able to do. Despite the changes that are still needed in the place, people refer to it as a good public space to be used in the city. *“At least now we have something, before our options for public spaces around here were zero, now we can come here, meet up with friends, see different things happening...”* (J. Silva, personal communication, November 10, 2015).



Figure 7: Batata Square (Source: Facebook page of *A Batata Precisa de Você*)

4.3.4 Ocupe & Abrace – ‘Occupy & Embrace’

Participation and citizen engagement

Enhance of social interaction was declared as one of the most important aspects regarding the place-making processes promoted by the self-organised group in the square: *“The best thing is the union of the neighbours”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015); *“this is a convivial space now, we got to know each other”* (M. Alvarez, personal communication, November 16, 2015); *“the activities gave me the opportunity to meet people from the neighbourhood and make new friends”* (I. N. Souza, personal communication, November 16, 2015). One of the organisers suggests that the festivals and physical improvements made by the collective

work of people created a mutual respect among neighbours, and developed a sense of commitment with the square in the organisers and participants.

However, participants and local residents of this case demonstrate a certain distance from the self-organised group, they refer to the group as an entity who takes care of the square and encourages them to do their part. *“I think the group is very capable on promoting betterments and realising things”* (M. Alvarez, personal communication, November 16, 2015). *“The initiative is responsible for the square, they take care of it; we participate in their events and help the way we can”* (P. Suzuki, personal communication, November 12, 2015). Moreover, sense of trust is mentioned as a consequence of the social interactions: *“People have more faith in us than in the politicians, because we are involving them in the process. We are finding a new way”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). *“We realised that we can work together to improve something that is ours, the group showed us that things are not so complicated, and it is very gratifying to see the results”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015).

One of the organisers reveals that, at the beginning, some people from the neighbourhood did not want them promoting activities in the place, since it was bringing different types of people from different parts of the city. In addition, there were some conflicts with people that they did not even meet, but who were damaging or destroying things done by the initiative. *“There were some problems, some people took out the seedlings we planted, broke some garbage bins. But over time, I think we have created a peaceful environment”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). According to her, there were some internal conflicts inside the group that resulted in people leaving the initiative. Since some people focus more on the preservation of the natural environment and others on the social events they tend to disagree about goals and approaches. One local resident emphasised that the activities have encouraged him to take care of part of the square close to his own house, but he stresses that he does not intend to participate in the activities: *“I take care of the garden in front of my house, I am doing my part”* (M. Alvarez, personal communication, November 16, 2015).

Sense of belonging and shared meaning of place

Organisers and participants reveal that after engaging in the activities they have a better feeling about the place and also they pay more attention to the conditions of the place. *“Before, I did not even remember that I had a square close to my house, but now I come very often, I feel good when I come here”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015). Local residents also assert that the way they see the place has changed: *“I have lived here for more than 30 years and only now I can say I like this square, it is really nice to see that it is improving and that citizens are part of this transformation”* (M. Alvarez, personal communication, November 16, 2015).

Organisers and frequent participants of the activities reveal a stronger feeling of attachment to the square: *“I feel like the square is changing me, not the other way around. I am strongly connected to this place. This is the best thing that happened to me in the last years”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). *“I love this place, it is my garden, my green space, the place I can connect with nature and with my inner self”* (I. N. Souza, personal communication, November 16, 2015). Interviewees also point out the importance of sharing the space with different users. *“I think these activities help us to understand that different types of people can and should share public spaces”* (P. Suzuki, personal communication, November 12, 2015). They stress that it did not happen before the self-organise initiative began acting there.

“I see people from different ages doing many things, reading, talking, enjoying the sun and the sound of water running through the grass, friends come to have picnic, it is more lively now.” (I. N. Souza, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

One of the organisers suggests that the transformation of the square in a sharing place for different types of people and the development of a connection between people and nature were great accomplishments, since before the place was seen as a dangerous part of the neighbourhood and most of the people avoided using the square. *“We must look for solutions together. The square is for everybody”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015).

Place experience

The priority of almost all physical interventions was the preservation of the natural environment, such as the construction of a pathway throughout the square preventing people from stepping on the seedlings; the demolish of a wall that was condemned and was about to destroy some of the nature; garbage bins to make the square cleaner. All interviewees emphasise the improvements in the square: *“We can see many betterments, and how the group takes care of the water springs, the trees”* (P. Suzuki, personal communication, November 12, 2015). *“Everything here was broken or damaged, the grass was tall and the place was not clean”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015). *“In 2008, when I moved to this neighbourhood, the square was completely abandoned, a dirty and dangerous place”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). Increase of safety was described as an important change in the last years, since the interviewees reveal that nowadays it is rare to know or see any case of robbery or violence, which was more frequent before, according to them. The festivals are mentioned as crucial for the increase of sense of safety:

“Before it was a very bad atmosphere here, there were drunk people all the time, robbery... the square changed a lot. We, old neighbours, are very happy with all the improvement the group provided to us.” (M. Alvarez, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

The square turned into a place for leisure, to meet friends, to engage in community activities, but especially to connect with nature and escape from the fast pace of life, which is common in São Paulo. *“It is even better than just a public space for us to meet up, it is our cell of green in the middle of the concrete jungle”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). The transformations in the square contributed not only to more social interactions but also to better quality of life. *“I have learned about the water springs, and I feel more connected with the natural environment”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015). The preservation of the green areas is seen as beneficial by all interviewees. *“It is a wonderful place to breathe fresh*

air and to relax” (M. Alvarez, personal communication, November 16, 2015). “*My level of awareness of how to preserve the green environment has changed. I brought some of the knowledge I gained here to my personal life, I teach my daughter how to recycle our waste, I live a better life*” (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). Interviewees refer to the square as *good, green* and *relaxing*. Although many people stress that the place has improved, even more than expected by them, there are still structural changes that were pointed out as crucial to transform it in a better place, such as more lighting at night-time, more benches and places for people to sit on and regular cleaning. Participants and local residents see the group as responsible for these improvements, but also assert that the group should push the local government to cooperate.



Figure 8: Square of the Water Springs (Source: Facebook page of *Ocupe & Abrace*)

4.3.5 Findings – comparison of cases

Discussion - Participation and citizen engagement

“A place to meet people”

The three cases present similar findings regarding social interactions. Interviewees assert that due to the promotion of activities and physical betterments in the place, opportunities were created for them to meet new people, to make new friends, to interact and to socialise. The isolated lifestyle of people in São Paulo was emphasised as a bad habit. The engagement in activities in public spaces is a way of developing more connection between citizens and places in the city, and of building more cohesion in the neighbourhood, it is an attempt to bring back the style of life in which people used to meet in the squares and have more interaction with neighbours, which was lost due to fast urbanisation in São Paulo. *“It is really nice to be part of a group, of a community and to have a place where we can always meet and socialise”* (M. H. Menezes, personal communication, November 10, 2015). The squares became convivial spaces where people who share similar values and ideas get together to work on the improvements of the place, or to simply use and enjoy the public space and the activities being held.

“Making the place together”

The idea of making the place together is stressed as beneficial by all interviewees engaged in the activities. Place-making activities are described as socially fruitful, fun and as processes that bring satisfaction. *“It is very pleasing, we feel good in engaging in projects like that”* (R. Schein, personal communication, November 11, 2015). *“I feel like I am doing my part, helping the city, helping other people”* (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015). Moreover, the possibility of bringing neighbours together, that do not have any other activities in common, is emphasised as an important achievement. *“Now we have a common goal. We clean the place together, we help the place, we talk about our lives while doing it, and we help each other”* (A. F. Santos, personal communication, November 16, 2015).

Furthermore, the place-making activities are seen as opportunities to test different options and solutions for the places, to raise questions about the conditions of the squares and to discuss in a democratic, bottom-up approach how to make the public space a good place for people. Especially for the people involved in the improvement of the squares, it is seen as an opportunity to exercise creativity, to share ideas and to experience the city. The fact that the place is being made by the people for the people was indicated as empowering and motivational, and that it contributed to an increase in trust and respect between the people involved. However internal conflicts are highlighted as prejudicial as they can make the self-organisation vulnerable since some people have left the groups after discussions regarding different goals and different ways of thinking, additionally sometimes projects/activities were not carried on due to insufficient number of people to work on them.

“Feeling engaged”

The reasons why organisers and participants engage in activities in the squares vary according to the type of engagement. Organisers and frequent participants emphasise that their engagement came from the wish to live in a city with more opportunities to socialise, with local places that could bring back the idea of living in a community instead of in a gigantic city without adequate public spaces, but especially because they wanted to contribute to society, for a better city and they were *“tired of waiting for the government to act”* (R. Franco, October 13, 2015). Therefore, the lack of action from the local government in providing adequate, attractive and safe public spaces for people to use in São Paulo pushed them to act by themselves. *“We, citizens... we woke up. We realised it is time for us to act. If we keep waiting, we might wait forever”* (C. Tarrío, personal communication, October, 4, 2015).

Even though the number of people engaging in activities is increasing, all groups stress that there is still some resistance from neighbours and citizens in general to take the lead on promoting activities and events, rather than only participating in a more spontaneous basis. Furthermore, it is noticed that social media has helped the initiatives to become more popular and to acquire virtual supporters, but it does not have the same

impact in real life regarding active engagement in promoting activities. All groups have a large number of virtual “passively engaged” members. *Movimento Boa Praça* has more than 3000 members in their online community¹⁴, *A Batata Precisa de Você* has more than 11000 virtual members¹⁵, and *Ocupe & Abrace* has around 4000¹⁶. The number of participants in activities in the squares varies according to type of event, day of the week, weather etc, but taking into consideration that the number of people identified as organisers and main promoters of activities in a more regular basis is around five for *Movimento Boa Praça* and *Ocupe & Abrace* and around 10 for *A Batata Precisa de Você*, there is a significant difference between virtual supporters and active engagement.

Types of engagement:

- a. Organisers and frequent participants developed a sense of commitment with the place and with the community they are working together with. Besides that, they demonstrate that to be engaged in the activities provides a sense of empowerment, a feeling that “*we can change things, we can solve problems in the city and we can pressure the government to help us and take our demands into consideration*” (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015).
- b. Occasional participants express that they feel welcomed to participate in the social activities, but do not necessarily feel the need of engaging on a more frequent basis, either because they see the self-organised group as responsible for the physical improvements and promotion of activities, which are the cases of *Movimento Boa Praça* and *Ocupe & Abrace*, or because they want to socialise and interact without having to commit and take responsibility for the place.
- c. All local residents (identified in this interview as people who live in the neighbourhood but do not engage in the activities) report that they appreciate what the groups in the squares are doing, however they do not feel compelled to join. Different reasons were reported to explain their unwillingness to participate such as lack of time, they do not

¹⁴ Data retrieved 20 December 2015, from <https://www.facebook.com/movimentodaboapraça/?fref=ts>

¹⁵ Data retrieved 20 December 2015 from <https://www.facebook.com/abatataprecisadevoce/?fref=ts>

¹⁶ Data retrieved 20 December 2015 from <https://www.facebook.com/PracaDaNascente/?fref=ts>

have interest in the activities, they believe it is government's responsibility or they are already taking care of a part of the square close to his/her house. In the case of *Ocupe & Abrace*, local residents stress that the group does not seem to need more help and that the communication is not that clear if they want more people in the group or not.

The regularity of activities in the case of *Batata square* shows that these are important characteristics in order to sustain the place-making processes and to attract more people to engage and participate. The organisers play roles of articulators between the sub-groups and other people interested in promoting activities. The other two cases still have the organisers playing specific roles of "promoters" of activities, which causes more difficulty on bringing people together, since it requires more energy and time from the organisers. Whereas in the *Batata square* these roles are not completely clear anymore, since a variety of people feel that they can promote and execute different activities in the square, even though this is the most recent case. Organisers from all groups emphasise the fact that to promote activities and to make the effort of keeping people engaged is time consuming. Some of them reported being tired of having the responsibility of organising the activities, and stress not being able to ensure for how long they will commit with the improvements in the place, which shows a vulnerable characteristic of the self-organised initiatives.

Discussion - Sense of belonging and shared meaning of place

"My garden, my square, our place"

Organisers and frequent participants underline the development of a close relation with the places, they consider the squares as important aspects of their lives now and they mention increase of quality of life after engaging in the activities. Local residents do not mention any strong connections with the places, however they report a change in the image of the squares in their minds from places that were "to be avoided" to places that are pleasant and welcoming. The sense of ownership and belonging is stressed by all organisers and frequent participants, they use expressions such as "my garden", "my place", "our convivial space", and "our refuge" to refer to the squares. *"We adopted the*

Batata square to be our place, it is where I can be creative, I can suggest and realise things, I can experience the city with others” (F. Pesquero, personal communication, November 5, 2015). *“I love this place, I am so grateful to have it in front of my house”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). Interviewees stress that citizens in general realised that the private and individualistic lifestyle is not sustainable anymore, people are eager to enjoy open and free spaces in the city, however there are not many options of good public spaces in São Paulo. Therefore the actions of the self-organised groups help to fulfil a city’s need. *“It is a growing movement in the city of São Paulo, it is great to see people willing to reclaim, re-conquer the public spaces”* (R. P. Nóbrega, personal communication, October 20, 2015). The increase of awareness about the importance of public spaces to achieve better quality of life in the city is observed in all three cases. All interviewees (organisers, participants and local residents) were affected by the improvements in the squares in the sense that they report developing a better understanding about the role of public spaces in the city. The interviewees demonstrate a change in the perception of the places, realising that changes in the public spaces that were abandoned and neglect had an impact in the way they understand the urban fabric, in the image they have of the city, in the way they use the city and how they relate with the public spaces.

The interviewees emphasise that the places became more diverse in the sense of variety of users, and stress that during the social activities and events there is interaction between people from different backgrounds and different ages (elderly people, young people, businessmen, homeless, artists, rich, poor etc.). However, an important issue to highlight is the question of whether on a daily basis people share the place completely or they tend to cluster in different groups, as was reported in some interviews. In addition, some local residents appear to be still hesitant to participate in the activities because they do not feel comfortable with sharing the square with different types of people. Organisers accentuate that it is difficult to surpass this barrier and that people are still learning how to engage in activities that are autonomous and how to interact with different types of people: *“We are creating a sense of respect, we are learning*

together how to make it a better place for all” (R. Franco, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Discussion - Place experience

“Social and physical activities”

The perception of improvement of quality of place is expressed by interviewees as a mix of social and physical interactions with and within the place: “to have a place to sit and chat with a friend”, “cultural activities to attend to”, “adequate playground infrastructure”, “festivals to bring neighbours together”, “to see people using the place”, “to have more contact with the natural environment”, “to be able to experience things together in the place” are some of the examples interviewees gave when asked about the changes and improvements in the places since the self-organised groups began to act in the sites. *“Everybody can notice the changes here, it is a quality public space now, I feel proud of having a place like this in my city”* (N. Marques, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

Places were described as “good” and “better than before”; adjectives related to the fact that nowadays places are cleaner, lively and more attractive. Moreover the increase of place quality is also related to better quality of life, since the social activities and physical interventions provided transformed the squares in safer places, places that are meeting points for neighbours, and the place-making processes promoted transformations in the style of life and the way people relate to the city: *“I feel happier, healthier and part of the city, I feel a better citizen too”* (R. Soares, personal communication, November 7, 2015). The challenge observed during the interviews is related to the maintenance and management of the improvements done in the places. Even though most of the interviewees refer to the squares as better places, they still emphasise that there is a long way to go in order to achieve real adequate public spaces for people to use. The lack of appropriate material and resources, the fact that people do not always have the ability and skill to repair damages in the place, along with the

situation of organisers being overburdened with tasks constitute a problematic point that influences the sustainability of the self-organised groups and their activities.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Review of objectives and approach

The aim of this thesis was to explore how self-organised initiatives promoting place-making processes are impacting the quality of places in São Paulo. The research investigated the origins, characteristics, motives, strategies, goals and challenges of self-organised groups emerging from civil-society, as well as examined the place-making processes promoted by the initiatives in public spaces, focusing on how these social and physical changes in the urban environment are affecting the relationship between people and places.

The context of the research, the city of São Paulo, is a metropolis currently dealing with the consequences of fast urbanisation of the last 50 years (IBGE, 2015), which resulted in fragmentation of its territory, degradation and neglect of public spaces. Moreover, the lack of attention from the local government towards the improvement and maintenance of public spaces, and the persistent decision of investing in mega infrastructures contributed for a disconnection between citizens and urban public spaces. Recently, self-organised initiatives evolving from the bottom up are attempting to reclaim the use of public spaces and rebuild the links between people and places in the city by making use of creativity, spontaneity and alternative ways of communication to improve quality of place.

The research investigated three self-organised groups emerging from civil society in the city of São Paulo identified as significant cases due to their public recognition, popularity and regularity of activities being promoted in the public spaces (Albertoni & Fagundez, 2015; 'Conheça os coletivos urbanos', 2014). The study aimed to contribute to knowledge about the role of civil society in current urban transformation processes and to understand how place-making processes conducted by self-organised initiatives are affecting quality of place. Based upon this understanding, one main research question and three sub-questions were developed: (1) How do self-organised initiatives impact the quality of places through place-making processes in São Paulo?; (1.1) What

are the origins, characteristics and motivations of self-organised initiatives to promote the use of public spaces in São Paulo?; (1.2) What are the main strategies, goals and challenges of self-organised groups in transforming public spaces in São Paulo?; and (1.3) How do these self-organised urban projects manifest? What are the meanings and perceived benefits in the understanding of the organisers, participants and local residents?

The four questions have been investigated through explorative and descriptive approaches based on the concepts of Self-organisation and Place-making and analysed through qualitative research methodology. The assessment of the impact on the quality of place was based on the perceptions of organisers, participants (frequently or occasionally engaged in the activities) and local residents (not directly involved in the activities). The next sections of this chapter synthesise and discuss the research findings, reliability and validity, and present recommendation for further research.

5.2 Key findings and significance of the findings

5.2.1 Self-organised initiatives – citizens as urban agents

The activities of self-organised initiatives in public spaces in São Paulo demonstrate how civil society is affecting urban development by taking a proactive role. The analysis of the three cases in the city reveals that the groups were born spontaneously and out of common interests and needs. The self-organised groups were created as a response to the lack of actions by the local government towards the improvement and maintenance of public spaces and as an attempt to change the mind-set of people living an isolated lifestyle in São Paulo by social collective engagement in the improvement of public spaces. The initiatives make use of creativity and voluntary engagement to carry out activities in the squares in order to promote social and physical betterments to the places.

The self-organised groups proved to be successful in raising awareness of the importance of public spaces in the city for the achievement of better quality of life and of the fact that citizens have the capability of acting as *urban agents*. By actively

promoting the improvement of the squares, they are bringing to discussion the issue of the neglect of public spaces and demanding the right of citizens to change the city by themselves. The activities promoted by the groups are stimulating debates that are being carried out not only between the people directly affected by the activities, but also in social media channels, newspapers, magazines and the media in general.

In their discourse, the capacity to contribute autonomously to urban development is emphasised, in alignment with the ideas of Boonstra and Boelens (2011) and Swyngedouw and Moulaert (2010), who argue that participation must be free from government control and that self-organised groups can be responsible for changes in the urban fabric and management of places. Their discourse goes in the opposite direction of what is proposed by Nederhand et al. (2014) who emphasise that government needs to encourage self-organisation to act in urban transformation processes.

This research exposes that the outcome of social and physical betterments, provided by creativity and autonomous engagement of the self-organised groups, is partially successful since the improvements reached the goal of attracting more users, but sustainability of activities and projects cannot be ensured. Despite being successful as initiators of activities and transformations in public spaces, yet the self-organised groups are not able to ensure the management and maintenance of the places due to four main factors that constitute their nature:

- Vulnerability of voluntary work (people do not always have the commitment to participate and help)
- Lack of financial resources (the quality and lifetime of projects and activities rely mostly on donations)
- Lack of adequate materials (all materials come from donation and most of the time they “solve” the needs in an improvised way, which is a short-term answer rather than a long-term plan/solution)
- Lack of proper labour skills and long-term planning

Therefore, their actions in public spaces can be seen as a experiments of what can be done to improve the quality of place and how people react to it; their “free structure” is proved to be useful in providing freedom to adapt and make changes along the course of the transformations taking place in the squares. Nonetheless, this research exposes that self-organised groups need to develop a strategy to increase feasibility; there is still the need to boost external collaboration from different stakeholders in order to guarantee sustainability of the activities and projects.

In addition, the findings suggest that the self-organised initiatives developed a new system of communication with local government. By acting in public spaces, being creative and implementing their own ideas, they developed a different method of participation, through which they express their opinion and needs by demonstrating possibilities of what can be done to improve the place, showing what is needed and desired by the citizens in the public spaces, the challenges for implementation and how the users react to these transformations. Thus, they are succeeding in calling the attention of the local government, since the municipality is showing interest in their activities, not only by allowing them to make changes in the urban environment but also by being more open to hear the people’s voice and to join some of the discussions proposed by the groups. Nevertheless, all self-organised groups emphasised being overburdened with tasks and reported that the response from the local government is still insufficient regarding real means of collaboration and support, which is leading to a situation of transference of responsibility, since the municipality is neither influencing nor essentially helping the groups.

5.2.2 Place-making processes and the impact on quality of place

All three cases analysed express that the people directly affected by the self-organised groups’ activities (organisers, participants and local residents) benefit from the improvements and changes promoted by the groups. Increase of social interaction was reported as one of the main achievements, which is the result of the promotion of cultural/leisure activities and physical betterments that transformed the squares into more attractive and safer places, encouraging people to use the squares.

This research reveals that place-making activities promoted by self-organised groups are able to enhance the connection between people - the ones who engage in the activities on a frequent basis - and places. By “making” the place together and sharing ideas and common goals, they developed an advanced sense of belonging and shared meaning of place. The type of engagement influences in the degree of sense of ownership of place, which is not perceived by local residents who do not participate in the activities.

The findings show that because the activities are carried out in a more spontaneous way, made by the people for the people and detached from government procedures, they are more appealing for people to participate. However, this increase of interest is referred, mostly, to participating in the social events, not actively engaging in the organisation and promotion of activities. *A Batata Precisa de Você* is the most successful of the three cases, since it succeeded in engaging more people to act as *urban agents* and developed a semi-structure organisation, in which organisers were divided in thematic sub-groups. Nonetheless, the involvement of participants lacks sustainability and demands energy and effort from the organisers in the three cases.

Although all groups claim to have a non-hierarchical way of organisation, this thesis reveals that organisers are the ones in decision-making positions, acting as informal leaders but still with power to influence the actions being carried out in the places, which generated conflicts of interest. Therefore, the empowerment of people as informal leaders in place-making processes can lead to biased and one-sided processes.

Recently, urban researchers have emphasised the idea of place-making as a process, not an end product (Karacor, 2014; Palermo & Ponzini, 2015; PPS (Project for Public Spaces), 2015), which is observed in the case of self-organised groups promoting place-making processes. The idea of “learning by doing” allows more freedom and room for improvisation and changes during the process, however, due to the fact that there is not a fixed outcome to be achieved and no clear plan to be implemented, the subsistence of activities and projects are being put at a risk of becoming temporary activation of space. In other words, the focus on the process in place-making activities tends to result in

short-term accomplishments rather than effective and permanent transformation of public spaces.

In summary, the findings highlight that self-organised initiatives promoting place-making processes in São Paulo are affecting the quality of place by increasing social interaction and improving physical conditions of public spaces that create more opportunities for people to use the places. Place-making processes carried out by self-organised initiatives proved to be important as experimentation to test possibilities of changes in public spaces, but cannot be considered as an urban solution for the permanent provision of quality of place. Therefore, the development of a management team, comprised by different stakeholders, is needed in order to guarantee plurality of voices, maintenance, and permanency of projects and activities. In the contemporary urban context, the role of civil society is changing as citizens are proactively and collectively promoting improvements in public spaces, therefore, local government and urban planners can also benefit from these new experiences and exchange of ideas in the urban environment in order to generate more holistic strategies for urban planning and development.

5.3 Research limitations and further studies

This study acknowledged that the analysis of three similar case studies in the city of São Paulo is not able to provide generalised conclusions. In addition, the complexity of external influences in São Paulo could have impacted the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the findings could have been influenced by information given by interviewees with a stronger voice.

This thesis has added to the growing research of the linkage between self-organisation and place-making, by providing more insights into the role of civil society in the transformation of the urban environment and the impacts of place-making processes of self-organised initiatives in quality of place. This research is a novelty for Brazilian studies since it analyses a recent phenomenon of proactive engagement of citizens in the transformation of public spaces in São Paulo from the concepts of self-organisation

and place-making. Further research regarding the interaction patterns between self-organised groups, public and private sector is suggested in order to identify policies and means to implement a holistic approach to the processes being conducted by self-organised initiatives in public spaces.

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Annex 1: Interview list

<i>Case 1: Movimento Boa Praça</i>		
Name	Type of interviewee	Date
Thais Mauad	Organiser	13 November 2015
Carolina Tarrío	Organiser	4 October 2015
Raimundo Paiva Nóbrega	Participant (frequent)	20 October 2015
Maria Aparecida Pandolfo	Participant (occasional)	15 November 2015
Rafael Camilo	Local resident	15 November 2015
Juscelino Xavier	Local resident	15 November 2015
<i>Case 2: A Batata Precisa de Você</i>		
Raphael Franco	Organiser	13 October 2015
Maria Eudóxia Carvalho	Organiser	12 October 2015
Naiê Marques	Participant (frequent)	5 November 2015
Filipe Pesquero	Participant (frequent)	5 November 2015
Rachel Schein	Participant (frequent)	11 November 2015
Joel da Silva	Participant (occasional)	10 November 2015
Ligia Gonçalves	Local resident	10 November 2015
Maria Helena Menezes	Local resident	10 November 2015
Lucas Henrique	Local resident	10 November 2015
<i>Case 3: Ocupe & Abrace</i>		
Roberta Soares	Organiser	7 November 2015
Paulo Suzuki	Participant (frequent)	12 November 2015
Abraão Francisco Santos	Participant (occasional)	16 November 2015
Manuel Alvarez	Local resident	16 November 2015
Ivan do Nascimento Souza	Local resident	16 November 2015

Annex 2: Interview guideline

Introduction to interview

This interview is part of my research project for my master thesis in Urban Management. The objective is to gain more understanding of self-organised initiatives that are promoting transformations in public spaces in São Paulo, as well as about the people involved in these activities and the people affected by them.

In the interview, I will ask questions about your relation with the place, with the self-organisation and some personal questions about your background. The interview guide was developed to take approximately 45 minutes.

I guarantee that the interview will be confidential and it will be used exclusively for the purposes of this academic research. If you have interest, I can provide you access to the final thesis.

I would like to ask for your permission to record the interview, since it will facilitate the process of analysis of data. Please, feel free to add comments or questions. If you agree, I would like to record the interview from now on.

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Annex 3: Interview Guide

Personal Profile

Name and surname of interviewee:

Interviewee type: organiser / participant / local resident

Date of interview:

Age:

Education:

Work:

Personal Background

Do you live in the neighbourhood?

- If yes: How long have you been living in the neighbourhood?
- If no: Do you pass by the place (square/plaza) to commute or for any other reason in a daily or week basis?

Part 1: Self-organisation

Organisers

Context (origins, motivations)

How did the activities start in the place?

- Were there events that trigger the initiatives?

Since when did you join the activities and why?

Features (members, approaches, goals)

What type of activities do you promote?

Who are the participants and how did you get together?

- Can anyone join the initiative and activities?
- What would you say is your role (if you think you have any specific role)?

Can you tell me how does the self-organised group work?

- Who is organising the activities and how? Is there a leader or are the participants organising themselves?

- What types of resources are used (materials, instruments) and which obstacles have the group encountered?
- How are the activities financed?

Cooperation

Did your group collaborate with the local government or private companies in any activities? How?

Participants / local residents

Do you feel welcomed to join the activities?

- Why have you decided to join or not to join the activities?

Can you tell me more about your involvement in activities? How have you participate?

- Have you contributed (labour/financially) to the self-organised activities?

Part 2: Place-making

Participation and social interaction

How often do you get involved in activities in the square/park?

Do you believe the activities in the place have an impact in your life? How?

- Social life?
- Quality of life?

How would you describe the relation you have with other participants?

Citizen engagement

How do you feel about engaging in activities (as a volunteer) to use, improve and maintain an urban public space?

- Is your contribution to the place valued the way you would like it to be?
- How long do you think you would like to be doing this kind of activities?

Have you ever had any conflicts with people in the place?

- Vandalism? Animosity?

Sense of belonging

Can you tell me how you feel about the place?

Did your perception/feeling about the place change after the activities started? How?

- Do you think this is your square/park, your place?

Shared meaning

Would you have used the place without the activities?

How do you think other people feel about the place and the activities?

Do participants of different groups share the place (at the same time)?

- Do children, youth, women, men, elderly use the space?

Place experience

Can you tell me something about the transformation of the place?

- How did the place change or improve after the initiatives started?
- What are/were the problems in the place?

How do you usually use the square/park?

What has changed in your way of using the place after the activities started?

- Specific characteristics? (accessibility, design, functionality, activities...)

How was the place used 5/10 years ago?

How is the place used today?

In your opinion, what are the main challenges to transform this public space?

Do you think this is a good example of public space?

- Why?
- Which qualities do you see on it?
- What would you still change here? What is missing?