

MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

From upgrading to repair. Looking at NGO housing improvement projects in informal settlements as urban political interventions

verfasst von | submitted by
Julia Brito Mafaldo

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:

UA 066 664

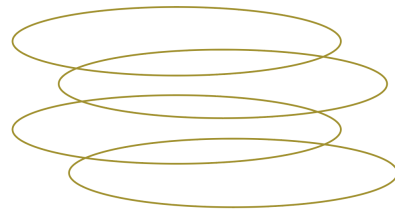
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:

Masterstudium DDP Urban Studies

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Kerstin Krellenberg

Abstract.



Urbanisation in the Global South unfolds at unprecedented rates and scales, producing profound housing challenges that formal planning systems and state capacities have struggled to address. In Brazil, one of the most urbanised countries in Latin America, the housing deficit is not limited to quantity but also marked by inadequacy of existing units. While the country has developed advanced legal frameworks on urban issues based on the social function of the urban land, public policies continue to prioritise new housing production over upgrading and improving precarious settlements. In this context, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played an important role in implementing housing improvement initiatives. This research investigates how projects carried out within multi-scalar NGO partnerships contribute to precarious housing improvement practices in Brazil. It examines a case study of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in Fortaleza, Ceará, through collaboration between Habitat for Humanity and the local technical assistance organisation Taramela ATAC. The study adopts a qualitative case study methodology, combining semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Its analytical framework draws on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to trace relational dynamics across actors, while engaging concepts from Southern urban theory such as informality, peripheral urbanisation, conflicting rationalities, and urban political experimentation to interpret NGO practices within broader governance processes. Findings highlight three transversal themes in housing improvement partnerships: legitimacy and territorial trust, network articulation and strategies, and critiques of the project-based model. These dynamics demonstrate that such initiatives cannot be understood through isolated operational challenges but must be analysed in their interdependence. By foregrounding these dynamics, the thesis advances critical debates on the role of NGOs in urban governance, arguing that generative tensions are constitutive sites of negotiation, contestation, and experimentation, rather than problems to be solved or eliminated through techno-managerial approaches.

Keywords: Housing improvements; informal settlements; Brazil; NGO partnerships

Zusammenfassung.

Die Urbanisierung in den Entwicklungsländern schreitet mit beispielloser Geschwindigkeit und in beispiellosem Ausmaß voran und führt zu tiefgreifenden Herausforderungen im Wohnungsbau, denen weder formelle Planungssysteme noch staatliche Kapazitäten gerecht werden können. In Brasilien, einem der am stärksten urbanisierten Länder Lateinamerikas, beschränkt sich der Wohnungsmangel nicht nur auf die Quantität, sondern ist auch durch die Unzulänglichkeit bestehender Einheiten gekennzeichnet. Obwohl das Land fortschrittliche Rechtsrahmen für städtische Fragen entwickelt hat, die auf der sozialen Funktion des städtischen Bodens basieren, priorisiert die öffentliche Politik weiterhin den Neubau von Wohnraum gegenüber der Modernisierung und Verbesserung prekärer Siedlungen. In diesem Zusammenhang spielen Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGOs) eine wichtige Rolle bei der Umsetzung von Initiativen zur Wohnraumverbesserung. Diese Forschung untersucht, wie Projekte, die im Rahmen multiskaliger NGO-Partnerschaften durchgeführt werden, zur Verbesserung prekärer Wohnverhältnisse in Brasilien beitragen. Sie untersucht eine Fallstudie zu Interventionen im Bereich Wasser, Sanitärversorgung und Hygiene (WASH), die während der COVID-19-Pandemie in Fortaleza, Ceará, in Zusammenarbeit zwischen Habitat for Humanity und der lokalen technischen Hilfsorganisation Taramela ATAC durchgeführt wurden. Die Studie verwendet eine qualitative Fallstudienmethodik, die halbstrukturierte Interviews und Dokumentenanalyse kombiniert. Ihr analytischer Rahmen stützt sich auf die Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie (ANT), um die Beziehungsdynamik zwischen den Akteuren nachzuvollziehen. Gleichzeitig werden Konzepte der südstaatlichen Stadttheorie wie Informalität, periphere Urbanisierung, widersprüchliche Rationalitäten und stadtpolitische Experimente einbezogen, um die Praktiken von NGOs im Rahmen umfassenderer Governance-Prozesse zu interpretieren. Die Ergebnisse heben drei transversale Themen von Partnerschaften zur Wohnraumverbesserung hervor: Legitimität und territoriales Vertrauen, Netzwerkartikulation und -strategien sowie Kritik am projektbasierten Modell. Diese Dynamiken zeigen, dass solche Initiativen nicht anhand isolierter operativer Herausforderungen verstanden werden können, sondern in ihrer Interdependenz analysiert werden müssen. Durch die Hervorhebung dieser Dynamiken fördert die Arbeit kritische Debatten über die Rolle von NGOs in der Stadtverwaltung. Sie argumentiert, dass generative Spannungen konstitutive Orte der Verhandlung, Auseinandersetzung und des Experimentierens sind und keine Probleme, die durch techno-managementale Ansätze gelöst oder beseitigt werden müssen.

Schlüsselwörter: Wohnraumverbesserungen; Informelle Siedlungen; Brasilien; NGO-Partnerschaften

Summary.

01 Introduction.....	2
02 Theoretical Framework.....	3
Housing precariousness in informal settlements . Theoretical framework.....	4
Theoretical Framework Image Gallery.....	15
03 Literature Review.....	17
Framing a practice: Housing improvement in informal settlements.....	18
04 Methodology.....	31
05 Results.....	44
Habitat for Humanity Brazil's Housing Improvements project to enhance access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).....	45
A Case Study of Multi-Scale NGO Partnership.....	45
Main actors.....	48
Key Dimensions of the Case Study Findings.....	60
06 Discussion.....	83
Results Discussion: The Interface Zone in Multi-Scale NGO Housing Partnerships..	84
07 Conclusion.....	87
08 References.....	89
09 Appendices.....	93



01

Introduction.

Urban expansion has been reshaping the global landscape. Over the past 60 years, demographic and spatial transformations have primarily concentrated in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where most of the world's largest and fastest-growing cities are now located (Smith, 2021). Such growth, unlike trajectories in the global North, often outpace institutional capacities and urban planning systems.

Watson (2009) emphasises that the rates of this growth, which sometimes is aligned with economic development but not necessarily causally related, are inversely proportional to three essential capacities: government's ability to provide housing and urban infrastructure/services; residents' capacity to afford such elements; and the overall capability to manage natural disasters. In this context, access to land and housing is deeply shaped by asymmetrical political and economic power relations (Simone, 2015). Informal and self-constructed settlements have become the primary mode of urban expansion in the Global South (Rolnik, 2018), a nuanced phenomenon discussed by Caldeira (2017) as peripheral urbanisation. While enabling impoverished populations to remain in the city despite precarious housing conditions, this mode of production also intersects with social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities (Watson, 2009).

Official institutions have often failed to address the basic needs of the urban poor, who face persistent risks such as eviction, exclusion from basic services, inadequate housing conditions, and health hazards. In response, marginalised populations organise politically, forming urban social movements that contest dominant development models and claim the right to adequate housing and urban citizenship (Rolnik, 2018; Braathen et al., 2015; Harvey, D., 2006).

The terminology to describe such settlements is itself contested. Slums, favelas, bidonville, self-build, self-help, autoconstructed, informal, precarious, inadequate, substandard housing or settlements, comunidades urbanas, comunas, squats, *invasiones*, shantytowns, *asentamientos*, *barrios marginales*, *barriadas*, *ciudadelas*, *arrabaldes*, *campamentos*, precarious neighbourhoods. Each of these terms highlights different aspects of territories built by impoverished populations, from construction techniques to legal status or cultural context.

International discourse often converges on terms such as “informal settlement” or “slum”. (Braathen et al., 2015). Pasternak (2016) argues that even “adequate housing” must be understood within the context of its historical and regional contexts. Nonetheless, all the terms mentioned earlier translate into material conditions and tangible lived experiences marked by precarity, exclusion, and vulnerability to crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened many of these issues. Lockdowns and social distancing measures, essential for public health, proved impractical for the majority of people. At the same time, the pandemic revealed the resilience of communities and the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships and grassroots organizations in bridging gaps left by formal

systems. Civil society actors have provided critical services, disseminated information, and advocated for urgent measures such as eviction moratoriums and water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure (Corburn et al., 2020; Cities Alliance, 2021; Bhide, 2021). As cities now shift from crisis response to long-term resilience strategies, NGOs remain central intermediaries, translating formal policies into context-sensitive practices.

The role of NGOs in addressing housing and poverty challenges across the Global South is not new; it has mainly emerged since the 1970s (Baruah, 2007; Miraftab, 1997). National governments heavily rely on non-state actors for precarious housing upgrading and land tenure formalisation processes, as noted by Sutherland et al. (2015). This intricate effort involves political engagement, collaboration with local and national governments, networking, and partnerships with international funding bodies. This evolution has led to interventions based on a multi-stakeholder urban governance model, which still requires further examination (Miraftab, 1997; UN, 2003, Zibechi, 2012; Braathen et al., 2015).

Despite this long trajectory, the literature review reveals some research gaps. Existing studies predominantly examine short-term crisis responses or financialised arrangements based on microcredit (Yu & Karaos, 2004; Ramanath & Ebrahim, 2010; Islam & Walkerden, 2015). Limited scholarly attention has been paid to understanding housing improvement projects that directly address the inadequacies of existing dwellings through community-driven, non-loan mechanisms. Moreover, few studies critically analyse the relational dynamics of partnerships between local and international NGOs in this field, despite their growing role in shaping contemporary urban governance.

The research addresses that gap by focussing on housing improvement initiatives implemented through multi-scalar NGO partnerships in Brazil. The country offers a particularly relevant context. Its urbanisation process, currently decelerating after decades of rapid growth of precarious and informal settlements, has matured (Reis & Lukas, 2022) and enabled urban popular movements to participate in the consolidation of a legal framework for urban reform which is internationally recognised (Maricato, 2017; Rolnik, 2021). Brazil faces not only a quantitative housing deficit but also significant inadequacies in existing housing units (e.g. infrastructure deficits (water, sewage, and energy), excessive density, a lack of bathrooms, or structural problems), affecting nearly 20 million households (IBGE, 2019). It is in this context that housing upgrading/improvements interventions gain relevance as an alternative to the logic of replacing all housing units. Recent federal initiatives, such as the Periferia Viva programme, have further positioned NGOs as key actors in collaborative upgrading strategies.

Within this context, the thesis investigates the contradictions and challenges of housing improvement practices in a Brazilian precarious settlement. It explores how international and local NGOs navigate

between formal and informal systems, negotiate between context-specific adaptation and standardized models, and balance urgent service provision with long-term systemic change. To do so, this work poses the following questions.

Research questions

Main question: How do projects carried out within multi-scalar NGO partnerships contribute to precarious housing improvement practices in informal settlements in Brazil?

Sub-questions:

1. How do NGOs navigate between formal institutional systems and informal practices?
2. How do NGO projects balance contextual adaptation with standardised implementation models?
3. How do NGO partnerships integrate immediate improvements with longer-term transformation objectives?

To address these questions, this study explores an urban theory grounded in experiences and knowledge derived from cities in the Global South. This approach recognises that traditional urban planning theories, predominantly developed based on the realities of the Global North, often fail to comprehend the intricate processes shaping rapidly evolving urban environments in the South (Roy, 2009a; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Watson, 2009).

Thus, the thesis engages with concepts such as informality (Roy, 2005, 2009b), peripheral urbanisation and autoconstruction (Caldeira, 2017), squatting, repair, and consolidation (Bhag, 2019), as well as Watson's (2009) concept of conflicting rationalities and Simone's (2015) urban political interventions and experimentation.

Methodology is built around a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2018), examining housing improvement initiatives carried out in 2020 in Fortaleza, Brasil, by Habitat for Humanity and the local NGO Taramela ATAC. It focuses on WASH-related housing improvements carried on by these organisations, providing a unique lens on the tensions identified in the literature: adaptation vs. standardisation, service vs. advocacy, and urgency vs. systemic change. Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and comprehensive document analysis of project reports and organisational materials. The analysis employs thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns and themes within the data (Saldaña, 2013).

The analytical framework combines Actor-Network Theory (Brenner et al., 2016) with Watson's (2009) concept of "conflicting rationalities" and Simone's (2015) "urban political interventions" and "experimentation", enabling a multi-scalar reading of the networks, logics, and contestations shaping NGO partnerships in precarious housing improvements.

The study is organized as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework, situating housing improvements in precarious settlements as urban political interventions. Chapter 3 reviews institutional practices and recent literature, mapping how actors define and act upon housing inadequacies. Chapter 4 details the research methodology according to the gaps this study addresses. Chapter 5 presents the findings in two parts: a descriptive overview of the case and a thematic analysis of primary data. Then, Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the literature, highlighting theoretical and practical contributions.



02

Theoretical Framework.

Housing precariousness in informal settlements . Theoretical framework.

This opening chapter aims to establish the theoretical foundations of this research concerning urban practices related to housing precariousness in informal settlements in Brazil, thereby setting the conditions for discussing this topic as urban political interventions.

Although present worldwide, the disparity in the proportion of urban populations living in slums, informal settlements, or inadequate housing across global regions is striking. According to UN-HABITAT (2021), only 0.66% of the population in Europe and North America live in slums, compared to 42.9% in Central and Southern Asia, 42.9.2% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 16.9% in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-HABITAT 2024). This data confirms that differences in economic and political power among regions, cities, and social classes greatly affect access to adequate housing.

The increasingly complex urban reality in the Global South requires approaches that address the specific dynamics of cities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Traditional urban theories, mainly developed based on the realities of the Global North, often fail to comprehend the intricate processes shaping rapidly evolving urban environments in the South (Watson, 2009).

In this context, Roy (2005) advocates for "new geographies of imagination and epistemology" in the development of urban and regional theory, arguing that Euro-American dominance obscures diverse forms of urban spatial production. To achieve this, numerous scholars have developed consistent urban theories that focus on cities in the Global South.

This research intentionally highlights these authors as key references for reflection. Although the research case study focuses on Brazil, this initial chapter draws on Brazilian authors in the same way as those from other cities in the Global South. The use of authors and their contributions in this chapter seeks to foster reflections grounded in specific contexts yet broadly applicable to issues such as informality, urban governance, planning, and precarious housing.

It begins by situating the production of urban space in the Global South (Braga, 2012). Then, the chapter advances by exploring key concepts that offer valuable insights into power dynamics and knowledge systems, which are closely linked to how space is produced in cities where structural inequalities and both formal and informal processes shape highly dynamic spatial configurations.

Autoconstruction and informality in the Global South.

According to Barata-Moura (2002), in his ambitious effort to explain dialectical materialist thinking in simple terms, what initially appears

chaotic, disconnected, fragmented, or even irrational actually constitutes a fundamental totality. This unity is not simple or straightforward, but rather complex, involving multiple elements, relationships, and, most importantly, contradictions.

Furthermore, this totality is not a static collection of parts, but an ongoing process of change. The unity of reality encompasses its historical evolution over time. According to dialectical materialist thinking, objects should be understood not as fixed states, but as dynamic systems in which contradictory forces emerge and operate. Contradictions are not external problems but fundamental aspects of things themselves, driving their transformation (Barata-Moura, 2002).

Beginning this chapter with these statements is logical considering the common association of informal settlements with pre-capitalist (non-modern) social structures or as a consequence of rudimentary or underdeveloped capitalism. Informal settlements are often still considered non-cities, a result of poor planning, and a “discriminatory hegemonic discourse persists, employing ethnic, economic, juridical, and spatial elements to designate this tenacious ‘place of urban outcasts’ (Rolnik, 2019, p. 89).

The authors mobilised in this session defend and demonstrate that the “logic of disorder” (Kowarick, 2024) is, perhaps not immediately clear, one more way in which “capital strives to produce a geographical landscape favourable to its reproduction and subsequent evolution” (Harvey, 2014, p 188). It is notable how precariousness and urban informality, which predominate in many Southern cities, have served as essential foundations for capital reproduction and accumulation, shifting across models over time and places.

In this research, the Global South is understood as territories subject to systematic resource extraction and value appropriation through mechanisms that go beyond traditional colonial relationships, late or partial industrialisation, and deindustrialisation. This extends into contemporary, financially driven arrangements of Peripheral capitalism (Braga, 2012). According to Braga (2012), the Global South is a concept that transcends territorial boundaries, described as “a metaphor for social spoliation” that includes both national processes of exploitation and the struggles for alternative social and political change projects.

As Harvey (2014) has well developed, uneven geographical development is inherent to capitalist spatial configurations. Some regions, cities, or neighbourhoods prosper while others decline, forming a complex mosaic of disparities across space. These landscapes remain unstable due to technical, economic, and social pressures and changes, requiring capital to adapt and transform the spaces it creates continuously.

The contradictions embedded in capitalist spatial development eventually turn previously favourable landscapes into obstacles for further accumulation, requiring what Harvey (2014) describes as “creative destruction” of existing arrangements. The resulting urban landscapes

reflect these tensions, showing stark contrasts between spectacular consumption and technological spaces, and marginalised areas where essentials are lacking.

Harvey's (2014) text, upon which the above reflections are based, primarily concentrates on the recent dynamics of capital migration, offshore outsourcing, deindustrialisation, and large-scale investments in urban renewal, such as the well-known cases of Detroit and China's urban expansion. However, keeping this logic in mind also helps in understanding the prevalence of informality and precariousness in cities of peripheral capitalism (Braga, 2012), where the basis of capital accumulation is not technological advancement and concentration, but rather colonial structures reinvent themselves over time through new modalities of territorial control and transfer of value.

Rolnik (2013) and Ferreira (2005) demonstrate how post-abolition power structures in Latin America reconfigured themselves through urban property control and land monopoly. Using Brazil as an example, the authors specify that the transition from slave to free labour coincided with the 1850 Land Law, which commodified land. The Land Law eliminated landowners' labour shortage risks by criminalising land occupation, thereby preventing both former slaves and poor European immigrants from acquiring land independently. This established the foundations for Maricato's (2019) concept of "low-wage urbanisation," where the occupation of unplanned areas and autoconstruction became the primary housing solution for subordinate classes, whose resources were insufficient to access commodified urbanised land. These spatial arrangements reproduced racial and class hierarchies from the slavery period through urban geography. It represents structural products rather than developmental anomalies.

The main argument, developed with insights from the referenced authors, is that urban informality forms a part of the foundation of "formal" capitalist development and its inherent dynamics and structures. Authors such as Harvey (2014), Roy (2005; 2009b), Rolnik (2019), and Kowarick (2024) identify the mechanisms that closely link urban informality with peripheral capitalism and its industrialisation process.

These statements, in some respects, debate one of the most renowned texts on the global phenomenon of rapidly expanding urban slums, *Planet of Slums*, by Mike Davis (2006). Davis (2006) describes how urbanisation in the Global South fundamentally differs from European and North American historical patterns by disconnecting urban growth from industrialisation. This result is what he calls an "informal urban proletariat"—"a wholly original development unforeseen by either classical Marxism or neoliberal theory" (Davis, 2006, p. 174). This phenomenon intensified after the 1980s, when structural neoliberal adjustment programs removed agricultural subsidies and directed rural populations towards deindustrialising cities with declining formal employment (Davis, 2006). Quoting Roy (2009b), "Davis (2006) sees the 'slum' as the global prototype of a warehousing of the rural-urban poor,

marginalised by structural adjustment and deindustrialisation” (Roy, 2009b, p 78)

Adopting a different perspective, Harvey (2014) argues that the link between the informal and formal sectors of the economy is almost symbiotic. The informal sector plays a crucial role in the social reproduction of the urban working class, encompassing both formally employed workers and those who are unemployed, in surplus. The informal economy sets a lower boundary for wage levels in the formal sector, with housing being particularly significant in this account (Kowarick, 2024).

Kowarick’s (2024) analysis of São Paulo during Brazil’s “Economic Miracle” in the 1960s and 1970s offers a detailed examination of how urban informality directly supported capital accumulation through autoconstruction. His central insight shows that autoconstruction isn’t about alleviating poverty, but rather about systematically reducing labour reproduction costs. When housing costs are met through unpaid self-help labour and debt, autoconstruction allows employers to pay wages that only cover food, transportation, and basic survival needs.

Kowarick’s (2024) concept of urban spoliation demonstrates how this process operates through multiple dimensions. Beyond housing, it encompasses the systematic absence or precariousness of socially essential goods and services, such as inadequate public transportation forcing workers into lengthy commutes, insufficient schools that perpetuate educational inequality, limited health and sanitation services that create systematic health disparities, and the absence of leisure facilities that restrict cultural and social development.

Urban spoliation is the systematic denial of the collective benefits of goods and services to workers whose labour generates the wealth that funds public investments. Moreover, São Paulo’s metropolitan expansion, driven by the clandestine land market, is characterised by a fragmented and segregated urban fabric that adds value to large vacant plots between the periphery and the centre (Kowarick, 2024).

The Brazilian case reveals complex mechanisms through which supposed urban disorder benefits capital while generating precariousness. The case of Brazil reported by Kowarick (2024) relates to a period of late urbanisation. Still, Rolnik (2019) also employs the process of accumulation through urban spoliation to describe different and more recent processes of urban explosion in cities on the west coast of Africa, where urbanisation continues rapidly despite economic regression and declining employment opportunities in urban centres. In these cases, super-exploitation of labour is also supported by urban spoliation and monopoly in both rural and urban areas.

Roy (2009b) contributes to understanding this phenomenon by emphasising the production of inequality and informality as a form of value extraction, which reflects not a planning failure but a systematic

spatial strategy, highlighting the role played by the state and urban planning tools.

Concentrated infrastructure investment and land tenure status create varying land values across urban space, where public investments effectively subsidises private property appreciation in privileged areas while systematically denying basic services to informal settlements. This unequal development pattern intensifies and enables what Rolnik (2019) describes as territorial assets that can be strategically captured through market dynamics, as well as through processes such as gentrification, eviction, and dispossession, facilitated by status of informality and illegality. Rolnik (2019) identifies informality as a dual mechanism of exclusion. At the same time, informal settlements and housing remain affordable precisely because their irregular status undermines access to formal credit, infrastructure, and services; this same irregularity enables systematic undervaluation that facilitates future appropriation (Rolnik, 2019).

Rolnik's analysis indicates that slum removals may be the most direct contemporary expression of rent recovery. Using mechanisms that are sometimes explicit and violent, or designed as urban upgrading to support population substitution strategies, these processes systematically displace original residents to the urban peripheries while capturing central land values for formal market development. Territorial assets built up through decades of resident investment and community effort are appropriated through removal programmes that find legitimacy while enabling systematic dispossession, serving as another example of "creative destruction" (Harvey, 2014) of existing arrangements.

Informal settlements. Who decides what is "informal"?

Building on this reasoning, Ananya Roy's research on urban informality reveals that informal settlements should not be understood as existing beyond state control, but rather as deliberate products of state practices, constituting an "idiom of urbanisation" through dynamic processes of informality that manage resources, particularly land (Roy, 2009b). Both Rolnik (2019) and Roy (2005) argue that the state actively fosters informality and precariousness. They argue that informal settlements are shaped, sustained, and removed through consistent state intervention, contrary to narratives of state absence or delayed response.

The state engages in spatial production through planning practices and territorial administration. As Watson (2009) notes, North models have greatly influenced urban planning and practice approaches in the Global South, primarily due to colonial legacies and imperialist dominance. Watson (2009) states that although new planning methods have appeared, such as participatory planning, the dominant culture still relies on modernist zoning, master planning, and the enforcement of standardised "best practices", posing significant challenges for poor urban residents.

By setting urban planning standards that are unattainable for low-income households, such as large minimum lot sizes, restricting land use, neglecting speculative land retention and labour super-exploitation, as well as failing to produce social housing and turning a blind eye to large-scale occupations of public or environmentally protected areas, the state fosters informality. This situation creates a paradox in which, while traditional and modernist urban planning methods, theories and practices are considered outdated, inapplicable, and deficient, they persist because they serve economic and political interests, protect exclusive land rights, and support real estate developers (Watson, 2009).

However, as demonstrated by Roy (2005) and Rolnik (2019), the institutional planning apparatus operates in a highly flexible manner, with selective adaptability. "Formal" urban planning and administration create margins for manoeuvre as convenience requires. Roy (2005) uses the term "state of exception" to illustrate how legal and urban planning systems determine which forms of illegality can remain and which must be contested.

Based on examples from Mexico's ejido developments, Rolnik (2019) illustrate dynamics where the state legally prohibits the sale of communal land while, in practice, enabling urban development through layers of irregularity and negotiations between all involved parties. Showing the example not as an isolated case, but alongside other ones where occupations by wealthy people in areas not planned for occupation are regularised, while poor people are removed, often with the use of violence. Rolnik (2019) adds that territorial stigma becomes a fundamental element in legitimating expulsion, while maintaining populations in a state of permanent stress and transience, perpetuating class and racial hierarchies that have been historically established.

About the ways in which informality is also associated with forms of wealth and power, Roy (2009a) observes, "the splintering of urbanism does not occur at the fissure between formality and informality but rather, in fractal fashion, within the informalized production of space", (p.826) where slum dwellers' urban informality differs from urban elites' informality only through class power that commands infrastructure, services, and legitimacy.

The reflections above emphasise the complexity behind terms such as informal settlements or precarious settlements, which are often used interchangeably. However, in the tangled reality of the Global South, informality is not always directly linked to precarious housing or urban conditions. Conversely, housing precariousness can also exist in older state-built housing complexes that have deteriorated over time, where residents continue to face poverty that hinders proper maintenance of their homes. Therefore, this research focuses on the precariousness of housing within informal settlements, as the research interest is closely connected to processes of autoconstruction in peripheral urbanisation. These issues will be further explored in the following sections.

Transversal Engagements in Peripheral Urbanisation.

Caldeira's concept of peripheral urbanisation adds a new layer to this theoretical framework. The anthropologist's comparative analysis of Istanbul, Santiago, and São Paulo heterogeneous landscapes suggests that peripheral urbanisation processes intersect with official logics in transversal ways, creating entanglements involving state actors, private developers, and citizens, resulting in more nuanced relationships than those of inclusion or exclusion (Caldeira, 2017).

Caldeira highlights that in peripheral urbanisation, the way housing becomes affordable through alternative land markets, land occupations, and incremental autoconstruction enables the urban poor to forge a place in the city despite precarious conditions. The author highlights the agency perspective in the creation of alternative provision circuits.

As primary agents, residents build and transform spaces over long periods using limited resources gathered gradually, resulting in landscapes of permanent construction and a makeshift urbanisation. Caldeira's emphasis on autoconstruction's distinctive temporality, as "it involves spaces that are never quite done, always being altered, expanded, and elaborated upon" (Caldeira, 2017, p.5), adds new dimensions to Kowarick's (2024) economic analysis. The same incremental process that increases exploitation also challenges the alienated relationship between the production and consumption of housing and urban spaces as products, fostering new forms of political subjectivity (Caldeira, 2017).

The state usually intervenes after spaces are already constructed and inhabited. This constitutes matters of struggles and ongoing negotiations, an essentially political process where residents are not passive. Caldeira's comparative analysis of key urban centres across different countries and continents highlights how peripheral urbanisation faces various contemporary pressures - from financialised land markets to state-led commodification of housing. However, her framework emphasises how peripheral urbanisation "generates new modes of politics through practices that produce new kinds of citizens, claims, and contestations (Caldeira, 2017, p.9)." Caldeira's reflections relate to the concept of governance proposed by Simone and Pieterse (2017).

Simone and Pieterse's (2017) concept of urban governance challenges traditional institutional frameworks by emphasising the role of informal networks and everyday practices in managing city life. In their work, which mainly focuses on African and Asian cities, they argue that governance emerges not just from formal government structures, but through what they call "people as infrastructure" - the social relationships, networks, and collaborative practices that residents create to navigate urban challenges. This approach recognises how communities develop their own systems of organisation, resources, and problem-solving that operate alongside, or sometimes in place of, official municipal services.

Simone and Pieterse's (2017) urban governance framework highlights the importance of flexibility and improvisation in how cities in the Global South actually function. They examine how residents, traders, religious groups, and other urban actors form temporary assemblages to address specific needs, from waste management to security to economic opportunities. Rather than viewing informal governance as a failure of the state, the authors present it as a productive force that generates innovative solutions and creates new forms of what is the "urban". Their work demonstrates how governance in many cities, especially in the Global South, relies on constant negotiation between formal institutions and these dynamic, everyday practices of urban life.

In a complementary line of reasoning, Roy (2009a) describes informality as a form of 'quiet encroachment' by subaltern groups on formal systems, also highlighting its potential to reinforce precariousness. She (2009) warns that not viewing urban informality as a state of crisis should not lead to seeing it through the lens of "urban poor's heroism". She emphasises that the recognition of communities' capacity to meet their own needs independently and resort to creative responses to state deficiencies should not justify austerity policies or absolve the state of its responsibility to ensure fundamental rights.

Urban Political Interventions: navigating complexity through Doubleness

Building on the insights explored so far, housing precariousness in urban informal settlements emerges as a manifestation of the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in contemporary urbanisation processes. In peripheral urbanisation as a mode of city-making, mechanisms that enable capital accumulation systematically reproduce inequality and inadequate housing conditions. Yet, simultaneously, as numerous urban actors negotiate and contest resources and space through both formal and informal processes—visible and invisible means—the urban poor forge a place in the city, construct their territorial identities, and develop social infrastructures while creating solutions for their material needs.

In view of the tension warned by Roy (2009a; 2009b) and Simone and Pieterse (2017), the challenge lies not in romanticising informal practices nor in dismissing them, but in understanding how they reveal possibilities for different approaches to urban governance and intervention.

Given this complexity, Simone and Pieterse (2017) argue that it becomes necessary to think politically within urban environments characterised by such apparent contradictions. This political thinking requires moving beyond conventional approaches that organise urban interventions through predetermined hierarchies and separate sectors. Instead, it demands embracing strategies that can create connections across different territories and scales, as well as spheres of urban governance.

The authors propose that effective urban political intervention operates through what they term a "double approach". Doubleness has two

complementary lenses. It leads to working simultaneously through different scales, including local and global, at both metropolitan system levels and targeted interventions at neighbourhood scales.

Additionally, the double approach requires sensitivity and interventions that operate across both intimate and macro-political spheres. Doubleness also reflects a recognition that formal government institutions and processes cannot adequately address the scale of housing shortages, employment creation needs, and basic service provision required in contemporary Global South cities at once (Simone & Pieterse, 2017). It demands respect for how things are accomplished according to their own internal logic, while maintaining an ethical commitment to how things could work differently.

This conceptual framework aligns with Watson's (2009) discussion of the tension between conflicting rationalities in urban governance. Watson highlights techno-managerial rationalities—defined by formal institutional methods, bureaucratic procedures, and neoliberal economic principles—alongside what she calls "survival rationalities." These survival strategies are complex adaptive approaches used by marginalised populations to secure shelter, maintain livelihoods, and essential services in challenging urban environments.

Importantly, these rationalities are not embodied separately by people, institutions, or things. Rather, they function as dynamic, overlapping systems of logic that individuals and communities navigate simultaneously. The interface zone represents the fluid social and political space where these varying rationalities intersect and interact. Rather than constituting a fixed boundary, this zone becomes a site of ongoing negotiation, contestation, and adaptation where the double approach finds its operational terrain.

Redescription as political method

Working a double approach within interface zones requires what Simone and Pieterse (2017) term "redescription"—an inventive method that attempts to compose urban knowledge of potential futures alongside present realities. This approach does not seek to establish or confirm definitive knowledge of urban conditions, but rather develops an understanding of how different urban realities can be enacted through trials, experiments, and creative practices.

Redescription operates by examining the boundaries where different urban conditions meet—spaces that various urban differentiations share in common. At these intersections, additional dimensions of each component become visible, revealing the reciprocal relationships, differences, and interdependencies that exist among elements we typically see as separate or opposed (Simone & Pieterse, 2017).

Resonance: the process of urban association

Central to urban political intervention is the concept of resonance — both the process and outcome of people, materials, and places sensing and attending to each other among numerous competing demands for attention (Simone & Pieterse, 2017). Resonance functions as the emotional and practical process through which people and things associate with each other, finding ways to act as components in operations larger than their particular functions and histories.

When urban elements resonate with each other, connections develop not from imposed comprehensive plans or predetermined logic, but from processes where things extend themselves toward each other. This involves institutions, knowledge production practices, and different ways of accomplishing tasks, finding concrete opportunities to consider each other. For urban development work, resonance becomes critical because it highlights mechanisms for leveraging existing resources and collaborating with them in new ways.

Cities generate enormous energy, not limited to powering machines, but energy from all transactions and intersections among urban life components. However, much of how urban space is organised functions to block resonance, channel it narrowly, and limit connection possibilities. Even calls for innovation and transformation often emphasise that change must be continuous and transformations stable, potentially constraining the very dynamism that enables resonance (Simone & Pieterse, 2017).

Experimentation and political imperatives

Understanding the importance of resonance enables the identification of areas where experimentation should be encouraged, expanded, and fostered. According to Simone & Pieterse (2017), to develop “new urban worlds”, urban political interventions must simultaneously engage with formal government structures and insurgent mobilisations of resistance, both public spheres and intimate spaces of local practices and inhabitation. This approach requires a flexible understanding of time capable of tracking the implications of interventions as they move across various places and sectors at different speeds and formats.

Simone and Pieterse (2017) identify three political imperatives for effective experimentation. First, understanding current economic crises requires recognising contradictions between established capital and new sources of wealth creation in knowledge-based economies. Second, progressive urbanists must remain focused on material improvement and well-being for urban majorities, addressing fundamental questions about health, sanitation, water access, affordable care, and security from violence. Third, rejuvenating insurgent coalitions of social movements, NGOs, and community associations, which form the living foundation of everyday spiritual, economic, and cultural practices, becomes essential.

Conclusion

The framework of urban political intervention developed by Simone and Pieterse (2017) offers tools for navigating the complexity that characterises housing precariousness in informal settlements. Through concepts of doubleness, redescription, and resonance, this approach suggests ways of working with rather than against the contradictions inherent in peripheral urbanisation processes.

The authors emphasise that these concepts do not provide definitive answers but rather inform political practice of sustaining a double view that affirms simultaneous experiments at everyday life levels and in policy and governance worlds. This framework opens up space for exploring how different vocabularies might create productive tensions with conventional urban practice, remaining attentive to the resonances that emerge when different urban elements find ways to connect with one another.

Bhan's (2019) "repair" concept provides an example of how such a framework can be explored. Instead of concentrating on the housing "shortage" addressed through new construction, Bhan suggests that many households in need of adequate housing already own homes that require improvements through incremental practices. His concept of repair emphasises restoring function, working within immediate material contexts, and relying on accessible knowledge rather than distant expertise, without damaging the structures that already work, both materially and socially, and without necessarily prescribing specific directions for policy or practices.

The title of the thesis, 'From Upgrading to Repair', is a play on words to illustrate how the framework of urban political intervention can inform different approaches to understanding housing improvement practices in informal settlements. Such approaches may offer possibilities for understanding housing improvement interventions in informal settlements not merely as external solutions to identified problems, but as processes that can build upon existing practices while expanding their potential for creating better and fairer urban environments.

How these theoretical insights can be applied in specific urban contexts remains a question without a straightforward answer; however, they can always be further explored.

The next chapter presents the first step of this research's contribution: exploring how practice in housing improvement in informal settlements has been institutionally framed and reported in recent academic literature. The literature review aimed to identify the gaps where this master's investigation could provide a contribution to the development of critically and politically engaged knowledge on the topic.

Theoretical Framework Image Gallery

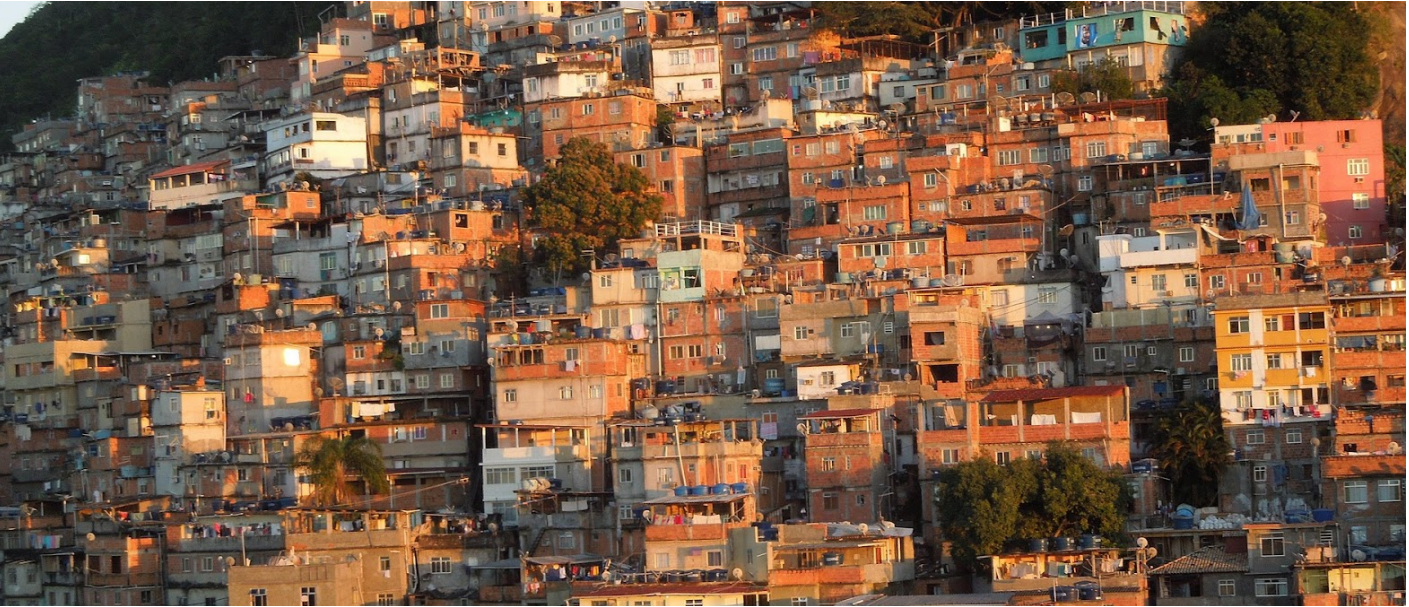


Figure 01. Urban settlement in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Note. Photo by @anja_schindler, 2018, in Pixabay (<https://pixabay.com/pt/photos/brasil-favela-rio-de-janeiro-3547283/>). Free to use under the Pixabay Content License.



Figure 02. Vidigal slum, an urban informal settlement located in one of the most valued areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Note. Photo by @Jose Guertzenstein, 2020, in Pixabay (<https://pixabay.com/pt/photos/brasil-rio-panorama-turismo-praia-4808992/>). Free to use under the Pixabay Content License.



Figure 03. Urban landscape contrasts, highlighting the juxtaposition of high-rise/high-end buildings with lower-income neighborhoods and densely built informal housing in the foreground.

Note. Photo by @Gezer Amorim, 2024, in Pexel (<https://www.pexels.com/pt-br/foto/cidade-meio-urbano-por-do-sol-construcao-25395966/>). Free to use under the Pexel Content License.



Figure 04. The image highlights the self-built occupation in a hillside area in Santa Marta Favela, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Note. Photo by @Nicolas DEBRAY, 2020, in Pixabay (<https://pixabay.com/pt/photos/rio-brasil-favelas-santa-marta-4904886/>). Free to use under the Pixabay Content License.

03

Literature Review.



Framing a practice: Housing improvement in informal settlements.

The previous chapter explored the theoretical debates and conceptual implications surrounding the main topics of this thesis. Based on this foundation, this chapter turns to practice reporting, both within institutions and in recent academic literature, analysing how key actors – both international and Brazilian – define, measure, and intervene in housing precariousness.

These institutional framings define categories, monitor indicators, and guide funding and public policies. Terms like slum, precarious settlement, or favela are not neutral. They determine which territories are recognised as legitimate targets of policy interventions and how resources are allocated. They also often reduce diverse social realities to a set of measurable deficiencies, compared against normative standards of “adequate housing.”

2.1 Framing Housing Precariousness within International and Brazilian Institutional Frameworks

“Slum” has long served as a general term to describe specific forms of urban development, though its meaning shifts depending on who defines it and when (López & Flores García, 2023). While diverse in form, housing produced by low-income urban populations under precarious conditions has been the subject of global systematisation efforts, particularly by international agencies seeking to establish parameters for housing as a human right.

In this sense, The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2008) is overall considered the global authority in operationalizing the concept. It defines slums as densely populated urban areas with substandard housing and poverty, where dwellings range from improvised to more permanent structures, with limited or deteriorated access to essential services and infrastructure. Five main housing deprivations have been used to orient objectives, targets, and indicators worldwide related to slums:

- ★ Lack of access to water
- ★ Lack of access to sanitation facilities
- ★ Lack of sufficient living area
- ★ Lack of housing durability
- ★ Lack of security of tenure

These five operational criteria have become central in monitoring global targets, particularly within the Sustainable Development Goals framework. The goal 11.1 aims, by 2030, to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and to upgrade slums. This is measured by the specific indicator 11.1.1 (“proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements, or inadequate housing” (United Nations, 2015, p. 26).

According to UN-Habitat's Housing, Slums and Informal Settlements Data (2023), around 1.1 billion people worldwide currently live in slums or informal settlements. This number is projected to rise to 1.6 billion by 2030 if current trends continue, despite reductions in relative percentages. The institutional definition of slums thus remains a powerful tool: it standardizes what “housing precarity” means in global statistics and directs international aid and national policy priorities.

At a global level, the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is responsible for coordinating the SDGs reporting process and compiling data for all over 200 indicators in the framework. This process ensures comparability of data across countries. In this way, UNDESA functions as the broker of institutional legitimacy: national definitions feed into a global database, which then frames international debates on housing and urban inequality.

Alongside UN-Habitat, the Cities Alliance has emerged as one of the most significant international partnerships advancing the upgrading of informal settlements. Established as a multi-donor fund and hosted by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Cities Alliance operates as both a financing mechanism and a convening platform that brings together governments, development agencies, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector. Its mandate is to combat urban poverty through practical interventions that strengthen municipal capacities, expand access to services, and promote inclusive urban development. With over one billion people worldwide currently living in slums, Cities Alliance situates informal settlements at the centre of global development debates, framing them not only as sites of deprivation but also as vital economic and social spaces that sustain much of the urban informal economy (Cities Alliance, 2024).

Another central international stakeholder in this debate is the World Bank. Its role combines statistical monitoring with the development of financing strategies and programmes. Its “Population living in slums (% of urban population)” indicator mirrors UN-Habitat's methodology and data, while its lending practices have historically shaped housing and upgrading policies in the Global South. Since the 1980s, World Bank-funded projects have promoted large-scale slum upgrading, focusing on infrastructure and land titling (World Bank, 2021).

While acknowledging nuances and updates over time, institutional reports consistently define precarious housing and settlements in relation to their perceived “deficiencies” or divergence from normative standards. These normative standards are defined within uneven and exclusionary political and economic power structures. These standards, however, emerge from historically uneven and exclusionary socio-political structures. While critical engagement with these framings is necessary, a shared conceptual ground is also essential for shaping policy and programmatic responses.

In Brazil, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] is the national authority in defining and measuring precarious settlements. For decades it used the category *aglomerados subnormais* (subnormal clusters), highlighting irregularity and informality as aspects below a level of normality. In 2024, IBGE announced a shift: it will once again adopt the terms *favelas* and *comunidades urbanas*. This change followed dialogue with researchers and social movements, aligning the official terminology not with a notion of discrepancy from the norm, but with social struggles for self-determination and rights to adequate housing (Giannella et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, IBGE continues to operationalize these territories based on deficiencies: lack or incompleteness of public services, predominance of self-built housing, and occupation of areas legally or environmentally restricted. This framing captures vulnerabilities but also reinforces a view of favelas as spaces of lack, rather than dynamic urban communities.

The Fundação João Pinheiro (FJP) offers Brazil's most influential assessment of precarity by focusing on housing deficits, combining quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitative shortages refer to unmet demand for new units, while qualitative inadequacies capture deficits in infrastructure, services, and habitability standards. The most recent report estimates that while 8.3% of households face a quantitative housing deficit, 42% experience qualitative inadequacies (FJP, 2021).

FJP (2021) further distinguishes inadequacies at the unit level and at the urban infrastructure level. Its 2016–2019 assessment revealed that inadequate access to water and sanitation were the most common problems, with 10.7 million households lacking reliable water supply and 4.9 million lacking proper sanitation. Building-related inadequacies also rose over this period, from 10.3 to 11.2 million households. Key issues included lack of water storage facilities (9 million households), inappropriate sleeping arrangements (1.9 million), inadequate roofing (1 million), absence of bathrooms (359,000), and poor flooring (69,000).

This report also emphasised stark regional disparities across Brazil, with the North and Northeast regions facing more severe and multiple housing inadequacies than other parts of the country. These findings underscore Brazil's ongoing struggle to ensure adequate housing conditions for its population and reveal the significant work still required to address persistent regional inequalities and infrastructure gaps, particularly in basic water and sanitation services, which continue to impact millions of households.

Reinstated in 2023, the Ministry of Cities is the political body that translates institutional indicators into housing policies in Brazil. It develops and coordinates programs for low-income populations, aligning with FJP's measurements and IBGE's categories.

These institutional frameworks define precarious housing operationally through indicators, categories, and statistical thresholds and across different scales. These are indispensable tools for monitoring progress

and designing policies, despite the limitations they also entail. By defining settlements through deficiencies and indicators, institutions risk naturalizing inequalities and overlooking the historical, political, and cultural processes that produce housing precarity.

Moreover, categories do not always overlap: a precarious dwelling may be located in the formal city, while an informal settlement may include housing that is not precarious. For this reason, this research adopts the term precarious housing in informal settlement, recognizing its intersection with slums, favelas and autoconstruction, while focusing on the concrete inadequacies that affect the daily lives of residents.

2.2 Housing precariousness responses, Global South and Brazilian contexts.

Institutional responses to precarious settlements have shifted significantly over the past decades across the global South. As documented by the UN (2003), earliest approaches were characterized by a profound denial. Governments excluded precarious settlements from official maps and planning instruments, treating them as temporary and assuming that general economic growth alone would absorb their residents, eliminating such imprints from the urban fabric. From the 1950s to the 1970s, this logic gave way to large-scale slum clearance and resettlement in public housing complexes. Yet forced evictions and relocations rarely offered viable alternatives. Rather than eliminating precarious settlements, these interventions displaced them to peripheral areas, reinforced cycles of poverty, and fueled the growth of new informal settlements (UN, 2003). Despite being framed by the UN as a historically bounded approach, Mitlin (2016) points out that this is still a dominant approach in many countries around the world.

By the 1980s and 1990s, and following the rise of neoliberal policies, governments shifted toward market-based housing provision, incentivising private real estate actors to serve low-income groups, though these strategies often failed to reach the poorest households. Despite attempts to privatise services, companies struggled in achieving the desired profit rates, withdrawing from the market and advocating for public subsidies (Mitlin, 2016). At the same time, social movements pushed for the recognition of precarious settlements as not transitory but structural features of urbanisation. This recognition underpinned a new generation of self-help and in-situ upgrading programs, which focused on improving existing communities by extending basic services, securing tenure, and facilitating access to credit. Supported by international institutions such as the World Bank, these initiatives demonstrated measurable benefits in health outcomes and quality of life. However, they also faced limitations: weak state follow-up, excessive reliance on residents' unpaid labour, and the indebtedness of poor families and governments (Magalhães, 2016; Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; UN, 2003).

From the late 1990s onwards, the so-called “enabling” approach and participatory upgrading practices gained traction as global best practices. This approach emphasised community involvement in planning, decision-making, and project implementation, empowering residents to take ownership over improvements. Partnerships among local governments, NGOs, and international organisations have played crucial roles in addressing precarious housing issues and integrating health, education, and economic empowerment alongside housing improvements (Magalhães, 2016; Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; UN, 2003). Yet the broader political economy constrained these gains.

As Crispi & Lewis-Lettington (2022) show, despite some evolutionary steps, more holistic slum upgrading programmes face deep-rooted structural constraints. When considering the bigger picture in the contemporary economic context, globalisation and inter-city economic competition have exacerbated social disparities within and between urban centres. Wealthier cities attract greater investment, while those excluded from the global economy struggle to address persistent slums and informal settlements (Watson, 2009).

These dynamics have created tensions between economic development, global competitiveness, and social inclusion. Municipal priorities pursue “world-class city” visions (Braathen et al., 2015), and the “competitive city” (Arantes et al., 2000) often conflicts with the basic and immediate needs of poor residents. Development strategies channel public resources towards prestigious projects, including event centres, airports, sports and cultural facilities—particularly those driven by mega-events such as the World Cup and Olympics—rather than social investments. These approaches frequently result in evictions, forced relocations, and the displacement of marginalised communities from central urban areas (Braathen et al., 2015; Arantes et al., 2000).

Governance transformations have been further shaping these dynamics. In the global North, urban management shifted “from government to governance,” with more actors and scales of decision-making (Watson, 2009). In the global South, neoliberal reforms promoted structural adjustment, “good governance” frameworks, and reliance on social capital, gradually reshaping state-society relations (Watson, 2009). These reforms left enduring tensions: planning is at once pressured toward deregulation for economic growth and tasked with addressing urban inequality through tools such as inclusive zoning or land value capture. In both contexts, public-private collaborations, civil society integration, knowledge-sharing frameworks, and capacity building are gaining prominence in urban governance. These developments have significant implications for addressing housing precariousness, but their outcomes remain uneven, warranting further investigation.

Sutherland et al. (2015) examined changes in housing policy across six cities in Brazil, India, Peru, and South Africa, noting a shift towards more socially progressive approaches. However, the implementation of these policies advances slowly, with demolition and eviction remaining

persistent threats to informal dwellers. Housing policies generally continue to prioritise quantitative targets over qualitative aspects (Sutherland et al. 2015; Frediani, Cociña & Roche, 2023). According to the authors, national governments heavily rely on non-state actors in upgrading precarious housing and land tenure formalization procedures. Their research highlights the significant gap between policy principles and practice, suggesting the need for more diversified, innovative, and incremental housing policies, with Brazil showing some progress in this direction.

Brazilian housing policies broadly reflect these global patterns but also show distinctive institutional innovations and contradictions. After re-democratisation and the 1988 Constitution, a new rights-based framework for housing and the city emerged, culminating in the elaboration of the City Statute (2001). The statute created progressive legal and planning instruments for land regularisation, inclusive zoning, and the production of social housing, positioning Brazil as an international reference. However, as Rolnik (2021) notes, two decades later many of these instruments remain only partially implemented.

The evolution of upgrading initiatives in Brazil, as documented by Coelho (2017), has largely focused on providing urban infrastructure (water, sanitation, roads, lighting) while neglecting the improvement of housing units themselves. In the 2000s, federal programs such as the Social Interest Housing Subsidy (PSH) and the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC-UAP) did channel resources to upgrading, but these efforts were soon overshadowed by the Minha Casa, Minha Vida (MCMV) programme. Rather than prioritizing the upgrading or urbanization of existing settlements, the program has historically concentrated on constructing entirely new housing complexes, often located on the peripheries of metropolitan regions. These developments, frequently distant from employment opportunities and poorly served by infrastructure and transport, reproduce spatial segregation and have been the subject of extensive critique (Santo Amore et al., 2015).

More recent policies reveal the persistence of self-help logics. The federal Renovation Card programme subsidised construction materials but required residents to cover labour costs and manage works independently, reinforcing the burden on families to resolve housing inadequacies on their own (Coelho, 2017).

Balbim et al. (2023) and Coelho (2017) highlight that operationalising and scaling up housing improvement initiatives in Brazil faces persistent structural challenges. Long-term upgrading programmes require highly customised technical solutions, tailored monitoring systems, and sustained inter-governmental coordination, conditions difficult to achieve due to the country's extension and complexity. Budgetary constraints, limited technical capacity within public institutions, and rigid management and contracting arrangements further hinder implementation. These obstacles are compounded by political dynamics: unlike large-scale housing complexes, upgrading projects yield

incremental and less visible results, making them less attractive to politicians seeking quick, demonstrable achievements. As a result, upgrading policies often lose priority in favour of mass housing production, despite their greater potential to address residents' needs.

Alongside public programmes, non-governmental and private-sector actors have increasingly engaged in precarious settlement upgrading.

On one hand, the private sector has begun to frame precarious housing as an emerging market opportunity, with social enterprises developing microfinance and other financial innovations to fund home improvements. While these models expand the range of actors and resources, they also raise serious concerns.

As Rolnik (2015) warns; such schemes often align with poverty reduction models rooted in entrepreneurship and financial discipline rather than in redistribution, opportunity creation, and equity. This raises concerns about the social consequences of transferring housing responsibilities to poor households, deepening indebtedness in already vulnerable communities. As demonstrated by Moreno's (2022) work on the Vivenda institution, a well-known housing improvement management platform in Brazil, which operates as an "impact business" — a business model aimed at addressing social issues through financially sustainable initiatives. She argues that the model does not offer solutions to social problems but instead focuses on expanding financialisation into peripheral territories, viewing them as a new area for capital's valorisation (Moreno, 2022).

On the other hand, non-profit NGOs — often working in collaboration with residents' associations and universities — played a central role in the approval of the Technical Assistance Law (Law 11.888/2008), which guarantees free architectural and engineering services to low-income families. However, implementation has remained fragmented and sporadic across the country (Maricato, 2017; Balbim et al., 2023).

Together, these diverse approaches underscore the fragmented, experimental, and often contradictory landscape of non-state participation in Brazilian housing policy.

In this context, the Periferia Viva (Live Periphery) programme marks a new phase in federal housing policy by seeking to integrate land regularisation with physical housing improvements. The initiative follows a structured implementation pathway: municipalities first formalise participation through adhesion agreements; promoting agents then identify eligible settlements and submit proposals; the Ministry of Cities selects viable projects; and financial agents manage contracts and disburse resources. Promoting agents — typically private companies or NGOs — are responsible for executing the technical work, which includes surveys, legalisation projects, and targeted housing improvements in sanitation, roofing, structural reinforcements, and essential infrastructure. At the operational level, architects, engineers, surveyors, and social workers form the backbone of the programme, bridging federal policy objectives with on-the-ground realities. Originally, the programme

required promoting agents to preferentially hire local workers and engage community leaders, thereby embedding participatory development into its design.

However, subsequent regulatory amendments removed these provisions, shifting the balance of power: while the programme continues to combine tenure security and housing improvements, it does so under a governance model where promoters (both for-profit and non-profit) gain greater discretion, while residents' formal role is diminished. This evolution exemplifies the broader tension in Brazilian housing policy between participatory ideals and the centralisation of decision-making in technical and financial actors.

2.3 NGO engagement with housing in precarious settlements

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged as one of key actors in addressing housing challenges across the Global South, particularly since the 1970s (Magalhães, 2016; Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; Baruah, 2007; UN, 2003). Their rise coincided with a broader governmental shift away from direct housing provision toward “enabling” approaches (Ramanath & Ebrahim, 2010; UN, 2003). The result has been a complex landscape of interventions, partnerships, and contradictions, which requires careful examination.

From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, NGOs functioned largely as voluntary, ideologically driven organisations in partnership with social movements. Their focus was community mobilisation and political advocacy, often confronting oppressive regimes in urban squatter settlements (Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; UN, 2003; Miraftab, 1997).

Miraftab (1997) identifies a second phase, beginning in the mid-1980s, marked by institutional transformation. Structural adjustment and neoliberal reforms compelled NGOs to professionalise, expand services, and secure international funding, reshaping their relationships with both communities and the state. Analysing the Latin American context, Zibechi (2012) highlights that NGOs emerged from the shadow of military dictatorships as democratic alternatives to banned political parties. Through popular education methods, they developed participatory practices but also blurred boundaries: NGO functionaries often acted simultaneously as state officials in leftist governments, and grassroots activists.

By the 1990s, NGOs were no longer peripheral but central development actors across multiple scales, influencing international guidelines, national policies, and local practices (Mitlin, 2001; UN, 2003). This shift, however, introduced persistent contradictions that continue to define their role in housing.

The work of NGOs in the field of housing in the global South is varied and multifaceted. The literature shows that these organisations operate across a wide spectrum of activities, often engaging in several domains through different projects. Each of these domains present distinct

opportunities, challenges, and limitations, reflecting both the complexity of addressing housing precariousness and the diverse institutional roles that NGOs assume. The following summary outlines the main areas of action identified in recent research.

- ★ **Emergency, post-disaster housing:** NGOs have been providing immediate shelter and material support in situations of emergency, especially after disasters such as earthquakes, landslides and flooding (Crawford & Morrison, 2021). While these interventions are effective in providing immediate housing - and sometimes provide permanent dwellings - they can also neglect longer-term planning and social issues, such as the integration of affected communities in neighbourhood structures. Concerns also persist regarding equity, integrity, and the preferential treatment of microcredit borrowers in distribution processes (Mitchell & Macció, 2021; Islam & Walkerden, 2015).
- ★ **Housing finance and microcredit:** Expanding financial access for low-income households has been another key line of NGO action. However, repayment difficulties frequently reveal the fragility of these models and their potential to exacerbate indebtedness among vulnerable groups. Inclusive housing finance schemes are likely to require both capital and interest rate subsidies, emphasising the persistent challenge of balancing social impact with financial sustainability. (Lines et al., 2020; Islam & Walkerden, 2015; Moreno, 2020; Mitlin, 2016)
- ★ **Community mobilisation and capacity-building:** A distinctive contribution of NGOs has been the training of local leaders and the strengthening of community-based organisations. Such initiatives seek to empower residents and sustain grassroots action. Yet, questions remain about the long-term durability of these capacities once external funding and project support come to an end (Barella, 2024; Martins & Rocha, 2019).
- ★ **Slum upgrading:** NGOs have also played a role in implementing participatory projects improving communal infrastructures related to water, sanitation, and drainage, with measurable gains in living conditions (Storey, 2021; Baruah, 2007). Such interventions focus on larger infrastructures but do not reach the scale of the housing unit. Yet their ability to address deeper structural issues—especially land rights and tenure security—remains limited (Ramanath & Ebrahim, 2010; Dovey & Recio, 2023; Devkar et al., 2019).
- ★ **Housing improvement works:** NGOs employ different solutions in improving housing conditions in informal settlements. These works often rely on community mapping to develop small-scale designs and construction interventions. Scholars recognise the societal returns of such interventions but also highlight the difficulties in assessing broader impacts of these practices. These

include their limited statistical significance; the need of a longer time-scale to understand impacts; and the difficulty to understand causality in a complex web of relations (Frediani et al., 2023; Martins & Rocha, 2019; Galiani et al., 2017).

Despite some of the aforementioned achievements, several persistent challenges are identified in the literature. Strychar and Day (2019) highlight that scale limitations continue to be a significant concern, with many initiatives struggling to move beyond project-based interventions. Islam and Walkerden (2015) identify coordination issues among different actors that frequently result in inefficiencies and duplication of efforts. Additionally, Martins and Rocha (2019) pose questions regarding construction quality and adherence to safety standards, emphasising the need for more robust quality assurance mechanisms.

The relationship between NGOs and government bodies adds another layer of complexity. Ramanath and Ebrahim (2010) identify various modes of interaction, ranging from confrontational to cooperative approaches. Some NGOs employ multiple strategies simultaneously, reflecting the dynamic nature of these relationships. This complexity highlights the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of how different engagement strategies influence the final housing improvements.

Miraftab (1997) comprehensively described NGOs' trajectory post-World War II as "flirting with the enemy," navigating between grassroots legitimacy and dependence on state and donor agendas. Professionalisation grants NGOs greater access to government resources but risks diluting their advocacy role, as seen in the Homeless People's Federation Philippines (HPFP), where closer ties to government compromised oppositional capacity (Yu & Karaos, 2004). Similarly, Huchzermeyer (2023) shows how the global expansion of Slum Dwellers International (SDI) produced tensions between local organising methods and international advocacy roles.

International financing further complicates autonomy. Miraftab's notion of the "paradox of empowerment through dependency" (1997) captures how external resources can compel NGOs to prioritise donor agendas over community needs. This dynamic is particularly evident in housing improvement projects, where funding requirements often dictate intervention methods. Simone (2017, 2018) expands this critique, portraying NGOs as actors caught between underpaid staff, fickle funders, and precarious urban realities. He calls for rejuvenated "insurgent coalitions" of NGOs, social movements, and communities, which could translate grassroots struggles into signals intelligible to bureaucracies and markets.

In Brazil, debates on NGOs and housing reflect these global tensions but with specific trajectories. Gordilho (1999) offers a contrasting perspective, perceiving NGO evolution and institutionalisation as potentially beneficial for achieving tangible housing improvements. While Miraftab warns against the potential reproduction of dependency

relationships and the risk of NGOs becoming instruments of neoliberal policy, Gordilho (1999) highlights their positive potential for connecting community needs with government resources, viewing NGOs as possible reform agents within state systems. The Brazilian analysis of NGOs' work in favelas illustrates efforts to sustain both service delivery and political advocacy roles, indicating that NGOs can act as catalysts for social inclusion and urban integration while encouraging the scaling of successful interventions. However, as Simone (2018) points, sustaining this dual role becomes increasingly difficult as NGOs become more reliant on international funding and government partnerships.

Recent discussions have also centred on the role of microfinance in supporting housing improvements in informal settlements. Some NGOs and social enterprises have embraced this approach as a strategy to scale up interventions, based on the assumption that a segment of favela residents can afford to finance incremental home improvements (Coelho, 2017). Martins and Rocha (2019) highlight the transformative role of small-scale NGOs which combine technical assistance and microcredit in ways that empower residents to co-design and implement incremental upgrades. They argue that these initiatives demonstrate how locally embedded organisations can foster resilience offering a counterpoint to top-down market-driven approaches. However, this debate is not consensual, as Rolnik (2015) and Moreno's (2022) warns about deepening inequality due to debt.

By pursuing an alternative course, a particularly influential element has been technical assistance practices (*assistência técnica*). Emerging in the 1980s, these collectives of architects, engineers, and lawyers drew inspiration from Paulo Freire's pedagogy and aligned with social movements advocating dignified housing. Initially grassroots and activist in orientation, these groups gradually formalised into Civil Society Organisations, extending their scope beyond southeastern Brazil into national networks (Cardoso & Lopes, 2022). Today, they operate as professional NGOs that combine political engagement with service provision, working with municipal and federal governments, international donors, and other NGOs. Their experience illustrates both the opportunities and contradictions of NGO professionalisation: greater institutional capacity on one hand, but complex negotiations of autonomy and legitimacy on the other.

Research has argued that implementing international project models in the Global South involves navigating complex webs of relationships filled with contradictions. While distributing resources, international organisations can simultaneously reproduce dependency dynamics. Conversely, standardising project formats can also encourage innovative approaches to scaling actions and balancing local adaptation with replicability. Moreover, the rise of local NGOs as creators of knowledge and methodologies, rather than merely executing international projects;

What is clear is that NGOs operate in contested terrain, negotiating between empowerment and dependency, grassroots mobilisation and

professionalisation, local specificity and international standardisation. Further research must integrate macro-level institutional analysis with micro-level community studies to evaluate both structural transformations and everyday impacts on housing in precarious settlements.

As Simone (2017) argues, the challenge is not simply one of balancing service delivery with advocacy, but of rejuvenating insurgent coalitions that bring together NGOs, social movements, communities, and associations, what he considers to be the “living tissue” of urban life. Such coalitions, when connected to broader “action networks” spanning universities, civil society, and even segments of the state, are vital for translating grassroots demands into signals that bureaucracies and markets can no longer ignore. Yet, Simone (2017) cautions, these networks require robust civic organisations, competent public institutions, and independent media if they are to move beyond experimentation toward systemic transformation.

At the same time, Simone (2017) highlights that NGOs also play a crucial role in shaping global norms. Even forums often dismissed as “greenwashing” — such as business councils or international sustainability platforms — can generate standards that acquire legal and institutional force. International NGOs like Oxfam have already influenced debates on tax evasion and financial governance, revealing how struggles around urban housing are tied to wider questions of resource distribution and global regulation. Seen in this light, NGOs in housing are not merely local actors: they are also part of transnational processes that define the conditions of urban development itself.

Considering these contributions, in addition to revealing various limitations of the practices, the literature on NGO engagement with housing in precarious settlements reveals important gaps in knowledge. The main gap identified concerns interventions in dwelling units; besides undercover, existing studies primarily focus on assessing the concrete impacts of interventions on human development indicators, yet often acknowledge difficulties in capturing results due to the small scale of interventions and the nature of the impacts, which are often dispersed and unfold over longer periods. Less attention has been paid to examining the context of institutional and political arrangements surrounding housing improvement practices. When these dynamics are addressed, analyses tend to prioritise questions of housing finance and indebtedness, placing interventions within debates on the financialisation of low-income housing (Rolnik, 2015; Moreno, 2020). This leaves the processual, political, and institutional relations within NGOs' practices on implementing housing improvements in informal settlements without a microcredit basis underexplored.

2.4 NGOs and housing improvement implementation

A range of international NGOs has played an important role in advancing housing improvement practices in informal settlements. These

organizations distinguish themselves not only through advocacy and policy engagement but also through direct, on-the-ground interventions that combine physical construction, technical support, and community engagement. Their initiatives contribute to advancing housing improvement across different regions, while also dealing with persistent challenges of funding, sustainability, and political integration.

One of the largest and most established actors is Habitat for Humanity International, which operates in sixty four countries across all continents. Habitat's model combines volunteer labour, partnerships with local communities, and provision of financial services for incremental home improvements, positioning it as the most extensive global implementer of direct housing support (Frediani et al., 2023). In Latin America, TECHO (Un Techo para mi País) has become a leading provider of basic, pre-fabricated housing units for extremely poor households (Galiani et al., 2017, Mitchell & Macció, 2021).

Two other prominent international NGOs working with housing improvements are the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and Slum Dwellers International (SDI). Their histories differ from the previous organisations because they were founded as grassroots mobilization and later became institutionalised actors in the field of housing.

ACHR emerged in 1988 in response to widespread evictions across Asian cities, explicitly seeking to build alliances between grassroots groups, professional networks, and civil society organisations to confront exclusionary urban development. The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) is notable for developing innovative community-driven models through its Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) programme.

Another important global actor is Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a transnational network of urban poor federations that promotes a bottom-up agenda (Bolnick, 2007). SDI represents a transnational network of federations of slum dwellers that also brings together homeless and landless communities with supporting NGOs. It promotes collective action, participatory planning, and incremental upgrading (Mitlin, 2015). SDI federations have engaged in a wide array of initiatives, from improving tenure security and upgrading "slums" and squatter settlements, to co-developing affordable housing and basic infrastructure such as water, sanitation, and drainage. These practices position SDI as an actor in advancing housing rights through grassroots-driven yet globally networked forms of urban transformation.

In Brazil, Technical Assistance groups, organised and formalised mainly as NGOs, have developed significant work on housing improvement in informal settlements. Particularly, following Brazil's 1988 Constitution, groups of architects, engineers, and social workers partnered with housing social movements, cooperatives, and urban poor communities to discuss and produce housing through self-management schemes, strongly inspired by Freire's (1970) "critical pedagogy" (Lopes, 2023).

Regulated by Law 11.888 in 2008, the Technical Assistance practice encompasses a range of services, including urban planning, social housing projects, auto-construction housing improvements, land tenure plan and projects and advocacy. However, fifteen years later, the law which states that access to such services is a right for poor families, remains extremely limited. Without broader support as small, specialised organisations, ATHIS NGOs face structural limitations in terms of funding, continuity, sustainability, and scale.

Brazilian academic literature primarily focuses on national experiences, with little dialogue with international frameworks for housing upgrading (Santo Amore, 2004; USINA, 2015; Ferro, 2006). This gap becomes significant when observing that international organisations, such as UN-Habitat, Cities Alliance, Habitat for Humanity, TECHO, etc, have developed specific methodologies for housing upgrading in precarious settlements globally and are operating in similar territories. These organisations possess superior financial resources and establish common technical languages.

04 •

Methodology.

Methodology

The primary objective of this chapter is to outline the research methodology employed in this thesis. However, it begins with a brief summary of the key urban issues identified in the research topic, drawing on elements from the previous two chapters. The main gaps identified in the literature review are also clearly outlined in this section.

The organisational choice of content was made to facilitate the explanation and understanding of methodological decisions and to provide a central chapter that offers the reader a preliminary overall picture, since the methodological choices consequently influence the research results and how they are presented in the upcoming chapters.

Real-World Problems

Housing precariousness in cities of the Global South is a complex challenge across social, economic, political, and technical dimensions. While in-situ urban and housing upgrading has emerged as the recommended (by whom?) approach for addressing precariousness in informal settlements, its implementation faces significant complexity and structural constraints, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Implementation complexity arises from persistent challenges in operating and scaling housing improvement initiatives to meet the magnitude of deficiencies. The incremental, heterogeneous, and diverse nature of auto-constructed housing and neighbourhoods challenges the balancing between adapting to local contexts and replicating broader solutions. Autoconstruction's "distinctive temporality" (Caldeira, 2017) requires the development of structures that can respond to emerging, evolving and shifting needs, thereby challenging dominant production-consumption logics and project management cycles in housing production. Furthermore, "urban informality" (Roy, 2009b) and "transversal logics in peripheral urbanisation" (Caldeira, 2017) defy current policy frameworks, operational models, norms, and standards.

On another level, structural constraints deeply link the success of housing improvement programmes with broader urban development issues, especially access to affordable land and housing. Even well-planned upgrading efforts may fail if implemented in isolation from structural urban reforms. Factors such as land commodification, speculative real estate practices, rising poverty, and poor housing policies perpetuate precariousness and weaken long-term programme outcomes. Additionally, housing improvements are often associated with less visible impacts compared to new buildings, which can diminish political support and create tensions between short-term political goals and continuous housing and urban policies and strategies.

Challenges in urban practice and gaps in knowledge

Within this complex reality, where multiple actors interact, negotiate, and produce housing and neighbourhoods, the research focuses on investigating the actions of NGOs. As explored in the literature review, NGOs function as significant organisations providing absent or insufficient services in precarious neighbourhoods, mediating public policy development and implementation, and building social capacities through mobilisation. In this field of action, they hold potential as innovators in professional practices, public policies and community engagement.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, governments significantly rely on non-state actors to facilitate urban planning, management, and service provision processes in informal and precarious settlements. This involves multi-stakeholder governance models on housing interventions, which require further examination.

Despite significant NGO engagement within this context, limited academic research analyses projects primarily addressing housing inadequacies through individual dwelling renovations. Existing studies regarding this kind of practice predominantly document immediate or short-term crisis responses or microcredit arrangements. Limited scholarly attention has been devoted to partnerships between local and international NGOs in the implementation of housing improvement projects that engage directly with communities without microcredit mechanisms. Several important gaps remain in understanding how NGOs navigate complex networks involving donors, state actors, and local communities across diverse locations and contexts.

From a broader perspective, theoretical frameworks rooted in the urban realities of the Global South have been consolidated, along with the strengthening of South-South cooperation. In Brazil, a legal framework concerning cities has also been consolidated over the past decades based on concepts such as the social function of urban land and the right to the city. Strong urban social movements have claimed the urban poor's place within Brazilian cities through planning instruments such as inclusive zoning, participatory urban planning and management, tenure regularisation, upgrading, and free technical assistance for housing improvements for low-income populations. This context introduces new and under-explored dynamics within the material and relational landscape that encompasses Non-Governmental formal institutions operating in informal territories.

Research Question

★ Main Research Question

How do projects carried out within multi-scalar NGO partnerships contribute to precarious housing improvement practices in informal settlements in Brazil?

Sub-questions aim to help clarify some of the key nodes in practice identified in the literature review:

- ★ Sub-question 1: How do NGOs navigate between formal institutional systems and informal practices in housing improvement initiatives?
- ★ Sub-question 2: How do NGOs' housing improvement projects balance specific contextual adaptation with standardised and replicable implementation models?
- ★ Sub-question 3: How do NGO partnerships integrate immediate housing improvements with long-term systemic transformation objectives?

The recognition of the importance of the relational domain and power dynamics research within NGOs' housing projects influences the focus on actors and their relationships as a methodological approach, addressing further gaps transversally.

Research Approach and Methodological Strategy

Bhag (2019), who engages directly with scholars discussed in the first chapter such as Caldeira, Roy, Simone, and Watson - offers key insights into certain vices that urban research and practice consistently face. These vices result in a persistent disconnect between theoretical frameworks and their practical application. The scholars define them as:

1. Unrooted Theory, which describes the tendency for urban theories to remain detached from specific contexts, making them difficult to translate or apply to particular places. This "unrootedness" creates a gap where theoretical insights, while potentially valuable, fail to engage with the material and social specifics that define urban spaces and practices.
2. Narrow Practice Readings, that occur when "practice" is seen mainly through professional, formal, or institutional perspectives, ignoring the diverse actors, approaches, and motivations that truly shape urban processes. This limited view of practice then affects both how theories are developed and which types of knowledge are considered valuable within the field of urban studies.
3. Compartmentalised roles, reflecting common assumptions that specific modes of practice are neatly aligned with particular types of practitioners. For example, "planners" are expected to focus on spatial planning without necessarily understanding political activism, while

"activists" organise protests but are not expected to engage with technical regulations such as zoning and land-use policies.

Aware of the limitations of the research's scope but guided by these thoughts, this study aimed to employ a methodology that would specifically help connect the concepts introduced in the first chapter, such as informality and auto-construction, transversal engagement, and political urban intervention, with the context of precarious housing improvement practices in informal settlements, emphasising meanings, interactions, and processes. Therefore, **the research adopted a qualitative approach, employing a case study strategy, which is theoretically supported by Actor-Network Theory (Brenner et al., 2016) and further reinforced by Simone & Pieterse's (2017) concept of assemblages.**

Based on Yin (2018), the case study methodological strategy is used to explore in-depth real-life phenomena within their context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. It relies on multiple sources of evidence and uses a systematic approach to collect and analyse data. Yin (2018) emphasises that case studies can be particularly valuable for answering "how" and "why" questions about complex social, organisational, or individual processes.

The case study

The research case study strategy is used to examine the complex dynamics of multi-scalar NGO partnerships in housing improvement practices within informal settlements in Brazil. The chosen case study is the **"Housing Improvements for Access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene" (WASH) project conducted by Habitat for Humanity Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil.**

Habitat for Humanity Brazil is an NGO that operates as part of a global network present in 70 countries worldwide. According to its Activity Report 2021, the project "Housing Improvements for Access to WASH" aimed to address precarious housing conditions through small-scale renovations that enhance access to essential infrastructure such as adequate bathrooms, water supply, and sanitation.

The report indicates that, in 2021, the initiative delivered 609 housing improvements, benefiting 2,393 people across 70 communities in 12 Brazilian states.

Habitat for Humanity Brazil specifies that the program was made possible through a collaborative network: 34 local organisations acted as implementing partners, directly executing the renovations; a group of corporate and institutional sponsors and investors provided the main financial resources; and supporting organisations offered complementary resources and contributions to strengthen the project.

The report also highlights that the initiative was awarded the São Paulo Human Rights and Diversity Seal, recognising its impact on expanding access to adequate housing, sanitation, and hygiene during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the organisation notes, this experience demonstrates the importance of partnerships and coordinated action in advancing urban development and reducing socio-spatial inequalities.

Within this context, the research specifically examines the implementation of **Habitat's WASH project in the city of Fortaleza (Ceará)**, where the local partner was an NGO called Taramela Assessoria Técnica em Arquitetura e Cidade (ATAC), which means Taramela Technical Advisory Services in Architecture and Urban Planning.

This case was selected because it demonstrates a clear connection between a well-established organisation with an extensive international network and a local technical team. Its focus on improving housing conditions in informal settlements to access WASH offers insights into challenges such as local adaptation of standard protocols and balancing immediate basic needs with advocacy strategies. The researcher's previous work and field experience facilitate access to key stakeholders and the specific community involved in the case, further improving data collection.

Analytical Framework

Brenner et al. (2016) discusses the application of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in critical urban theory. It provides the primary methodological framework for examining complex relational dynamics within NGO partnerships for improving precarious housing in informal settlements.

ANT provides methodological tools by suggesting the examination of social phenomena as networks of human and non-human actors that influence each other (Brenner et al., 2016). This approach is especially relevant for this research, once it involves diverse actors operating across multiple scales and temporalities, as well as institutional and community arrangements.

The methodological strength of ANT lies in its capacity to trace connections between diverse elements and explore how these links produce specific effects without reducing complexity to predetermined categories. Instead of assuming that the project and partnerships succeed or fail based on fixed and previous variables, ANT investigates how opportunities and challenges arise through particular configurations of actors, resources, and practices under specific circumstances. This focus on emergence and process suits the nature of informal settlements, as seen through the lens of the theories and authors discussed in the first chapter of the research, which lays out the theoretical framework.

While ANT provides the primary methodological framework, *assemblage thinking* also offers supplementary analytical insights. Drawn from Deleuze and Guattari's work, an assemblage refers to the dynamic processes through which heterogeneous elements come together to form

provisional configurations (Brenner et al., 2016). Simone and Pieterse (2017) also engage with assemblage thinking, they employed it for understanding cities as dynamic and interconnected systems. They argue that cities can be seen as assemblages of multiple “operating systems” composed of both social and material elements, including infrastructure, the economy, land, governance, and cultural systems. Each of these systems has specific internal properties and interacts with others, creating complex, path-dependent dynamics in urban spaces. Understanding the resonances between operating systems is essential for designing interventions that promote adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable urban futures (Simone & Pieterse, 2017).

The research did not strictly engage with Actor-Network Theory or the Assemblage concept. The network mapping was not undertaken to identify instances of translation and enrollment (Callon, 1986) nor inscriptions (Latour, 1992) processes. And, It was also not mapped based on the system division proposed by Simone and Pieterse (2017). This analytical framework was regarded as a way of thinking, enriching the analysis by providing a vocabulary to capture dynamic, relational processes. In constructing a network, both animated and inanimate actors were linked through relatively free associations, which gradually evolved in terms of form, position, nature, and relevance. This allowed for the interpretation of the collected data through the perspective of the theoretical framework.

Brenner et al. (2016) identify several key limitations of these approaches. Concentrating mainly on detailed descriptions of local networks may also obscure wider political and economic contexts and restrict the capacity to recognise contradictions or opportunities for social transformation. They argue that dismissing structural concepts can lead to “naïve objectivism,” where observed interconnections are presumed to speak for themselves without critical analysis.

Concerning these challenges, the methods employed in this research aimed to carefully design the actor network and reflect on the collected data, linking local relations with larger structural dynamics.

Methodology implementation

The methodology was implemented in three phases, each designed to gradually understand and analyse the heterogeneous network shaping the project as a system with human and non-human elements.

★ Phase 1: Analysis of secondary data and initial mapping of the actors' network

In the first phase, an initial understanding of the heterogeneous network was developed based on secondary data available about the project, the main organisations involved, and the community context where the case took place. An exploratory interview was also conducted with a member of a local NGO who managed the project. Based on these activities, actors

were identified, and a preliminary network was mapped out, providing a foundation for designing primary data collection.

★ **Phase 2: Collection and analysis of primary data and consolidation of the actors' network**

The second phase focused on collecting and analysing primary data. Stakeholders were contacted, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a public event was observed. The collected data were organised through thematic coding and inductive clustering into categories. The network was refined, and the links among its heterogeneous components were qualified. Attention was given to controversies, alignments, and negotiations.

★ **Phase 3: Theoretical interpretation of results**

The final phase involved analysing findings using a matrix that connected inductive categories to the research questions, then relating them to relevant theoretical concepts supporting the analysis of the case as an Urban Political Intervention (Simone & Pieterse, 2017). The discussion of results did not aim to develop evaluation indicators for the case study but rather to contextualise and qualify the findings.

Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

Data Collection

The research drew on multiple sources, aiming to capture a variety of perspectives and facilitate integration and triangulation across network positions.

The process began with the gathering of secondary data, including a review of institutional publications, transparency reports, and organisational and government websites. This provided an overview and insights into the project scope, actor profiles, urban and community contexts, partnership structures, resource flows, and operational procedures.

Building on this overview and the preliminary network, semi-structured interviews were conducted with strategic representatives positioned at different levels of the pactors' network.

The interview protocols, informed by Saldaña's (2011) methodological framework, emphasised open-ended questions designed to foster narratives and stories rather than short or binary responses. Questions were sequenced from broad institutional contexts to more specific experiences, allowing interviewees to establish a narrative frame before addressing details, complex dynamics of collaboration and project implementation. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted:

- ★ One interview with Habitat for Humanity Brazil's national program manager.

- ★ Two individual interviews were conducted with two founding members of the local organisation: the general director and the member responsible for the direct implementation of the Habitat WASH project.
- ★ One interview was conducted with the Vice President of Pici's Community Management Council, who lives in the area where the project was carried out and acted as the on-site mediator during its implementation.

All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, recorded digitally, and transcribed with temporal markers.

Alongside interviews, a forum observation offered another layer of data. Due to temporal and geographical research constraints, the observational component relied on remote participation in a public event called: Meeting on Housing Improvements and Technical Assistance in the Context of Fortaleza, where key actors—Taramela ATAC and Pici community representatives—were present, along with government and city council representatives, academics, and broad civil society.

This set of sources facilitated triangulation between individual actors' viewpoints and collective multi-actor dynamics, capturing both the internal logics of the Habitat-Taramela-Pici partnership and the interactive tensions that emerged when more diverse stakeholders negotiated shared housing improvement agendas in Fortaleza's informal settlement context.

Primary data processing and analysis

Data analysis followed a three-level coding and thematic construction process, progressing from data organisation to theoretical interpretation. This systematic approach transformed raw empirical materials into structured knowledge, engaging the research questions through successive levels of abstraction and pattern identification.

★ Structural Coding

At the first level, structural coding (Saldaña, 2015) was used to systematically screen and organize data. Structural codes functioned as question-based labels, indexing relevant segments for further analysis while remaining flexible to emerging patterns.

★ Themes

At the second level, structurally coded data segments were interpreted and organized into themes. Themes captured the core meaning of data passages and allowed patterns to emerge inductively, aligning with qualitative analysis principles (Saldaña, 2015). Detailed thematic analyses of each source are available in the research appendices.

★ Categories

Finally, categories were developed by grouping related themes together. These categories served as interpretive structures, highlighting patterns and exploring the relationships between different themes to emphasise

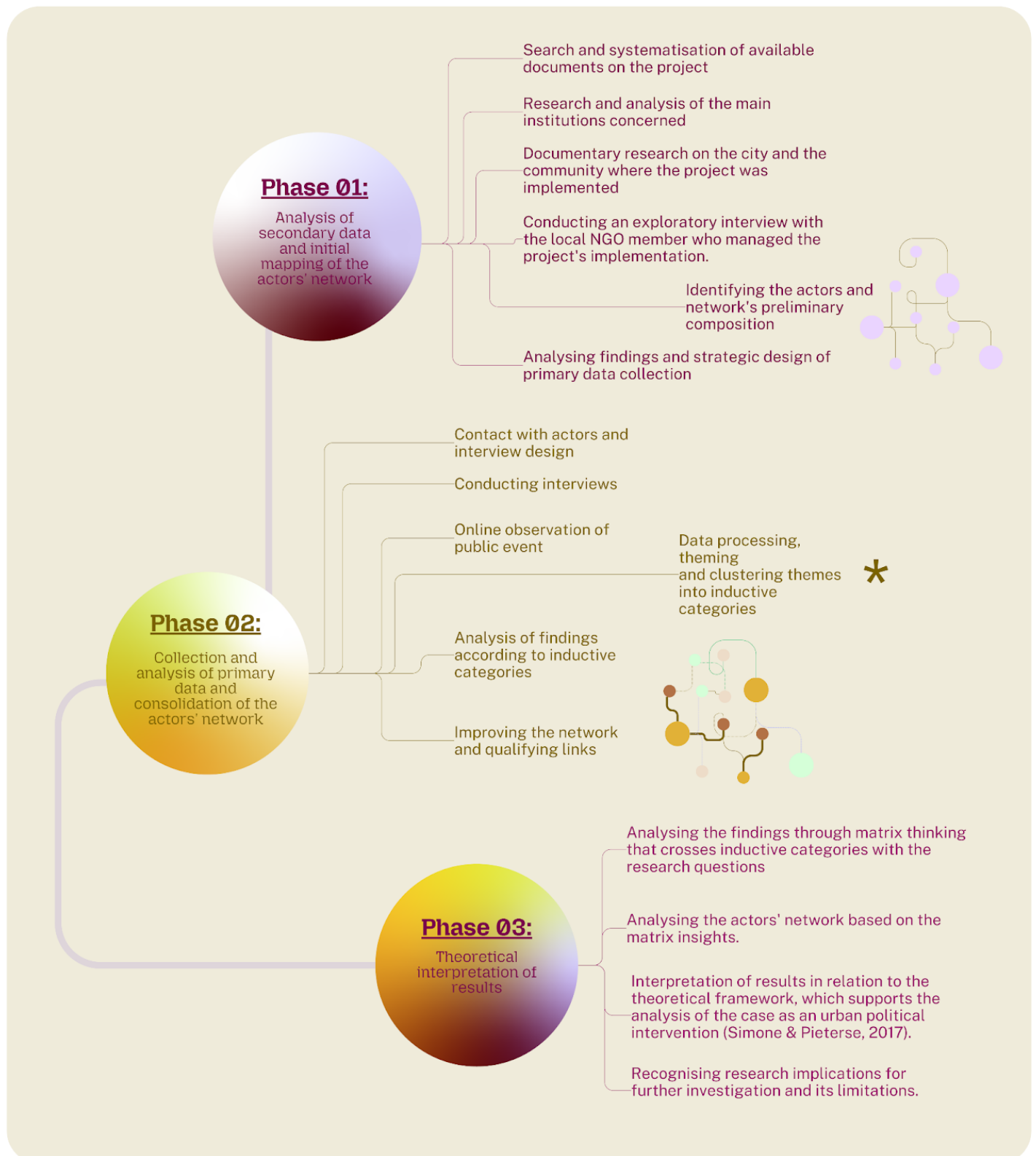
their significance in relation to the research questions. This process resulted in a structured analytical framework for better understanding of the heterogeneous network of actors, infrastructures, technologies, resources, and data within the project system.

★ Data Crossing Matrix: Sub-Questions, Categories, and Themes

To trace the link between the findings and the research question, a matrix was then developed that systematically cross-references themes and categories with the three sub-questions. This step enabled the analysis to identify how empirical evidence directly addressed key issues, while also revealing overlaps, tensions, and complementarities across categories. The matrix acted as a bridge between thematic analysis and theoretical interpretations.

The entire process of analysing primary data thematically and subsequent matrix thinking helped map the networks of the actors. Based on understanding how the collected data interacted with the network, by adding elements, adjusting actors' positions, and qualifying links, the final theoretical interpretation of the findings emphasised connections, positioning, controversies, alignments, and negotiations within the case study. The interpretation of the results was conducted in accordance with the theoretical framework addressed in the first chapter, which underpins the analysis of the case as an urban political intervention (Simone & Pieterse, 2017).

Figure 05.
Summary chart of the applied methodology



Note. Author's elaboration based on own analysis/data.

Researcher Positionality and Militant Research

The research methodology incorporates elements of militant research approaches (Colectivo Situaciones, 2005), understanding that the researcher's professional trajectory as a technical advisor in Fortaleza represents not a limitation to analytical objectivity, but rather a component for developing situated knowledge oriented toward social transformations.

Militant research recognises that knowledge creation occurs through involvement in social struggles and transformative practices rather than through detached observation. This methodological approach challenges traditional academic distinctions between the roles of researcher and practitioner.

The researcher's embedded experience within Brazilian technical assistance networks offers a specialised perspective on institutional dynamics, community relationships, and organisational tensions that might go unnoticed by external academic observers. At the same time, once a researcher has gathered prior contextual knowledge, it becomes more challenging to present the data clearly and to identify what is essential for others to understand and follow the analysis. However, this approach highlights that situated knowledge emerges from specific social positions and political commitments rather than claims to universal objectivity.

Limitations and Considerations

The research recognises several methodological limitations inherent in single-case study designs, especially regarding transferability to other contexts and partnership structures. Nonetheless, the analytical depth offered by this approach provides valuable empirical material for theoretical development and yields insights that may be applicable to similar urban contexts in Brazil and the Global South.

The research's temporal dimension presents both opportunities and limitations, as data were collected 4 years after the project's completion. This enabled the collection of more reflective analysis from actors, although perhaps less detailed, and perceivers of the project's potential impacts over time. However, it may also limit access to real-time partnership negotiations, conflicts, and process observations.

Language and cultural factors were also considered, as interviews were conducted in Portuguese and then translated, recognising that translation processes naturally involve interpretive choices that can influence analytical results.

The researcher's embedded position within Brazilian and Fortaleza's urban planning networks, while offering analytical benefits through militant research principles, required ongoing attention to how these relationships

could influence stakeholder responses and data interpretation, to ensure that political commitments strengthened rather than weakened the research's analytical rigour.

05

Results.



Habitat for Humanity Brazil's Housing Improvements project to enhance access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)

A Case Study of Multi-Scale NGO Partnership

The thesis results section is organised according to the research phases and their outcomes. Based on secondary data, the first part offers a descriptive overview of the case, introducing the main actors in a preliminary network to give the reader an initial understanding of the case and contextual information.

The second part presents findings from collecting and analysing primary data, along with the consolidated network of actors, organising the results based on the inductive categories that emerged from data analysis.

Project overview

Habitat for Humanity Brazil is an NGO that operates as part of a global network. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Habitat Brazil expanded its Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programme to include emergency house renovations in vulnerable communities across the country. According to its Activity Report 2021), the project “Housing Improvements for Access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene” aimed to address precarious housing conditions through small-scale renovations that enhance access to essential infrastructure, including adequate bathrooms, water supply, and sanitation. The organisation emphasises that these actions contribute to creating healthier and safer living environments, while also strengthening quality of life, reducing health risks, and promoting social inclusion for families living in vulnerable urban areas.

At this point, the origin of the WASH concept is noteworthy; as de Wit et al. (2024) observed, it marks a shift in the water and sanitation field from infrastructure and universal strategies to incorporating behaviour change, equity, and sustainability. This view emphasises that WASH goes beyond services to encompass a broad agenda operating at the intersection of health and development, providing access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation, and hygiene promotion to improve health and social well-being worldwide.

The Housing Improvements for Access to WASH programme focused on homeowners earning up to two minimum wages, prioritising women-headed households, elderly residents, families with children, people with disabilities, and those suffering from respiratory conditions. The average budget per renovation was 5,500 Reais, approximately 940 USD (Habitat for Humanity Activity Report 2021).

The project secured funding through a multi-stakeholder and multi-layered financial structure involving corporate sponsors, investors, and institutional supporters. Key sponsors included Cisco, CP Kelco, Bank

of America, and S&P Global. The investor group consisted of the ECK Family Foundation, Gerdau, PepsiCo, Votorantim Cimentos, Whirlpool, Instituto Cyrela, and MetLife. Additional backing was provided by P&G, Banco BNP Paribas Brasil, and Instituto Vedacit.

The operational model relied exclusively on implementing partnerships with local organisations. Habitat for Humanity Brazil established the operational framework, including scope definition, beneficiary selection criteria, budget allocation, technical requirements, documentation protocols, and timeline management, delegating community-level implementation to 37 local non-profit organisations and social impact enterprises. These local partners were responsible for selecting communities and families, with approval from Habitat, and for coordinating construction work. Each partner operated within their respective territorial areas, undertaking renovations according to established guidelines while adapting to local community conditions and needs.

During 2020-2021, the WASH initiative completed 609 housing renovations across 70 communities in 12 Brazilian states. The programme's geographical scope covered diverse urban contexts across various regions of Brazil. The project achieved wide territorial coverage throughout the country, although with a relatively low density of renovations per community. This distribution pattern resulted in multiple communities receiving housing improvements while maintaining a limited number of interventions within each location.

Table 01.

General data on WASH housing improvement projects in 2020-2021

Note. Table created by the author based on Habitat for Humanity Brazil Activities Report 2021, from <https://habitatbrasil.org.br/quem-somos/transparencia/>.

HOUSING UPGRADES	609 updated homes	2393 people benefited	70 communities	12 Brazilian states
MASTER SPONSORSHIP	Cisco, CP Kelco, Bank of America and S&P Global.			
INVESTORS	ECK Family Foundation, Gerdau, Pepsico, Votorantim Cimentos, Whirlpool, Instituto Cyrela and Metlife.			
SUPPORTERS	P&G, Banco BNP Paribas Brasil and Instituto Vedacit.			
EXECUTING PARTNERS	ABRA, ArqCopMais, ArqPodemos, Arqteto, Arqtodos, Arquitetas Nômades, Arquitetos da Vila, Arquitetura Faz Bem, Arquitetura Humana, Athos Servtec, Atos Colaborativos, Bandeira, Bom Viver, Coletivo Meio, Coletivo Trena, Comuta, Conjunto Soluções Habitacionais Acessíveis, Construnir, Dona Obra, Eficiobra, Engenheiros Sem Fronteiras Núcleo Porto Alegre, Favelar, Geathis, Hublar, Modlar, Morá, Moradigna, Panan, Reconstrular, Reparação, Saúde Moradia, Taramela ATAC, Viverde Casa and Z Arquitetura.			
PROJECT TIMELINE	2020-2021 (COVID-19 pandemic)			
TARGET BENEFICIARIES	Homeowners earning ≤2 minimum wages — priority groups: Women-headed households, elderly, children, disabled, respiratory conditions			
BUDGET	BRL 5,500 (Brazilian reais) per household, approximately USD 940			

Case Study Focus: Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil.

The partnership with Taramela ATAC in Fortaleza, Ceará, exemplifies the local implementation component within the wider WASH initiative model. Taramela carried out five housing improvements in the Pici community in Fortaleza. The specific case enabled a detailed investigation into how locally based organisations operated within the broader programme framework to deliver housing improvements in a particular informal settlement.

Table 02.
General data on the WASH housing improvement project carried out in the Pici community, in Fortaleza, Brazil

LOCAL EXECUTING PARTNER IN FORTALEZA, CEARÁ, BRAZIL	Taramela Assessoria Técnica em Arquitetura e Cidade (ATAC), which means Taramela Technical Advisory Services in Architecture and Urban Planning (est. 2016)
PARTNER TYPE	NGO
TARAMELA OUTPUT	5 housing improvements, with 5 Bathroom renovations and 1 laundry sinks
LOCATION OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	Pici community, Fortaleza, Brazil. The local NGO maintained existing partnerships from previous projects and advocacy initiatives.

Note. Table created by the author based on Habitat for Humanity Brazil Activities Report 2021, from <https://habitatbrasil.org.br/quem-somos/transparencia/>.

Main actors

Habitat for Humanity International and Brazil

Habitat for Humanity International was founded in 1976 as a Christian organisation in Georgia, US, where they formed partnerships to build modest homes on a non-profit basis (Fuller, 2009; Habitat for Humanity, 2024). According to organisational reports, the organisation now operates in over 70 countries and has helped more than 62 million people secure decent housing by building, repairing, and financing their homes, developing new construction and funding methods, and advocating for policies that make housing more accessible (Habitat for Humanity, 2024).

Habitat started working in Brazil in 1992, initially responding to the 1989 floods in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, before establishing formal operations three years later (Habitat for Humanity, 2024). The organisation moved from its original headquarters in Minas Gerais to its current National Office in Recife, Pernambuco, with expansion to São Paulo (Habitat for Humanity Brazil, 2021). This geographic expansion reflects the organisation's mission-driven approach to scale impact across Brazil's diverse territorial contexts.

Mission and Values

According to organisational documents, Habitat for Humanity Brazil operates with the mission to "mobilise people to build houses, communities and hope together," working toward a vision where "everyone has a decent place to live" (Habitat for Humanity Brazil, 2021). Core organisational values include:

- ★ Demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ through housing work
- ★ Maintaining focused commitment to housing as a development priority
- ★ Advocating for adequate housing as a fundamental right
- ★ Promoting dignity and hope in community interventions
- ★ Supporting sustainable development principles in all activities

These, while maintaining a Christian mission orientation, shape operational decisions and partnership approaches, positioning the organisation within a broader discourse on housing rights.

Framework and Operational Approach

Based on the institutional framework, Habitat Brazil operates within UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the New Urban Agenda, defining housing as a "development factor" that drives socioeconomic growth in families and communities by transforming precarious conditions into adequate living standards (Habitat for Humanity Brazil, 2021). This perspective positions housing as a constitutional right connected to the right to the city, requiring coordinated efforts between state institutions and civil society organisations, and framing interventions as mechanisms for "combating inequalities."

According to organisational methodology, the organisation's approach focuses on the concept of "dignified housing" (*moradia digna*), emphasising quality, safety, and adequacy beyond simply providing shelter. This foundation guides program design toward collaborative construction methodologies and community engagement processes that emphasise partnership rather than traditional charity models through their "Partnership Housing" methodology.

The Brazilian affiliate employs 44 staff members across eight operational sectors with governance oversight through the National Deliberative and Fiscal Councils. Based on organisational structure, the organisation implements four primary program areas:

- ★ Housing Access and Construction: Direct building and renovation of residential units, reflecting the organization's core housing mission
- ★ Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH): Infrastructure interventions including toilet renovation, water facility repair,

community sink installation, and cistern construction for rainwater collection and storage in urban and rural communities

- ★ **Policy Advocacy:** Engagement with civil society and governmental institutions to influence policy processes, protect precarious settlements, improve city occupation, and optimize infrastructure investments
- ★ **Network Coordination and Articulation:** Connection with broader civil society movements working on housing and urban issues, strengthening local entrepreneurship, community groups, social movements, beneficiary families, and other civil society entities

The organisation's representation of all NGOs and civil society organisations in the National Cities Council, a body with 71 representatives from civil society segments, demonstrates its advocacy impact and policy influence capacity in the Brazilian context.

Impact and Network Strategy

Partnership networks include corporate partners, sponsors, executing partners, advocacy allies, and volunteers. This international connection enables multi-sector collaborations involving the private sector, government, and civil society organisations, allowing operation within complex institutional environments while maintaining diverse resource streams.

According to institutional assessment methods, the institution employs impact measurement based on both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Over 29 years of operation, Habitat for Humanity Brazil has achieved significant territorial coverage:

- Geographic reach: 24 states, 62 cities, and 291 communities •
- Beneficiary impact: Partnership with approximately 50,000-87,000 people to build or repair homes in urban and rural areas •
- 2022 fiscal year results: 6,140 individuals supported through various interventions

- ★ 2,995 through repairs
- ★ 260 through incremental building
- ★ 1,410 through market development
- ★ 1,475 through civil society initiatives
- ★ 325 volunteers engaged (Habitat for Humanity, 2024)

Based on organisational practice, the organisation maintains systematic documentation of interventions for replication purposes and knowledge dissemination through annual reports and reference documentation, demonstrating a commitment to information dissemination, institutional development, and alignment with its mission to optimise housing impact.

Taramela Assessoria Técnica em Arquitetura e Cidade: Local Implementation Partner

Organisational Profile and Mission

Taramela Assessoria Técnica em Arquitetura e Cidade (ATAC) emerged in 2016 as a collective of professionals and students in architecture and urbanism, transitioning from an informal collective to a formal civil society organization providing technical advisory services to communities in Fortaleza. According to organizational founding principles, the organization was particularly influenced by the Brazilian ATHIS Law (Federal Law 11.888/2008), which guarantees families with income up to three minimum wages the right to free public technical assistance for housing construction and reform. The limited implementation of this law through public policies motivated a group of professionals to establish organizations that integrate service delivery with political activism in the third sector, reflecting a mission-driven response to policy gaps.

Mission and Values Framework

Based on organizational charter, the organization operates under the mission to "democratize access to architecture and urban planning professionals as a way of promoting the right to the city and reducing socio-spatial inequalities." Core organizational values that guide operational decisions include:

- ★ Democracy: Commitment to horizontal decision-making and participatory processes
- ★ Knowledge democratization: Challenge to technical knowledge monopolization
- ★ Collective work: Emphasis on collaborative professional practice
- ★ Integration of technical and popular knowledge: Valorization of community expertise alongside professional knowledge

These values position Taramela ATAC within Brazil's critical urban planning tradition while distinguishing its approach from conventional technical assistance models.

Framework and Operational Approach

According to legal positioning, Taramela ATAC operates within Brazilian legal frameworks, including the Brazilian Constitution, which recognizes housing as a social right, the Brazilian City Statute (Federal Law 10.257/2001), which regulates urban policy instruments, and the Brazilian ATHIS Law (Federal Law 11.888/2008). This legal framework provides an institutional foundation for technical assistance activities while defining target populations and service parameters, enabling the organization to position its work within established rights-based discourse.

Based on theoretical foundation, the organization's work is grounded in critical urban theory, particularly "Right to the City" discourse and

participatory planning approaches derived from international academic and activist traditions. Key operational concepts include:

- Democratic access: Critique of technical knowledge monopolization
- Socio-spatial inequalities: Analysis of urban space as both product and producer of social inequalities
- Popular knowledge: Valorization of community expertise and traditional building practices

These concepts inform practical interventions that challenge conventional models of professional service delivery, reflecting the organization's values-driven approach to technical assistance.

According to methodological principles, approaches integrate Popular Education framework principles derived from Freire's popular education theory with technical assistance provision, creating "*prática profissional militante*" (militant professional practice) that combines technical service provision with political organization. This methodological integration positions technical assistance as a political tool for empowerment and urban transformation rather than neutral professional service delivery, demonstrating alignment between organizational values and operational practice.

Organizational Structure and Activities

The organization consists of eight members, all architects and urban planners, operating without hierarchical position differentiation while maintaining designated responsibilities for financial and general management functions. This organizational structure reflects commitment to horizontal and democratic decision-making processes, with formal institutionalization enabling access to formal funding mechanisms while maintaining values-based governance.

Based on operational framework, Taramela ATAC implements activities organized around three operational axes that reflect its comprehensive mission approach:

- ★ Architecture and Housing Assistance: Technical assistance in architecture, urbanism, and urban planning, provided directly to communities and individual families requiring professional support for housing improvement projects
- ★ Urban Planning and Right to the City: Policy monitoring and advocacy activities enabling engagement with governmental institutions, civil society, and policy processes affecting housing access and urban development in Fortaleza
- ★ Institutional Development: Training, capacity building, documentation, and information dissemination activities

Networks and Impact

According to network strategy, the organization engages with Brazilian Technical Assistance (ATHIS) regional and national networks, including

the regional Rede Nordeste de Assessoria Técnica Popular (Northeast Technical Advisory Network) and the national Rede Assessoria e Moradia (Advisory and Housing Network). Local network involvement includes:

- ★ Civil society initiatives: Frente de Luta por Moradia Digna (Front for the Struggle for Decent Housing)
- ★ Participatory governance spaces: Assembleias Populares da Cidade (Popular Assemblies of the City)
- ★ Academic activities: Research, networking, and publications

These network connections demonstrate the organization's commitment to collective work values while extending its mission impact beyond direct service provision. The combination of local grassroots connections with national technical assistance networks positions Taramela ATAC to influence policy processes while maintaining community-level engagement, reflecting its integrated approach to technical assistance as political practice.

Technical Assistance and Advisory Services in Housing in Brazil, some context.

The current research highlights the need to contextualise technical assistance practices in Brazil. Collected primary data indicates that terms such as 'technical assistance', 'technical advisory', and 'ATHIS' are often used interchangeably, potentially confusing readers unfamiliar with the field. This section aims to clarify that, despite their conceptual differences, these terms all relate to a broader domain within which the case study actor operate.

Legal Framework: Federal Law 11.888/2008

The collective effort of these trajectories culminated in the approval of Federal Law 11.888/2008, which ensures low-income families the right to free public technical assistance for housing construction or renovation projects. The ATHIS law, which is frequently used in practice to refer to the groups operating under this legislation, born from historical demands by unions, NGOs and popular movements, the Law references the experience of the Technical Assistance Programme for Economic Housing (ATME) started in Rio Grande do Sul in the 1970s, expanding understanding about architecture's social role beyond the traditional market (Melo, 2021).

Despite this normative recognition, the law's implementation faces structural limits, such as low municipal adherence, lack of robust financing and, often, lack of awareness by the population and public managers themselves. In São Paulo, for example, less than 2% of municipalities fully implemented technical assistance programmes, reflecting the challenges of institutionalising this policy at a national level (Camara e Bueno, 2024).

Technical Assistance vs Technical Advisory: Conceptual Debate

In the Brazilian context, the terms "technical assistance" and "technical advisory" coexist but carry different political nuances. "Technical assistance" refers to the legal framework and institutional service provision, while "technical advisory" emphasises collective, dialogical action as part of social movements' struggle for self-management and the right to the city. In the view of popular groups and various authors, technical advisory goes beyond technical service, promoting community leadership in housing production, territory defence and democratic construction of urban space (Lopes, 2023). As Kapp (2018) highlights, "assistance" tends to reproduce a vertical and philanthropic logic, while "advisory" makes explicit the critical commitment to social emancipation processes and popular participation.

Diversity of Actors and Regional Networks

The technical advisory field, after a beginning marked by experimentalism and militancy, expanded and diversified, forming national networks like the Housing-Advisory Network and the Northeast Technical Advisory Network. These networks bring together NGOs, professional entities, university collectives and social movements, especially in Southeast capitals (São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro) and Northeast (Fortaleza and other cities), promoting methodological exchanges, political advocacy and joint training and extension programmes (Lessa, 2021). Examples include the work of UFMG's Model Office, the NGO USINA and CEARAH Periferia, and Taramela ATAC itself, a reference in training young professionals and in interdisciplinary partnerships with universities and other public and private bodies (Lopes, 2023).

University extension is a key component of this ecosystem, not only in students' citizen formation but in strengthening the relationship between universities and popular communities. Several Brazilian universities have model offices or continuous technical advisory projects, fundamental for field renewal and participatory methods experimentation (Silva, 2023).

Current Perspectives

The contemporary scenario of technical advisory in Brazil shows a coexistence of significant challenges and great potential, elements that, in an articulated way, reflect both the field's complexity and its growing social relevance. First, this practice aims to democratise access to architecture and urbanism in urban contexts marked by deep social and housing inequalities. By approaching peripheral and vulnerable territories, technical advisories seek to integrate local knowledge, foster self-management strategies and promote participatory models in housing improvements, recognising communities' own leadership throughout the entire process, from planning to execution. Popular participation is central, guided by horizontal and dialogical logic, which distinguishes these initiatives from traditional models, more vertical and focused on mere service provision (Lessa, 2021).

Additionally, these experiences consolidate as drivers for articulating solidarity networks, political advocacy and formulation of more contextualised and inclusive public policies, capable of dialoguing with the country's realities and cultural diversities. An example is the work of networks like the Housing-Advisory Network and the Northeast Network, which bring together NGOs, professional collectives, university centres and social movements, expanding the reach, methodological exchange and social and political advocacy of technical advisories (Lopes, 2023).

Despite notable transformative potential, considerable structural barriers remain. Among them, the fragility of financing, whether public or private, institutional fragmentation, low priority of housing agendas in the State and difficulty in measuring not only physical impacts but also symbolic and community impacts of these practices in territories stand out. Added to this is the fact that the implementation and institutionalisation of Federal Law 11.888/2008 advances unequally among the country's regions, restricting many communities' access to the right to free and quality technical assistance (Camara e Bueno, 2024).

Faced with these adversities, the Brazilian technical advisory field has gained international recognition, not only for methodological creativity and ability to obtain concrete results in high complexity and risk scenarios, but for training engaged professionals capable of connecting local practices to global debates about housing, urbanism and sociospatial justice. This experience proves especially inspiring for its work in contexts marked by inequality and urban informality, combining social commitment, production of dialogued solutions and collective mobilisation for the right to the city (Cardoso e Lopes, 2022). This uniqueness gives technical advisories in Brazil an exemplary role that can enrich and inspire similar practices in other urban realities worldwide.

Territorialising Habitat's housing improvement project for WASH access.

The ZEIS Pici, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil. The community as an actor

The territory known as Pici is located in Fortaleza, a city with a population of over 2.4 million inhabitants and the fourth-largest in Brazil, according to the most recent Brazilian Demographic Census (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2023). Fortaleza serves as the capital of Ceará state in Brazil's Northeast region and stands as one of the country's main urban centres. According to economic data, Fortaleza ranks eighth in GDP among the country's capital cities and has the largest GDP in the Northeast and is one of the main centres for services, tourism, and higher education in the Northeast (IBGE, 2023).

However, Fortaleza faces serious challenges related to inequality that directly affect housing access and the development of informal settlements. According to the United Nations, Fortaleza "is the fifth most unequal city in the world," reflecting broader patterns of urban inequality that characterise Brazilian cities. Research indicates that approximately

35% of Fortaleza's population lives in favelas or informal settlements, highlighting the large-scale precarious housing conditions affecting over 800,000 residents in the metropolitan area (Câmara, Freitas, & Rufino, 2019). This high proportion of informal settlements reflects historical urban development patterns that have pushed low-income populations to peripheral areas or environmentally vulnerable locations within the city (Câmara, Freitas, & Rufino, 2019).



Figure 06. Fortaleza is a metropolis marked by social inequality, with areas of high-class population concentration.

Note. Photo by @Gabriel Rissi, 2024, in Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com/pt-br/foto/29597082/>). Free to use under the Pexels Content License.

Territorial and Legal Context

Pici, in addition to being a neighbourhood in the official division of the municipality, was officially demarcated as a Special Zone of Social Interest (ZEIS) in Fortaleza's 2009 Participatory Master Plan, recognising its centrality in the municipal urban agenda and the urgency of interventions aimed at socio-spatial inclusion of its residents (Fortaleza, 2009). ZEIS constitute national urban policy instruments focused on guaranteeing the right to decent housing through land regularisation, urbanisation of occupied areas, and social housing production. According to municipal legislation, each ZEIS requires the establishment of a Management Council with a balanced composition of public authority and local population representatives, chosen through resident elections to ensure the process's legitimacy and representativeness (see Appendix for a detailed analysis of Brazilian urban law and the ZEIS framework).

In Fortaleza's case, 135 territories were recognised as Special Zones of Social Interest, but the implementation of actual improvement

interventions depended largely on the community's mobilisation capacity. According to Pequeno and Freitas (2012), the main factor determining which ZEIS received Integrated Plans for Land Regularisation (PIRF) was the community's capacity for political pressure and sustained advocacy, rather than purely technical criteria related to vulnerability. This explains why Pici was chosen among only ten priority ZEIS to receive PIRFs, while many other designated ZEIS remained without the plans, which aim to register informal settlements and set investment priorities for the community through a participatory process.

Historical Development and Community Formation

According to the PIRF of ZEIS Pici (Universidade Federal do Ceará [UFC], 2019), the transformation from an aristocratic rural character to an urban area began in the 1930s, when a land subdivision process started, offering parcels targeted at low-income groups. The installation of a United States military base during World War II significantly intensified local dynamics, with direct impacts on people's circulation, land valuation, and occupation of the surrounding area, accelerating informal occupation processes.

Following the war's end and the subsequent deactivation of military bases, an accelerated and disorderly process of territorial occupation began, without adequate basic urban infrastructure. Between the 1950s and 1990s, Pici experienced continuous expansion, with areas previously belonging to public or private entities now occupied by families from other regions of Fortaleza or migrant families from other cities in Ceará. During this period, the government also began intervening in the region, building housing complexes and community public facilities. By the end of the 20th century, the occupation of remaining spaces and community consolidation exhibited a growth pattern characterised by informality, heterogeneous and discontinuous urban fabric, and persistent land tensions (UFC, 2019).

Based on the PIRF diagnostic process (UFC, 2019), ZEIS Pici is formed by internally territorialised communities, whose residents self-identify as belonging to specific localities. These collective identities emerged from distinct periods of occupation, processes, and dynamics. During the PIRF elaboration, social cartography workshops conducted with residents identified seven communities within ZEIS Pici: Fumaça, Feijão, Entrada da Lua, Tancredo Neves, Futuro Melhor, Planalto do Pici and Papoco.

According to diagnostic data, internal disparities exist among these communities (UFC, 2019). The lowest incomes are concentrated in the Entrada da Lua and Fumaça communities, which also exhibit the most significant deficiencies in sewage network connections. Better income levels characterise the Planalto do Pici and Tancredo Neves communities.

Socio-Economic Profile and Housing Conditions

Despite internal disparities, the overall situation remains one of poverty. Based on PIRF diagnostic data, the majority of the population of ZEIS Pici has a family income of up to 2 Brazilian minimum wages, which represents

approximately \$400 per month per family, while only 2.2% of ZEIS Pici families live on more than 5 minimum wages (UFC, 2019). The area is mainly characterised by self-declared homeownership at 75.55%, often without formal land titles.

The territory has good access conditions to essential services, including electricity (99.76%), water (98.33%), garbage collection (99.85%), and sewage (90.37%), superior to other socially vulnerable neighbourhoods in Fortaleza, although specific areas with sewage network connection deficiencies persist, particularly in the Entrada da Lua community (UFC, 2019).

Regarding habitability conditions, ZEIS Pici mainly features high density and low vertical building height, with a maximum of 3 floors (UFC, 2019). Construction occupies almost the entire area of the small plots, which are generally autoconstructed and often extended with annexes to accommodate family members or support economic activities. There is a noticeable tendency for cohabitation, with two or more families sharing the same property. A small plot (35 m² on average), combined with high construction density, results in limited internal spaces and poses challenges for providing sufficient natural lighting and ventilation, thereby compromising health conditions and thermal comfort (UFC, 2019).

Community Organisation and Struggle History

The territory has an extensive history of social mobilisations demanding community improvements and housing provision. According to the PIRF diagnostic, since the mid-2000s, different institutional arrangements involving community organizations, Cearah Periferia NGO, universities, public agencies, and international partners sought to implement projects aimed at territorial housing and urban improvement (UFC, 2019). These included the "Citizen Regularisation Project" and the "Pro-ZEIS Project," which, despite advances such as socioeconomic registrations and technical diagnostics, faced challenges related to execution and continuity.

Community articulation gained strength during strategic moments, such as Fortaleza's Participatory Master Plan elaboration process (2009), when mobilisation aimed to ensure Pici's recognition as a Special Zone of Social Interest. This action counted on decisive participation from local groups, including the Family Development Group (GDFAM) and the Front for the Struggle for Decent Housing (FLMD). Years later, social mobilisations exerted pressure on public authorities, leading to the 2013 creation of the Inter-sectoral and Community Technical Committee for ZEIS Regulation, where ZEIS Pici was selected among ten priority territories that would receive Integrated Plans elaboration (Pequeno, 2023).

Partnership Network and Project Context

The territory's improvement needs created conditions for partnerships with multiple organisations over the years, as mentioned above, including Taramela ATAC. Since 2018, Taramela has occupied the civil society entity

position in the Management Councils of ZEIS Mucuripe and Pici, advising residents in the PIRF elaboration process and facilitating dialogue between communities, public agencies, and local organizations. Technical assistance to ZEIS Pici, promoted by Taramela, has been continuous since then.

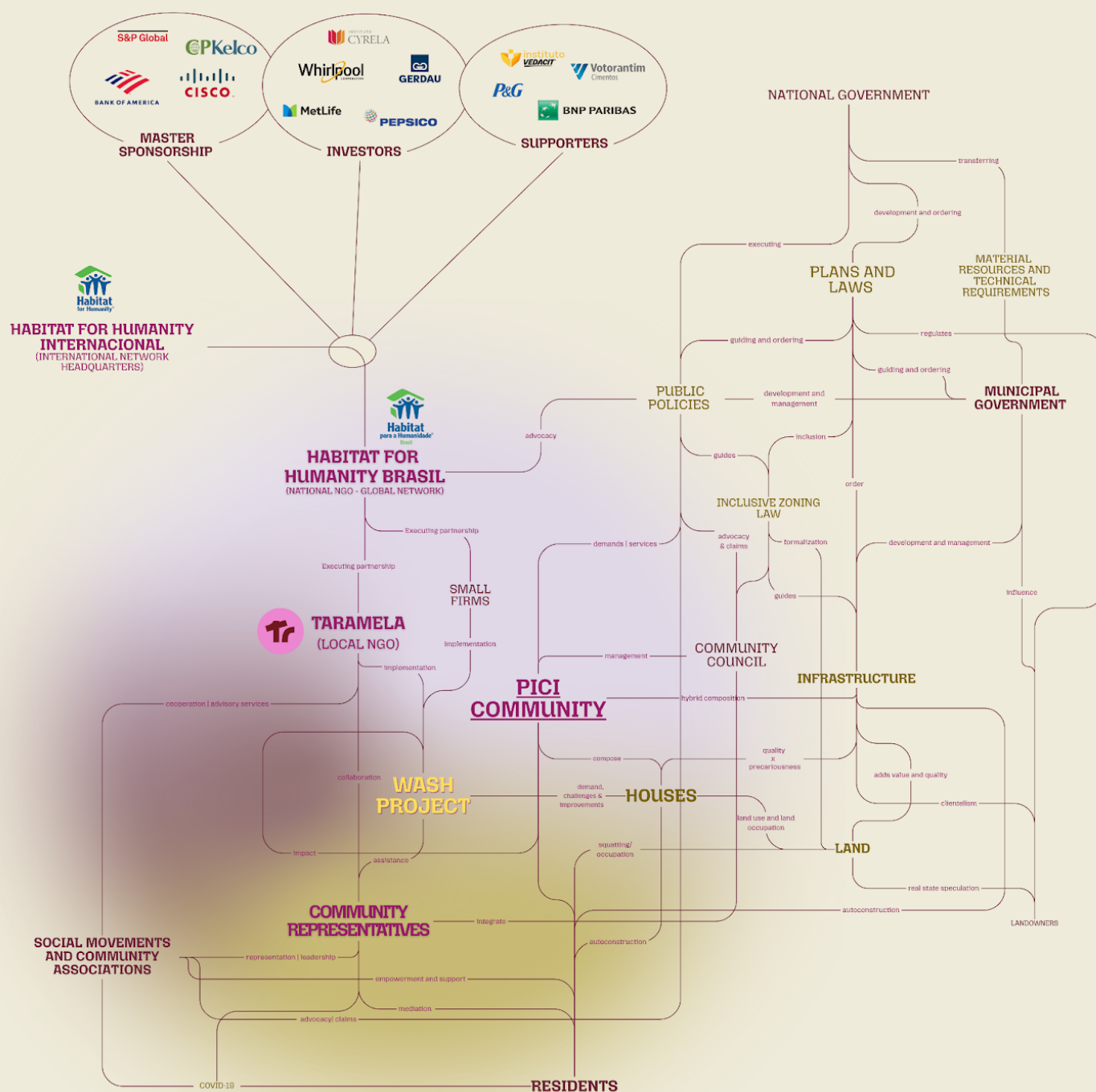
The "One Hand Washes the Other" project, implemented between 2020 and 2021, consisted of installing community sinks in vulnerable urban areas as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, financed by Habitat for Humanity Brazil (Taramela, n.d.-b). The WASH Program in 2021 was implemented specifically in the Fumaça community, also in partnership with Habitat Brazil, promoting housing improvement interventions such as water tank installation, bathroom renovations, and space readjustment, prioritising access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for families (Habitat Brasil, 2022). Most recently, in 2024, the Housing Improvements project was implemented, financed by the Ceará Architecture and Urbanism Council. The project involved conducting a precariousness diagnosis, elaborating a pilot architectural project, and formulating a strategy for a territorialised housing improvement program (Ponte et al., 2025).

Case study preliminary actors network

Below is an image that graphically summarises the relationship between the actors identified so far from the collection of secondary data. The Pici Community is located in the centre of the image because it is the main point connecting all the other actors, with the relevant groups branching out from it.

Case study preliminary actors network

Figure 07.
Preliminary network of actors involved in the case study of the WASH project implemented in the Pici community



Note. Author's elaboration based on own analysis/data.

Key Dimensions of the Case Study Findings

Methodological Note

Primary Data Sources and its Contributions

The research findings presented in the following sections draw from four semi-structured interviews and one multi-stakeholder public forum. Each source contributed distinct analytical perspectives that collectively show the complexities of the Habitat for Humanity Brazil - Taramela ATAC partnership in Pici community housing improvements in Fortaleza. The strategic positioning of interviewees across organisational scales and operational contexts enabled an understanding of how multi-scalar NGO collaborations function in practice, showing both convergences and tensions that shaped the project outcomes.

Habitat for Humanity Brazil's national program manager provided an institutional perspective that placed the WASH partnership within broader organisational strategies and constraints. Her experience in social housing initiatives provided a historical context for understanding how the international networked NGO adapts its approaches to Brazilian territorial conditions. Her insights into resource mobilisation processes showed the donor relations and policy advocacy work that enabled partnerships like Habitat-Taramela while shaping their operational flexibility.

The two Taramela ATAC founding partners interviewed provided complementary insights into local implementation dynamics. The territorially embedded partner's community relationships in Fortaleza demonstrated how technical assistance projects depend on alignment with existing social networks and local governance structures. Her direct experience with community-driven methodologies during the COVID-19 pandemic showed the adaptive capacity required for partnership sustainability in such crisis contexts. The academically engaged partner's dual positioning as organisational coordinator and university researcher provided analytical depth regarding challenges that emerged when international development frameworks encountered local knowledge systems. Her reflections on participatory methodologies showed the ongoing negotiations required to maintain community agency within institutionalised partnership structures.

The last interview was conducted with a community management council leader from Pici, who provided ground-level analysis that both validated and complicated the organisational narratives presented by NGO representatives. His leadership experience demonstrated internal community dynamics that influenced project reception and sustainability, including coordination challenges and political negotiations necessary to maintain community support. His perspective showed how housing improvement initiatives generated unexpected consequences for local

governance capacity, both strengthening and potentially undermining existing community organisation structures.

The public forum observation, called: Meeting on Housing Improvements and Technical Assistance, contributed analytical dimensions that individual interviews could not capture, connecting the Habitat WASH project with Fortaleza's broader housing improvement landscape. Multi-stakeholder interactions demonstrated the policy environment that enabled and constrained NGO partnerships, while community voices from various settlements provided comparative context that enhanced understanding of Pici's specific experience.

The triangulation of these data sources produced findings that strengthen the validity of results presented in subsequent sections, though each source also presented limitations. The research acknowledges potential bias in organisational self-representation and community leadership perspectives that may not capture the broader experiences of residents. However, this data configuration enabled analysis that moves beyond single perspectives to examine interactive dynamics that shaped project outcomes through constant dialogue between sources. The findings that follow draw on this multi-actor database to understand how the Habitat-Taramela-Pici collaboration can contribute to housing improvement practices in informal settlement contexts.

Methodological Note

As part of the data processing and analysis methodology, each interview underwent thematic analysis, which is available in the thesis appendices. The breadth and diversity of themes suggested categorising them as an intermediate stage of data interpretation in relation to the research question and its three analytical focuses. The search for patterns to cluster themes led to five analytical categories:

- ★ Organisation models, networks and relationships
- ★ Infrastructure and housing material conditions
- ★ Knowledge Systems and Technologies
- ★ Resources and sustainability
- ★ Urban Governance and Politics

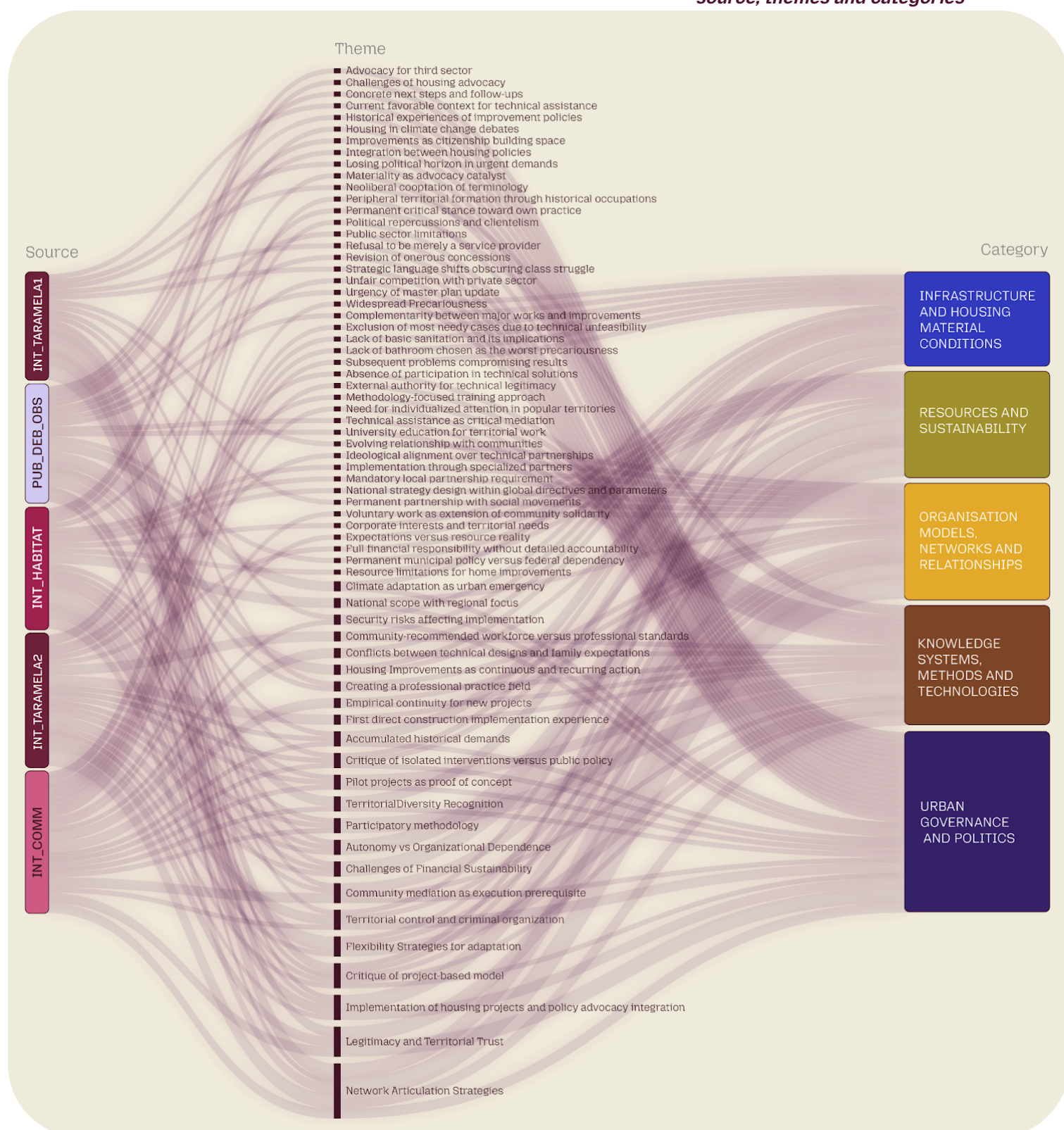
Categories, like most research and analysis tools, attempt to make sense of a highly dynamic and complex reality, though always imperfectly. They are not rigid boxes. In this research, the categories aim to facilitate an understanding of the relations between themes and communicate these connections.

Data processing and analysis showed that themes naturally crossed boundaries between categories, reflecting the interconnected nature of housing improvement work where organisational, material,

epistemological, financial, and political dimensions operate simultaneously rather than in isolation. Allowing themes to appear where their contributions proved most significant, the research preserves these cross-cutting connections, providing a more accurate representation of dynamics in the actor-network.

For a first overview of the results, the interpretation of the graph presented below leads to the following considerations:

Figure 08.
Graphic demonstration of method approach showing the relations between source, themes and categories



Note. Author's elaboration based on own analysis/data.

Examining thematic patterns, certain themes appeared consistently across multiple analytical categories. "Legitimacy and Territorial Trust" emerged across the "Organisation Models, Networks and Relationships", "Urban Governance and Politics", "Resources and Sustainability", and "Knowledge Systems, Methods and Technologies" categories, indicating that this theme extended project requirements, consistently influencing organisational relationships, resource distribution, knowledge production, and territorial navigation throughout the entire process and beyond.

The investigation identified two additional themes that appeared across multiple categories with distinct distribution patterns. "Network Articulation Strategies" and "Critique of project-based model" followed different pathways through the data analysis process. The research primarily traced articulation through the "Organisation Models, Networks and Relationships" and "Resources and Sustainability" categories, with extensions into "Urban Governance and Politics", indicating that partnership building functions as an organisational capacity, a resource mobilisation strategy, and a territorial political requirement.

The "Critique of project-based model" appeared most frequently in "Resources and Sustainability" and "Urban Governance and Politics" categories, while maintaining presence in "Organisation Models, Networks and Relationships", demonstrating how funding temporalities affect financial planning, territorial and political relationships, and organisational development.

The analysis identified a third cluster of themes that revealed operational challenges and adaptive responses. "Flexibility Strategies for adaptation", "Territorial control and criminal organisation", and "Community mediation as execution prerequisite" each demonstrated distinct distribution patterns.

The research noticed "Flexibility Strategies for adaptation" concentrated in "Organisation Models, Networks and Relationships" and "Knowledge Systems, Methods and Technologies" categories, indicating that adaptability emerged through organisational learning in partnerships and methodological innovation.

"Territorial control and criminal organisation" emerged across the "Urban Governance and Politics", "Infrastructure and House Material Conditions" and "Organisation Models, Networks and Relationships" categories, indicating that security concerns influenced political navigation and partnership/networking structures, as well as resonated with material aspects.

"Community mediation as execution prerequisite" appeared in "Organisational Models, Networks and Relationships", "Urban Governance and Politics" and "Knowledge Systems, Methods and Technologies", suggesting that local leadership operated simultaneously as an organisational infrastructure, governance mechanism, and knowledge production system, rather than solely as an intermediary between external actors and local communities.

That said, the upcoming sessions will examine the findings for each category, aiming to clarify and deepen the understanding of the dynamics outlined above. In these sessions, the strict terminology of themes, created to build a database for graph modelling, becomes somewhat secondary to their meanings and key passages from the primary data collected. The presentation of additional findings involved ongoing dialogue between different data sources, and quotes from the original interviews are included to enrich the narrative. Direct quotations validate the findings and help accurately identify the main issues that arise across various perspectives. These quotes, originally in Portuguese, were translated by the researcher.

Organisation Models, Networks and Relationships

This category includes themes that explain how the three main actors in this case - Habitat, Taramela ATAC, and the Pici community - form partnerships, navigate power asymmetries, and manage relationships at different levels. The clustered themes highlight dynamics connected to capacity building and strengthening through networks and partnerships, as well as alignments and discrepancies between actors and organizational autonomy versus dependency. They express how network positioning influences actors' opportunities and constraints.

The theme of network articulation strategies proved significant across all data sources, with different levels and aspects identified for different actors. Networks operate as sources of capacity building, development, and political influence, though they can also create certain restrictions that shape organisational behaviour and opportunities.

Habitat for Humanity Brazil's position within a broad international network creates a balance between global alignment and local autonomy that affects all partnership decisions. As highlighted in the interview, most national organisations within the Habitat for Humanity network "are not branches" of Habitat for Humanity International and can "design its own strategies within the network's possibilities, with the freedom to assess the country's needs and demands, in line with Habitat for Humanity's global strategy" (Habitat Interview). This positioning "opens opportunities" as Habitat for Humanity International "offers a range of possibilities for action" and provides support for international calls and partnerships, as well as resource management capabilities.

However, being part of a global network requires "complying with standards of performance and excellence, as well as the network's policies, international financial and bureaucratic systems" (Habitat Interview). These requirements create operational limitations, such as the inability of local partners to raise international funds directly. These aspects suggest a dynamic of conditional autonomy in which Habitat Brazil both benefits from the global network structure and adapts to its constraints in ways that affect how partnerships can be structured and maintained.

This conditional autonomy shapes Habitat's approach to local partnerships, which forms the operational foundation for all housing improvement projects. Habitat staff recognised the organisation's complete reliance on local partners: "almost 100% of our projects are carried out through partners" (Habitat Interview). The organisation clearly expressed a partnership model preference for small organisations with social commitment over traditional construction companies.

Regarding housing improvement projects specifically, Habitat Brazil partnerships require formal registration - "nowadays we only work with organisations that have a tax ID" (Habitat Interview) - but selection also considers alignment with organisational values. Staff emphasised seeking "small actors... who, even though they were companies... have a sense of social commitment... and know how to operate in low-income vulnerable areas and want to work there" (Habitat Interview).

The partnership selection process operates through invitation rather than open competition. "We don't run a selection process; what we do is invited" (Habitat Interview). Habitat maintains "a pool of approved partners", establishing partnerships based on partners' recent activities, capacity, and project needs (Habitat Interview). This approach relies on existing networks, which may influence who can access opportunities, while ensuring the desired institutional alignment that supports project implementation.

Currently, most Habitat partners involved in housing improvement projects are "small social impact offices; they don't define themselves as technical assistance organisations" (Habitat Interview). Both the Habitat Interview and Taramela ATAC's interviews highlight a significant distinction between ATHIS organisations and small social impact offices that affects partnership possibilities and competitive dynamics within the sector.

While Habitat expressed interest in collaborating with ATHIS organisations, they noted persistent challenges in making these partnerships work effectively. "We really want to work with technical assistance organisations, but we haven't managed to... maybe their dynamics are just different" (Habitat Interview). Staff described these organisations as operating at different rhythms, being "deeper, less focused on construction and more theoretical in the sense of supporting other struggles" (Habitat Interview), indicating different work approaches and priorities that may conflict with project implementation requirements.

Habitat reported that improvement projects require an operational pace "that we couldn't achieve with ATHIS Organisations" (Habitat Interview). This suggests that housing improvement projects demand implementation speed that can conflict with technical assistance approaches that prioritize deeper community engagement and broader social analysis. The tension reveals how different organizational models create compatibility challenges that affect partnership formation within the housing improvement sector.

The local NGO Taramela ATAC also identified purpose alignment as a key criterion for partnerships, though their perspective on collaboration differs from Habitat's efficiency-focused approach. Taramela staff stated that partnerships "always need some degree of purpose alignment" and recognized operational differences from social impact businesses. While these differences are "not an impediment", lack of alignment tends to make collaboration less viable given what they described as the "demanding nature of their work".

Despite recognition that small offices and social impact businesses may be more efficient for housing improvement implementation, the interviews provided limited evidence to clearly define operational differences between these organizational types. However, the data suggests competitive dynamics within the sector between small offices and ATHIS organizations, particularly given reported resource scarcity. Taramela ATAC staff noted that "we have great difficulty accessing resources without partnership and network arrangements" (Taramela Interview 2), indicating how resource constraints shape partnership strategies and organizational positioning.

Based on Taramela ATAC's experience, the organization views networks as essential mechanisms for collective and organizational strengthening that enable access to opportunities that would otherwise remain unavailable. The integration into the Northeast Network of Popular Technical Advisors provided access to international funding and institutional development that "would be impossible to achieve independently" (Taramela Interview 1). The WASH project itself was mediated by this regional network connection, demonstrating how network relationships enable resource access and project opportunities.

However, projects in partnership with larger organizations operate within frameworks that require ongoing negotiation around autonomy and compliance requirements. Taramela ATAC staff noted: "There is rigidity, but it's not intransigence" when describing Habitat for Humanity frameworks (Taramela Interview 2), suggesting that partnerships involve continuous management of organizational differences and power asymmetries while maintaining collaborative effectiveness.

In this housing improvement case, territorial legitimacy operated as a prerequisite that created different positioning within the partner network and determined implementation possibilities. The findings suggest that the project depended on identifying and partnering with actors who already possessed established territorial legitimacy rather than organizations attempting to build new community relationships. Habitat staff acknowledged: "We don't enter a territory without a local partner" (Habitat Interview).

Taramela ATAC staff emphasized that successful project execution relied on "relationships of trust that have been previously established" (Taramela Interview 2). This indicates that organizations could not rapidly establish the social foundations necessary for interventions without

ongoing work in advising and continuously supporting residents' associations, participatory councils and social movements. The finding suggests that Habitat's invitation-based partnership approach prioritizes organizations that already possess territorial legitimacy, yet this legitimacy requires ongoing maintenance through specific practices and relationships that extend far beyond individual project periods.

The community leader's role as local facilitator demonstrates how territorial legitimacy operates through existing social networks and institutional relationships. The project reached the Pici community because Taramela ATAC participated as an advisor in the ZEIS Pici council, which collectively decided that housing improvement initiatives would be directed to the Fumaça section of the broader Pici community (Community Leader Interview). This institutional pathway reveals how formal decision-making structures intersect with territorial legitimacy to enable resource allocation and project implementation.

Community members had already established mutual aid systems during the pandemic that provided the organizational foundation for housing improvement implementation. "People from Fumaça were the ones helping each other" (Community Leader Interview), with local mask production and donations being distributed through the community leader's house, which functioned as an informal distribution center. The community leader's central role in organizing pandemic response, as well as his position as coordinator of the community kitchen for food security, positioned him as the logical liaison once the council directed the project to the Fumaça area.

The community leader became the community representative on the required selection committee, which oversaw family identification and housing improvement implementation (Community Leader Interview). His involvement illustrates how territorial legitimacy operates through established community relationships and recognized leadership roles that enable project mediation between external organizations and local residents.

These networks extended beyond the immediate community through connections with social movements such as the MST and the Front for Dignified Housing (FLMD). The FLMD received ongoing support from Taramela ATAC, as they stated, "This partnership has been in place since we started" (Taramela Interview 1), creating overlapping networks between the implementing organization and the territory that strengthen both advocacy capacity and implementation legitimacy.

The overlap of relationships and roles becomes evident in how the community leader understood his mediation work as an extension of existing community solidarity rather than a separate employment opportunity. For him, the project had a voluntary and relational nature: "For me, it's something very common, something very normal, because I was already doing this with the kitchen, and we don't get paid for the kitchen either; there's no pay for other projects I'm involved in either. So

for me, it was just another project to help people" (Community Leader Interview).

This perspective reveals how community leadership operates through solidarity networks that extend across multiple projects and activities, suggesting that territorial legitimacy depends on sustained community engagement rather than project-specific relationships. The evidence indicates that housing interventions rely on both existing community social infrastructure and formal decision-making structures that have established legitimacy to allocate resources to specific territorial areas.

The case study data shows that the three main actors operate within different yet complementary network structures that enable collaboration while creating ongoing tensions around autonomy, efficiency, and territorial legitimacy. Regional, national, and international networks provide access to resources and operational models, while pre-existing solidarity networks and trust-based relationships enable project implementation. The evidence suggests that effective housing improvement partnerships require alignment across multiple network levels, from international organizational standards to local community relationships, creating complex coordination challenges that affect both immediate project success and longer-term sustainability.

Infrastructure and Housing Material Conditions

This category encompasses how materiality influenced relationships and the possibilities for housing intervention. The themes demonstrate how physical conditions went beyond purely technical considerations to shape social relations, community responses, and political opportunities. The evidence from this case study suggests that material improvements fostered dignity and recognition, while also exposing the limitations of punctual interventions with a limited budget and focus in contexts of ongoing vulnerability.

The territorial context in Pici showed widespread precariousness that required immediate strategic decisions regarding intervention focus and scope. Data revealed extensive housing needs throughout the territory, with the community leader stating that "all the houses there need renovation, without exception" (Community Leader Interview). This perception created immediate pressures for strategic prioritisation within constrained resources.

When the community leader mentions 'there', he is specifically referring to the Fumaça community, where he lives and where the project was implemented. This is important because his account also emphasises how materiality, urban morphology, and constructions reflect historical processes that shape current conditions.

First, the context of the project, at the time, was during the pandemic. I live in the Fumaça community, which is a marginalised area. Pici was formed from invasions that became settlements, developing into what it is today. This happened between 1960 and

1990; before the settlements were consolidated, they occurred in different parts of the neighbourhood. There is a part where Feijão is located, as well as Entrada da Lua, Tancredo Neves, and a region we also call Planalto, which is the area near the university. There are also areas further up that have housing complexes. Each of these developed at different times and grew, eventually merging to form the neighbourhood as it is today. The most underprivileged part is Fumaça, which is almost at the end of the neighbourhood, making it quite difficult to access; some streets don't even have pavement. It is not close to the main avenues, which are the areas that usually develop better. It is quite hidden within Pici. So, reaching it takes longer, and improvements or projects tend to reach other parts of the neighbourhood first. During the pandemic, vulnerability there became even bigger, and the council decided that the Habitat project with Taramela would be directed to there (Community Leader Interview, 2025)

While describing the community, the leader referred to what is known as the Pici neighbourhood, a mosaic of settlements and housing complexes created by the state, with varying levels of infrastructure and income profiles. He suggests how the location and urban form of a particular area influence its development pattern, and how this has influenced the collective decision to prioritise one area over another, combined with the social structure established by the residents of that specific area, the Fumaça community, to cope with the increased vulnerability experienced during the pandemic, as described in the previous session.

Although the project's WASH concept covers different types of housing improvements, the implementation committee decided that the priority would be bathrooms and toilets. These were identified as representing "the most serious precariousness" since "most houses there have a problem with sanitation infrastructure" (Community Leader Interview). This strategic focus appears to have enabled both standardised technical approaches and meaningful impacts for participating households while creating clear intervention boundaries that organisations could manage within available resources.

However, these same resource and technical constraints created systematic exclusion patterns that affected the most vulnerable households in ways that all actors acknowledged but could not resolve within the project structure. Technical feasibility assessments excluded what the community leader described as the most precarious cases:

Those who needed it most couldn't get in, even though they were the ones who needed it most and didn't have a toilet in their house, but the structure was very precarious and making any changes could compromise the rest of the structure (Community Leader Interview, 2025)

This exclusion highlights how technical standards can create barriers for households with the greatest need, forcing project actors to choose

between equity and feasibility within resource constraints. Taramela ATAC staff confirmed this structural constraint: "We realized that the resources would not be enough to do what needed to be done" when encountering complex structural cases (Taramela Interview 2). The pattern suggests that housing improvement interventions face inherent tensions between achieving visible results for some families while systematically excluding those whose needs exceed standardized intervention capacity.

Despite these exclusionary limitations, the material improvements implemented generated significant impacts on housing dignity and community recognition that extended far beyond the immediate technical changes. Community members in the Public Debate highlighted transformative social effects: "with the renovations, people start giving their address" indicating how material improvements affected residents' relationship to their territorial identity and social recognition.

The community leader shared a specific example illustrating the broader territorial impact of housing improvements:

For a while, I was known as 'the bathroom boy'. It became so widespread that I remember going to other parts of the neighbourhood where I didn't have much contact with people, and they knew about this project and wanted to know how to bring it there (Community Leader Interview, 2025)

This recognition created both opportunities and pressures, as the intervention's visibility generated community expectations that exceeded the partnership's capacity to respond across the broader territory.

He also noted that, although only five houses were involved, he believes the project "stands out because it had a big impact on some people's lives" (Community Leader Interview). This observation suggests that material improvements create ripple effects within community social networks that amplify their significance beyond the immediate beneficiaries, potentially affecting how communities understand possibilities for territorial change and development.

The material improvements generated political capital that organisations recognised as significant for broader advocacy strategies. The Taramela ATAC team acknowledged that these impacts have direct political significance: "when we have the materiality of the thing, it gives a boost" to advocacy work (Taramela Interview 2). This suggests that concrete housing improvements provide tangible evidence that organisations can use to demonstrate feasibility and effectiveness in policy advocacy contexts, creating material backing for arguments about scaling similar interventions.

The political significance of material improvements appears to operate both within communities, where visible changes affect social dynamics and expectations, and in policy contexts, where concrete outcomes provide credibility for organisations engaged in advocacy work. This dual

impact suggests that housing improvements function simultaneously as direct interventions and as demonstration projects that can influence broader territorial development possibilities.

However, these recognised impacts face significant challenges in organisational monitoring and communication systems that may affect sustainability and scaling possibilities. Habitat staff acknowledged difficulties in capturing these broader impacts through standard monitoring frameworks. The organization recognized that housing improvements can act as "a gateway to other rights" and "can generate other gains, health and such" yet noted that "it's difficult to measure and communicate this" (Habitat Interview).

This measurement challenge suggests that housing improvements have systemic benefits that current evaluation approaches struggle to quantify and document effectively. The difficulty in communicating complex social and political impacts may affect organisations' capacity to demonstrate value to funders and partners, potentially constraining resources for similar interventions that generate recognised but unmeasured benefits.

The evidence from this case suggests that infrastructure and material conditions operate as a crucial intersection where technical interventions meet social relationships and political possibilities. The material focused on sanitation infrastructure enabled standardised approaches while generating significant dignity and recognition impacts that exceeded technical expectations. However, the same resource constraints that enabled focus also created systematic exclusions, while the difficulty in measuring complex social impacts creates ongoing challenges for organisational sustainability and scaling efforts.

These findings suggest that housing improvement effectiveness depends on understanding material conditions not only as technical challenges but as social and political opportunities that require evaluation frameworks capable of capturing the full range of impacts that material changes generate within territorial contexts characterised by multiple forms of precariousness and ongoing vulnerability.

Knowledge Systems, Methods, and Technologies

This category examines how different knowledge systems interacted, conflicted, and integrated among the actors in this project, revealing how knowledge hierarchies influenced both project outcomes and relationships among actors. The themes demonstrate negotiations between technical expertise, experiential knowledge, and territorial understanding that occurred among the three main actors and extended beyond them. This category contributes to understanding how knowledge asymmetries created both collaborative opportunities and power imbalances in this specific case.

International technical vocabulary and standards provided basic parameters within which the intervention operated, yet created communication challenges across different knowledge systems. The

WASH framework provided the conceptual basis for the project, although this terminology did not translate directly into local vocabulary. Taramela ATAC staff shared that "WASH became a synonym for bathroom" in practice (Taramela Interview 2), which connects to the "bathroom boy" account from the community leader. This suggests that international development vocabulary requires local translation processes that can change original technical meanings and scope, creating gaps between intended frameworks and community understanding.

Habitat's approach to knowledge management reveals ongoing tensions between standardization requirements and flexibility needs that affect all implementing partners. Staff explained their operational challenge:

We have dilemmas... but we try to have well-designed processes. Because if we are going to work with organizations in different locations, we need to have processes and tools in place so that we can, at the very least, guarantee some level of monitoring and quality (Habitat Interview, 2025)

However, they acknowledged that "this is a challenge when, at the same time, we want and need flexibility" (Habitat Interview). This suggests that standardized systems struggle to accommodate recognized diversity of local contexts and partnership arrangements while maintaining operational consistency.

Local organizations navigate these international frameworks strategically while maintaining critical perspectives on their limitations. Taramela ATAC indicated the need to adopt international terminology for resource access: "We use these terms because we know that, strategically, when we write... we need to use these terms to get noticed" when applying for funding (Taramela Interview 1). This suggests that local organizations must adopt international frameworks and technical language to access resources, while potentially maintaining different internal frameworks for understanding their work and managing community relationships.

The evidence reveals how organizations occupy different positions within knowledge hierarchies that create both learning opportunities and power asymmetries. Taramela ATAC staff positioned themselves as intermediaries among various knowledge systems, recognizing key lessons from Habitat as a "more consolidated and professionalized organization". They gained valuable insights into "budgeting, project planning, and standardized processes", which improved their own proposal development skills (Taramela Interview 2). This learning process demonstrates how partnerships can enable knowledge transfer while reinforcing organizational hierarchies based on technical capacity and resource access.

However, the intermediation role creates complex negotiations around authority and legitimacy that affect community relationships. The community leader remarked that "it's better to have someone from outside to manage the whole project, because when it's someone who has no connection, people will already look at them with an air of authority"

(Community Leader Interview). This view highlights how external technical authority gains legitimacy by distancing itself from local political ties, yet creates dependencies on intermediary organizations to bridge knowledge systems.

Taramela ATAC staff recognized their position within hierarchical social structures while attempting to transform traditional technical assistance relationships: "We refuse to simply provide a service, we've been moving away from the idea that we are the ones that can solve problems" (Taramela Interview 1). This positioning suggests efforts to create more horizontal knowledge relationships, though the evidence reveals persistent challenges in implementing participatory approaches within resource and time constraints.

The project implementation process revealed how knowledge systems and technical protocols create tensions between standardized methodologies and community-specific needs, particularly around conflicts between participatory approaches, technical standards, and resource constraints that ultimately affect which families benefit from housing improvements.

Habitat's structured approach attempts to balance technical requirements with participatory elements, though this creates operational complexities. The Habitat representative described their methodology:

We understand that each house is a case, each family, each house is each house. So, there is a survey moment, participating in a committee. In this committee, which includes Habitat, plus partners, where we go, in addition to selecting families, because by our policy, we always visit more families than what we select. This is a transparency policy (Habitat Interview, 2025).

However, this transparency protocol can raise expectations that technical limitations later challenge, as the same interviewee admitted: "There are cases that we don't apply, because sometimes the situation is so precarious that we can't apply. So, we make this point flexible."

The community leader's account highlights how transparency practices designed for accountability can create community disappointment when technical assessments determine project feasibility. The leader explained:

We managed to get only seven people because as it would never work and bringing this kind of hope to people is complicated because when it doesn't work out it gets very bad, and in the case the first houses that we selected couldn't enter were the ones that needed it most (Community Leader Interview, 2025)

This illustrates how transparency protocols can shift from tools of inclusion to sources of community disappointment, requiring careful intermediation to manage expectations and maintain community relationships.

Despite participatory ideals, resource and time constraints limited community involvement in design and construction processes. Taramela ATAC staff noted that "there was no participatory process in the design and construction" due to "resource, time and scope limitations" (Taramela Interview 2). The community leader's observations suggest that limited participation created communication issues with beneficiary families: "people did not fully understand the project... during works, people wanted something different, such as different flooring or paint" (Community Leader Interview). When analyzed together, these comments reveal constraints that participatory ideals struggled to address within the project's operational frameworks.

The community-recommended workforce, which followed project guidelines for local economic integration, created tensions between social objectives and technical quality standards. "The people hired for the project were from the Fumaça Community" (Community Leader Interview), while Taramela ATAC staff acknowledged some concerns about technical quality (Taramela Interview 2). This tension required the organization to make trade-offs between technical standards and territorial legitimacy, suggesting that social infrastructure considerations influenced technical implementation decisions in ways that affected project outcomes.

However, the shared responsibility arrangement also provided organizational benefits that helped manage implementation pressures. Taramela ATAC staff expressed relief about the community-led workforce selection:

Because it was the community itself that recommended the team, and the builder was actually a resident, that took some of the pressure off us. If it had been a team that we had recommended and it hadn't turned out perfectly, it could have been very stressful for us, you know? I think that's why we didn't have any problems, even if some results did not meet our standards as technicians (Taramela Interview 2)

The local workforce requirement created implementation delays, as only one team could be assembled, preventing multiple projects from proceeding simultaneously. This suggests either limited availability of construction professionals within the community or high demand for this type of work, revealing how local economic integration objectives can affect project efficiency and timeline management.

Knowledge building in this case emerged less from formal instruction and more through partnerships and hands-on engagement that created ongoing learning relationships beyond the immediate project period. Habitat provided some capacity support, although Taramela ATAC staff described it as more of an introduction to standardized procedures than in-depth training (Taramela Interview 2). What proved more valuable was the opportunity to apply these methods directly, which represented a new step in Taramela ATAC's experience with construction processes.

Deeper learning took place within evolving community relationships that enabled subsequent collaborations. This progression facilitated later work on proposal writing when communities identified funding opportunities they wished to pursue but lacked capacity to prepare independently, blending Taramela ATAC's technical writing skills with local territorial knowledge. The pattern highlighted complementary knowledge relationships where Habitat contributed methodological frameworks, Taramela offered technical and mediation capacities, and the community grounded the process in territorial understanding.

The knowledge exchange generated concrete outcomes that extended beyond the immediate intervention into broader policy and advocacy possibilities. The community leader explained how the project experience informed subsequent initiatives:

It really had an impact on the council. Recently, Taramela won a grant from the Council of Architecture and Urbanism, another project to improve houses, ventilation and lighting in homes. The project is together in a book that also works as a manual, showing what a house looks like, the layout, and what can be done to make it better. There's even talk about turning this into a city council project someday. A lot of the info for this came from the previous Habitat project, this one of the bathrooms. For Taramela's project, I helped write the proposal and basically shared how the bathroom project actually worked in practice. So now we have something real to show, how homes can be improved and what that process looks like in real life (Community Leader Interview, 2025).

This outcome demonstrates how knowledge systems integration can create resources for subsequent advocacy and policy engagement, suggesting that housing improvement projects generate knowledge products that exceed immediate technical outcomes. The evidence indicates that effective knowledge integration requires ongoing relationships that enable learning across different expertise types while managing power asymmetries and resource constraints that affect how participatory approaches can be implemented within project frameworks.

Resources and Sustainability

This category reveals how funding structures created both collaboration opportunities and sustainability challenges in this intervention, with each actor occupying different positions relative to resource flows and accountability requirements. The analysis exposes how resource dependencies shaped immediate implementation possibilities while creating longer-term sustainability challenges that affected the participants differently. The evidence suggests that resource asymmetries fundamentally structured relationships and constrained collective action possibilities in this case.

Housing improvement organizations face structural sustainability challenges that exceed individual project capacities and reflect broader

sector characteristics. Habitat staff acknowledged that they "can't sustain specialized offices through demand alone" (Habitat Interview), revealing how project-based funding models fail to support the technical capacity required for housing improvement work. This challenge becomes more acute when compared to other development sectors where organizations can demonstrate simple outcomes like feeding children "for one dollar per day" (Habitat Interview). Housing interventions face measurement and communication gaps where recognized systemic benefits remain difficult to quantify and articulate for fundraising purposes, potentially affecting organizational sustainability and resource mobilization strategies.

The sustainability pressures create dependencies on unpaid labor that organizations absorb to maintain continuity between funding cycles. Taramela ATAC staff described sustaining activities through "voluntary work between funded periods" (Taramela Interview 2), indicating how project-based models transfer institutional costs to individual commitment rather than adequate organizational support. These patterns suggest that housing improvement organizations operate within funding structures that systematically undervalue the continuous engagement required for effective territorial work.

International funding sources impose methodological constraints that may conflict with territorial needs and local implementation preferences, creating additional sustainability pressures. International funders "never cover just improvements" and require "other components" beyond construction activities (Habitat Interview). This requirement forces programmatic complexity that may exceed local implementation capacity or territorial priorities, creating tensions between donor expectations and community needs. Paradoxically, while acknowledging that "Brazil really needs to invest in improvements" (Habitat Interview), organizations must navigate between international funder requirements for complex programming and territorial needs for direct, simple interventions. This tension suggests that international resource access may inadvertently complicate interventions that communities and local organizations prefer to implement through straightforward approaches.

Corporate partnership models introduce geographic biases that conflict with equitable resource distribution, requiring additional advocacy work to align corporate interests with technical priorities. Corporate funding creates territorial tensions where "each corporation is much more interested in doing the work in their own backyard" (Habitat Interview), prioritizing geographic proximity to corporate operations over social need criteria. This preference conflicts with technical priorities based on housing deficit data, creating "difficulties" that require organizations to "demonstrate the data, to say where the deficit is, to say where the demand is" to redirect corporate investments toward areas with greater social needs.

The housing improvement sector experiences ongoing transitions that reflect broader regulatory and economic pressures affecting partnership

sustainability. Some organizations are "moving from companies to third-sector organizations... because of tax issues and maybe opportunities" (Habitat Interview). This transition pattern suggests that regulatory frameworks and economic incentives shape partnership possibilities in ways that exceed organizational control, potentially affecting the availability and sustainability of different types of implementing partners. However, Habitat recognizes that the housing improvement sector "needs to be strengthened" because "Habitat doesn't have enough demand to sustain the work of these organizations" (Habitat Interview), revealing mutual dependency relationships where neither international organizations nor local partners can independently sustain specialized housing improvement capacity.

Organizations cannot access international resources directly. Habitat's position as intermediary enabled resource flows while creating dependencies, as organizations "can't seek international resources directly" (Habitat Interview), positioning international NGOs as necessary gatekeepers for global funding access. This structural arrangement enables international organizations to maintain donor compliance while transferring operational risks to local partners, potentially reproducing resource inequalities by maintaining hierarchies where international organizations control resource access while local organizations assume implementation risks.

Against this broader organizational context, the specific intervention in Pici revealed how these structural constraints manifested in particular territorial conditions and implementation arrangements.

In this intervention, financial responsibility distribution created complex accountability relationships that enabled operational flexibility while maintaining hierarchical dependencies. Taramela ATAC assumed comprehensive financial management, reporting that "we manage all the resources, make all the purchases" while Habitat maintained oversight through "service reports, not detailed financial accountability" (Taramela Interview 2). This arrangement enabled Habitat to maintain donor compliance while transferring operational risks to the local partner.

The community leader confirmed local economic benefits, noting that "all purchases were made like this" within the community, except for materials requiring "official invoices" (Community Leader Interview). However, these formal accountability requirements created unexpected limitations on territorial integration. The requirement for official invoicing prevented local neighborhood businesses from participating in the intervention, forcing purchases in neighboring areas rather than strengthening local economic networks. This constraint demonstrates how formal accountability requirements can conflict with community development objectives, limiting the intervention's territorial embeddedness even when organizations seek greater flexibility.

The intervention implemented specific flexibility strategies designed to address territorial heterogeneity while managing resource constraints.

Habitat developed a contracting approach based on packages rather than standardised unit costs, allowing for internal resource redistribution across beneficiaries according to need variation. As Habitat staff explained, this system enables partners to "spend 50 or spend 20" per house while maintaining an average cost per intervention, recognising that "this is the dynamic of territories" (Habitat Interview). This approach represents an attempt to accommodate the heterogeneous needs that characterise informal settlements while maintaining budget predictability for funders.

Despite these adaptive strategies, resource flexibility faced significant operational limitations. The case also reveals ongoing adaptations in Habitat's flexibility approaches, with staff acknowledging that current online form-based monitoring systems are "no longer sufficient" and require platform restructuring to better accommodate territorial complexity while maintaining quality standards (Habitat Interview).

While these flexibility mechanisms attempted to address implementation challenges, they could not overcome broader resource limitations that created systematic exclusion patterns in this specific case. Resource constraints systematically excluded the most vulnerable populations, a pattern that all actors acknowledged but interpreted differently. Habitat staff noted that "resources for improvements are limited" (Habitat Interview), while the community leader provided specific analysis of exclusion outcomes: "the ones who needed it most couldn't get in, who were the ones who needed it most and didn't have a bathroom in the house, but the structure was very precarious" (Community Leader Interview).

Taramela ATAC staff made explicit the exclusion logic underlying selection processes: "we understood that the resources wouldn't be enough to do what needed to be done" (Taramela Interview 2). This pattern reveals how standardized unit costs could not accommodate the full spectrum of precariousness, potentially reproducing inequalities by systematically excluding the most vulnerable cases. The evidence suggests that resource constraints create selection pressures that favour interventions in less precarious situations where standardised budgets can achieve visible results, leaving the most urgent needs unaddressed.

These exclusion patterns connected directly to the differential sustainability challenges that each participating actor faced throughout and beyond the intervention period in this specific territorial context. The intervention revealed how resource dependencies created distinct sustainability pressures based on organisational structures and funding relationships in this particular case. Community expectations extended beyond intervention timelines, with residents continuing to approach leadership for months after project completion. The community leader noted that "for about two months after the project, from time to time people would come to my house to ask when it would happen again" (Community Leader Interview), revealing how community engagement creates ongoing demands that exceed project resource availability.

The specific factors affecting long-term sustainability of the housing renovations in Pici exceeded project control, revealing the limitations of discrete interventions in addressing ongoing territorial vulnerability. Post-intervention outcomes demonstrated the complexity of measuring success in precarious contexts: "the first house that was done had electrical problems and caught fire afterwards, the last house... the person... had to abandon the house due to threat from criminal factions" (Community Leader Interview).

This pattern illustrates how housing improvements in this territorial context had to contend with ongoing vulnerability factors that individual interventions could not address, suggesting that the effectiveness of housing improvements may require policy frameworks that provide continuous rather than episodic resource availability, with links to other dimensions of poverty and social vulnerability.

Urban Governance and Politics

This category examines how actors in this intervention navigated territorial politics, engaged with multiple authority structures, and managed the WASH housing improvements project within complex governance contexts where formal and informal power systems intersected.

The themes reveal how territorial dynamics simultaneously enabled and constrained collaboration while demonstrating how the NGO intervention became embedded within existing political relationships. Each actor occupied different positions relative to territorial authority structures, creating both opportunities and risks that extended far beyond the immediate scope of housing improvements.

The specific territorial context in Pici presented immediate security challenges that required constant navigation of power structures. Territorial control by criminal organisations created operational constraints and security risks that formal project planning could not anticipate or address. The community leader provided details of how factional conflicts directly affected implementation: "There was a dispute between factions in this area... on the street where most of it happened... three houses were on a street that's the border between two factions" (Community Leader Interview). These territorial divisions created daily operational risks where "sometimes it became dangerous to keep going back and forth with materials and also the people who came here" (Community Leader Interview).

The security considerations required territorial knowledge that exceeded technical capacity, demonstrating how complex urban governance determined the feasibility of interventions in specific contexts.

I remember Habitat's visit after the project was done was on one of the most dangerous days. This woman from Recife was walking down the streets alone. There was no one else around, and she was knocking on doors, but no one answered. Then

someone from Taramela sent me a message saying that the person had arrived. We were afraid to go out on the street, so my mother went to pick up the person. Luckily, nothing happened while the person was here, but about 40 minutes earlier... (Community Leader Interview).

This situation reveals how housing improvements occur within territories where state authority competes with alternative power structures, requiring actors to develop informal relationships and territorial knowledge to navigate without confronting criminal territorial control.

Even within this challenging context, the intervention generated territorial recognition, which created both political opportunities and complications for the actors. The community leader described that after the project was concluded, "people asked if he could put their house on the list" with ongoing requests for expansion (Community Leader Interview).

This recognition created an unexpected political impact, and the intervention became entangled with clientelistic expectations. The Community leader reported that some residents initially assumed improvements were politician-funded, as he explained: "everyone thought it had been some councillor who had put some politician and that I had also received a lot of money" (Community Leader Interview). This assumption generated popular pressure on local politicians who made promises they couldn't fulfil: "two councillors promised similar projects here but never delivered" (Community Leader Interview).

These clientelistic dynamics can be related to some community scepticism about municipal governance structures. The Community Leader expressed clear preferences for external project management when asked how he believes such projects should be carried out if expended, while acknowledging the necessity of local mediation: "I don't think there's anyone at city hall... or if it's at City Hall, the project needs to be carried out by people who hold permanent positions, not by those who are appointed" (Community Leader Interview). Additionally, he also emphasised that territorial mediation requires "someone from the area to be able to make this connection... someone who is a leader because I think if it were other people, the person wouldn't have the same contact that makes the project possible in the time it was done".

This analysis reveals community awareness of differences between appointed positions and permanent service positions in public government, with appointed roles perceived as potentially compromised by patronage relationships. The preference for external technical management, combined with local leadership mediation, suggests a complex understanding of how different authority types need to complement each in order to avoid clientelistic capture.

This resonated with the broader debates about the roles of technical assistance/advisory groups. In the Public Debate observed a professor said: "technical assistance has a very critical demarcated position" which

extends beyond technical and legal functions to encompass political positioning.

The findings suggest that the link between housing improvement implementation and policy advocacy also occurs through a continuing exchange between informal and formal spaces of citizen associations and participation. In this context, housing improvement projects were seen as providing evidence for broader policy arguments, while political pressure and council participation enabled organisations to influence resource allocation decisions that affect territorial development patterns.

In this case, organisations demonstrated distinct approaches to connecting immediate interventions with broader transformation objectives. Habitat connects service with thematic advocacy through independent financing, using local projects as cases to influence national and international policy. Their approach works through institutional channels to influence policy frameworks that can scale housing improvement through the partnership of governments with non-governmental organisations.

Taramela undertakes advocacy, starting from territorial demands and the groups it advises. Their strategy focuses on empowering community organisations that can sustain pressure for policy changes across political cycles. Taramela staff explicitly positioned their work against clientelistic dynamics: "This isn't charity, this is a call to pressure for public policy."

The partnership enabled both service provision and advocacy to operate simultaneously. Taramela staff recognised that interventions created "material backing to continue pressuring for policies" (Taramela Interview 2), illustrating how technical interventions generate political capital that becomes appropriated by actors outside the implementation partnership, creating both advocacy opportunities and organizational sustainability challenges.

In the Public Debate discussions emphasised that technical assistance should "help in citizenship building, people understanding rights and duties" (Public Debate), transforming technical interventions into educational opportunities for political formation.

The ZEIS council emerged as a crucial institutional space where housing improvement advocacy intersects with broader urban governance, representing a formal mechanism through which community needs can be channelled into municipal planning and management processes. Yet its effectiveness depends on the capacity of local organisations to sustain participation across political cycles and administrative changes.

The nature of the Public Debate that was a research source serves as an evidence. It involved the launch of a publication about a housing improvement project, conducted in another partnership between Pici and Taramela, under a new funding scenario. More than the community leadership recognised as a development of the project with the habitat.

The impact of the Habitat project for the council is mainly related to organisation. There was another project in this regard to improve the ventilation and lighting of the houses, which came from this project about the bathrooms, because currently we have something empirical to show how the houses can be improved (Community Leader Interview, 2025).

The launch served as a platform for political influence, bringing together various stakeholders for a meeting and discussion on "how do we add up and create this governance design" (Public Debate) that enables coordination between university, movements, and government while maintaining the continuous territorial presence that housing improvements demand as ongoing rather than isolated interventions. The ultimate goal was to discuss how to "build a housing improvement policy for Fortaleza city" (Public Debate) that can sustain territorial engagement across political cycles and administrative changes.

Another example of the evolution of partnerships formed through the housing improvement project is the collaboration between Habitat and Taramela, which also experienced further developments. The two organisations jointly competed for implementing public policies in vulnerable settlements. This occurred within a transformed political context that has created new institutional opportunities while still reproducing persistent structural constraints.

The current political scenario has generated unprecedented access to funding aligned with territorial development work. Taramela staff described how "we've never had a scenario with so many calls for proposals... with so many opportunities to compete for grants, where the grant object is actually what we work on and we don't have to work around it, adapting our work to fit the grant, like we've often done before" (Taramela Interview 1).

This transformation resulted from institutional changes, including "a new ministry that was created, which is the Ministry of Peripheries, along with the return of the Ministry of Cities", that aim to "articulate nature-based solutions in favelas", requiring community involvement in Growth Acceleration Programmes (PAC).

However, actors also expressed concern about how multiple overlapping interventions cause exhaustion among community participants rather than fostering effective coordination. Taramela staff explained how territories receive "three participatory actions for one territory" carried out by different organisations: the state government implementing PAC projects, organisations competing to develop action plans, and various nature-based solution initiatives (Taramela Interview 1). This fragmentation results in "layers of projects, layers of solutions, layers of teams in the same territory."

The territorial impact reflects what staff identified as "a difficulty in renewing people who engage in these processes" because "they are exhausted... nobody can stand talking about the same thing anymore"

(Taramela Interview 1). This pattern suggests a contradiction: policy fragmentation can undermine the community engagement that institutional reforms explicitly seek to promote.

Case study consolidated actors network

After the above explanation, the complexity of the actions of the groups involved in the case study in question is clear. In order to seek a representation that visually demonstrates this network of connections and influences, the image below summarises the diversity of relationships discussed above. The next chapter will provide a more in-depth discussion of the results obtained from the data presented.

[illegible]

90

06

Discussion.

xResults Discussion: Moving Beyond Simple Dichotomies to Sustain Doubleness in Practice

The interpretation of the research results through the lens of the mobilised theory began with matrix thinking. The findings, grouped by categories in the previous chapter, were cross-referenced with the research question and its three analytical focuses, which were specifically designed to guide the investigation into multi-scalar NGOs' housing improvement project by examining tensions arising from dichotomies.

- ★ Formal institutional systems versus informal practices
- ★ Contextual versus standardised
- ★ Immediate and punctual versus systemic and long-term

The outcome of this exercise is systematised in a table in Appendix 1, in which distinct patterns of thematic concentration emerged, revealing the dimensions of reality where these tensions are more pronounced or evident, and how they are navigated in the case study.

Examining navigation between formal institutional systems and informal practices, themes of legitimacy building, political mediation, and power relations proved especially relevant. The findings particularly emphasise how territorial trust enables project implementation within complex governance contexts where standard operational procedures meet community-specific realities. The categories of data collected that most expressed this tension were:

- ★ Organisation models, networks and relationships
- ★ Governance and Politics.

The balance between standardised frameworks and contextual adaptation was primarily expressed through flexibility mechanisms and methodological innovations developed in response to actors' recognition of territorial diversity. These enable global frameworks to function within local conditions while maintaining organisational accountability — a tension that proved more productive than problematic. The results categories that most clearly reflected this tension were:

- ★ Knowledge Systems and Technologies
- ★ Infrastructure and housing material conditions

Exploring how immediate improvements relate to systemic transformation goals sheds light on structural critiques of funding models, timing mismatches between project cycles and territorial needs, and ongoing

challenges in linking specific interventions with the establishment of more consolidated structures and with broader policy frameworks. The categories of results that distinctly illustrated this tension were:

- ★ Resources and Sustainability
- ★ Urban Governance and Politics.

What emerged most clearly from this matrix thinking were three recurring themes that cut across various categories and tensions. **"Legitimacy and territorial trust"** emerged as fundamental concerns influencing the project's implementation and navigation within the complex web of elements and relationships that comprise the network of actors in the case. It serves as a key point in managing the ongoing tensions between different logics and the formal and informal relationships within the system.

"Network articulation and strategies" emerged as central to building organisational capacity, particularly through their articulation at various levels. They serve as a strengthening factor for political actors and foster partnerships that build constructively amid tensions, as partnering and networking promote interaction between diverse rationalities and methods of operation. They are a vital component in both the inward and outward processes of negotiating and balancing productively the specific needs of communities with standardised and replicable implementation models.

The study consistently found **"Critiques of the project-based model"** across sustainability issues and systemic transformation challenges. Short-term logics that frame projects pose significant challenges to integrating immediate housing improvements with long-term systemic transformation objectives.

These transversal themes suggest that certain dynamics operate simultaneously across different aspects of housing improvement partnerships, requiring approaches that address their interconnected manifestations rather than treating them as separate operational challenges.

Examining the project's challenges in detail and analysing its results within its own framework and metrics shows that the potential for significant real-world change is quite limited due to the scale of intervention (five houses), the modest budget (\$900 per housing unit), and the narrow focus (construction or renovation of the bathroom). The research's ability to draw consistent conclusions from the data about how to navigate the tensions that inspired the research is also very limited.

An invitation from one of the interviewees crystallised this realisation: it becomes necessary to "move away from the idea that we are the ones who will solve the problems." This analytical back-and-forth movement around the actor-network altered the original plan to discuss results guided by the three tensions.

The reflective exercise on this matrix, supported by concepts within the theoretical framework on which this research builds, demonstrates that thinking politically, as proposed by Simone and Pieterse (2017), requires actually overcoming dichotomies that can compromise an understanding of the complexities of multi-scale partnerships and their potential to inspire practice and knowledge production. This led towards a narrative approach that invites readers to explore the network of actors. While observing their elements and nuanced connections, readers are encouraged to delve into the reflections that follow.

Actors Network of Multi-Scale NGO Housing Partnerships as an Interface Zone

I depart by taking the entire network — Habitat for Humanity International, Taramela Technical Advisory, and the Pici community — as a system within an interface zone (Watson, 2009), a dynamic space where varying rationalities intersect and interact. Instead of a fixed physical or administrative boundary, it functions as a fluid social and political space characterised by ongoing negotiation, contestation, and adaptation.

This complexity requires a political perspective that views arising tensions as productive rather than problems to be solved or eliminated through techno-managerial approaches. As an interface zone, the network of actors was analysed in search of expressions of “doubleness” (Simone and Pieterse 2017), a state where multiple logics coexist productively, encompassing both local and global dynamics alongside everyday life and official policy worlds.

Analysing the housing improvement initiative provides valuable insights into how local practices interact with larger structural dynamics. The actor network connects international frameworks, funds, and vocabularies with national operational logics and parameters to the reality of an informal settlement in a northeastern Brazilian city. Where the territorial configuration materially accumulates unequal and heterogeneous historical social processes that shape current living conditions and transformation possibilities.

These historical processes, materially inscribed in the Pici community, involve land occupation, autoconstruction, and interactions with the state, legal frameworks, as well as market logics that systematically exclude urban poor populations.

In Pici, all the elements outlined by Caldeira (2017) regarding autoconstruction and peripheral urbanisation are evident: distinctive temporality, slow, progressive, uneven, heterogeneous, precarious, and unfinished, along with significant spatial and social inequality. The Community Leader account reveals significant heterogeneity and inequality within the territory, where various occupations at different times and under different conditions — alongside state-produced housing — combine in a fragmented way. Although not seamlessly connected, they somehow form a cohesive whole that stands out from the

surrounding area and fosters a sense of belonging that links shared struggles and claims for rights.

As previously mentioned, network articulation and strategies strongly emerged as a cross-cutting theme. The actors' network in the case study encompasses multiple levels of networking, which proved especially important for mutual influence, strength, and continuous negotiation.

- ★ The global level encompasses Habitat for Humanity International, funders, supporters and international partners who provide operational frameworks and resources.
- ★ The national and regional levels include Habitat Brazil, with its group of implementing partners operating throughout Brazil, Taramela Technical Advisory, and the Northeast network of popular technical advisors, which have connections to national networks.
- ★ The local level comprises Taramela, residents' associations, social movements such as the Front for Dignified Housing, and informal networks formed within the community for mutual support during periods of vulnerability, exemplifying what Simone calls "people as infrastructure" (2018) – social networks functioning as organisational infrastructure.

All these levels interact transversally with government structures and legal frameworks that operate at federal, state, municipal, and intra-municipal levels, including both confrontational and collaborative approaches. This complexity is further heightened by clientelism and organised crime relationships, which add an even more nuanced and intricate dimension to the implementation of the project.

Productive Tensions in Practice

This transversal engagement directly relates to practices observed during the housing improvement project implementation, especially at the intersection of formalised models—such as work, service provision, standardised technical parameters, and quantifiable indicators—with relationships of trust, networks based on shared values, interpersonal connections, and tacit agreements. These dimensions, which in some aspects parallel formality versus informality, engage transversally in practice (Caldeira, 2017) mainly because they were equally important for project execution, such as when, for instance:

- ★ The tripartite family selection council operates simultaneously with formal criteria and informal territorial knowledge.
- ★ Technical assessments, socioeconomic forms, and building structural condition evaluations intersect with community relations and local dynamics that can only be navigated by territorial leadership.
- ★ The guidelines for local workforce hiring and local business material purchases aim to strengthen local expertise, regardless of formal proof of it, creating tensions between technical standards and community economic integration.

- ★ The contract and accountability model attempts to open space for adaptability in budget distribution while meeting institutional requirements.
- ★ Package-based contracting enables attending to both institutional demands (deadlines, budgets) and the incremental time of autoconstruction diversity.
- ★ The waiving of "technical responsibility" by the architect acknowledges the recurring impossibility of total respect for technical norms given preexisting conditions, assuming a shared responsibility system that chooses to act with available resources and case-by-case established limits.

Transversal engagements generated productive tensions between temporalities (fast project execution time versus slow trust relationship building time) and between rationalities (transparency protocols versus expectation construction; operational standards versus needs and desires; technical standards and language versus popular standards and language).

These productive tensions suggest that the effort of developing an operational model that leans towards a practical hybridisation is not merely a technical adjustment but a political navigation between conflicting rationalities. This navigation produces knowledge and experiences that, in turn, have the potential to shape new and evolving contours for the practice of improving precarious housing in informal settlements.

However, as with everything in this interface zone, negotiations are constant and do not always achieve the desired results.

On a more practical, small-scale, and daily life level, it can be cited as an example of the limits faced when the requirement for construction material invoice issuance proved imperative, preventing material supply from local businesses. Supply was then provided by an establishment in an adjacent neighbourhood with higher income and employment patterns than those of the area involved in the project.

On a larger and more complex scale, issues involving clientelism, criminal organisations, territorial fragmentation, and disillusionment with the government and politics demonstrated how the territorialisation through partnership, as Habitat Brazil's standardised process, reveals that behind apparent simplicity in institutional strategy lies underlying political complexity.

This reveals the structural dimension of urban governance complexity and interventions in peripheral territories.

The leadership's work proves essential for project viability: their knowledge of family dynamics, historically constructed trust relationships, and mediation capacity were key factors, especially during

the COVID-19 social isolation period and a time of territorial dispute between criminal factions. However, accepting remuneration would represent concrete political risk in a community marked by a history of clientelism, where "politicians promised resources and never delivered," generating distrust cycles. Leadership navigates simultaneously between enabling concrete benefits for families and protecting their political legitimacy against accusations of personal interest.

The central question is not classifying community mediation work as "voluntary" or "remunerated," but recognising a specific form of territorially rooted social work that requires new institutional arrangements. The Community Leader's affirmation that the approach "depends on each person" reveals how structural contradictions are being individualised, transferring to individuals the responsibility for resolving tensions that should be faced collectively.

The same irreducible tension manifests in local organisations like Taramela. The NGO operates simultaneously, executing formalised projects with specific deadlines and accountability requirements, while maintaining a continuous presence in spaces of political struggle like the ZEIS Pici Management Council and the Front for Dignified Housing. This double insertion does not represent organisational incoherence, but a necessary strategy: relationships constructed over long periods through social movement participation and continued technical advisory enable the indispensable trust for implementing punctual projects.

Although project-based financing logic generates negative impacts both institutionally and territorially.

Institutionally, NGOs maintain essential activities — such as public policy monitoring, technical advisory services, communication, and team training — through precarious voluntary work.

Territorially, discontinuity creates unmet expectations, as shown by the fact that families have approached leaders for months, interested in a project that was already completed. This is also reflected in the fact that the Community Leader does not believe that expanding housing improvement projects in informal settlements is achievable through municipal authority, and when staff identified a "difficulty in renewing people who engage in these processes" because "they are exhausted... nobody can stand talking about the same thing anymore".

This contradiction between the temporality of territorial work and the accelerated temporality of financing cycles cannot be resolved through better organisational management. It requires recognition that effective urban interventions require sustaining social infrastructures that operate within different temporal logics from time-framed projects. Fostering the characteristics that Bhan (2019) identifies as central to Southern urban practice — "incremental, uncertain, temporally fluid, speculative, transversal and rooted" — requires institutional arrangements that can accommodate these temporal complexities.

The research results reveal how notions of legitimacy, credibility, trust relations and actors' mediation capacity are damaged by historical practices of clientelism, state inefficiency, public policy discontinuity and distrust in institutional politics.

Despite these limitations, the state and public policies remain a field of interest and negotiation for all actors in the case study. This becomes evident through the Public Debate discourse, the advocacy practices of different actors, and the evolution of the Habitat-Taramela partnership in competing for public calls to implement policies for improving precarious settlement housing.

The project productive tensions also interfere with actors' capacity to politically advocate for public policies that support access to fundamental rights. There was consensus that executing this type of project serves as proof of concept, shifting the debate from the impossibility of implementing housing improvements to the absence of investments and structure to make them happen.

Showing that the actors involved in the case, to some extent, and facing the limitations, have as their horizon Simone's concept of "doubleness praxis (2018)," which acknowledges the need to operate simultaneously at different scales and through various modes of action.'

Additionally, the continuity and evolution of relationships indicate a potential for lasting coalitions, where temporary contracts can evolve into dynamic strategic alliances.

The examples above can also be seen as an example of resonance, a key aspect for considering urban interventions politically. Resonance functions as the emotional and practical process through which people and objects connect, enabling them to serve as parts of larger operations beyond their individual functions and histories. (Simone & Pieterse, 2017)

The research process also reveals how "redescription" operates as a political method that recomposes vocabularies and practices through implementation. The strategic use of global vocabularies by local NGOs does not represent merely pragmatism, but political redescription that enables "composing urban knowledge of potential futures alongside present realities" (Simone & Pieterse, 2017).

The adaptation from WASH to "bathroom" does not represent "loss of sophistication," but redescription that connects global vocabulary with specific territorial materiality. The notion of impact—how to measure empowerment, demonstrate proof of concept, or conduct methodological experimentation—gets redefined through practice.

However, this redescription process reveals critical limitations when projects become disconnected from territorial context in "depoliticised" ways. The challenge involves maintaining structural connections that influence housing conditions while preserving community fabric and survival systems. The research suggests that when moving from local to

global, maintaining context in evidence and the struggle for urban land and improved income conditions becomes essential. This prevents the loss of structural elements that define action spaces when global frameworks return to local implementation.

Concluding this discussion, viewing the practice of housing improvements as political urban interventions shows that NGOs function as a kind of "legitimation interfaces" between structural logics and local dynamics, absorbing contradictions that neither the state nor the market can resolve.

This position creates a specific political implication, which defines a vital horizon in urban practice: acknowledging the intricate social structure of urban communities implies that interventions should enhance, not disturb, existing social networks and practices that are the stitching of the social and urban fabric in peripheral territories.



07

Conclusion.

The Habitat-Taramela-Pici partnership functions as an interface zone where simultaneous experiments are tested, revealing that "double vision" is not merely an analytical perspective, but a necessary political practice for navigating urban complexities. The research confirms Simone and Pieterse's (2017) proposition about experiments operating simultaneously within everyday life and in official policy and governance worlds.

Returning to the research question that guided this investigation—*How do projects carried out in partnership between multiple levels/scales of NGOs contribute to housing improvement practices in informal settlements in Brazil?*—the evidence suggests that multi-scale NGO partnerships contribute through creating interface zones where different logics can coexist productively, yet within structural limitations that constrain their transformative potential.

The case study demonstrates that such partnerships enable territorial legitimacy, methodological innovation, and advocacy capacity that individual organizations could not achieve independently. The intersection of international resources, national technical assistance networks, and local territorial knowledge creates possibilities for hybrid operational models that can navigate between formal institutional requirements and informal territorial practices. These partnerships generate productive tensions that foster learning, adaptation, and political advocacy capacity.

However, the research also reveals significant limitations. Multi-scale partnerships absorb contradictions between state limitations and market exclusions without resolving underlying structural issues. They operate within project-based funding models that create temporal mismatches with territorial development needs. They face systematic exclusion patterns where the most vulnerable households cannot be served through standardized approaches. Most critically, they must navigate territorial violence that existing theoretical frameworks and policy models inadequately address.

The evidence suggests that these partnerships contribute most effectively when understood not as technical solutions to housing problems, but as political experiments in interface zones where different scales and logics must learn to coexist. Following Bhan's characterization of Southern urban practice (2019), they operate through modes that are "incremental, uncertain, temporally fluid, speculative, transversal and rooted," challenging conventional development approaches that seek linear outcomes within predetermined timeframes.

The research reveals that the studied partnership exemplifies political practice of sustaining double vision that affirms the importance of simultaneous experiments at everyday and official governance levels. Rather than providing definitive solutions, this analysis opens space for understanding how interface zones can function as laboratories for

institutional innovation while maintaining connections with structural elements that define territorial transformation possibilities.

Research Limitations and Future Experimental Directions

Based on the case study methodology and findings, this research has several limitations that shape what we can learn from these conclusions. The study focuses on just one case with five housing improvements in a single community in Fortaleza, which means we cannot easily identify patterns across different territorial contexts or partnership arrangements. The data came mainly from organizational representatives, with only one community leader's perspective, which might lean the findings toward institutional viewpoints rather than capturing how residents actually experienced these improvements. Since the research captures a specific moment rather than following outcomes over time, we cannot really assess whether these partnerships or housing improvements had lasting impacts beyond the immediate intervention. The geographic focus on one Brazilian city also limits our understanding of how similar partnerships might work in different regulatory settings or cultural contexts.

Future research could explore these questions more broadly and deeply to better understand how multiscale NGO partnerships function in housing improvement work. Comparative studies looking at similar partnerships across different cities and countries might help us figure out which collaboration elements work universally versus those that depend heavily on local context. Following the same communities and partnerships over several years would provide valuable insights into sustainability challenges and long-term territorial changes that this study could only hint at. It would also be valuable to engage more extensively with community residents beyond leadership positions to capture diverse perspectives on how effective these partnerships actually are. Studies examining different intervention scales - from individual household improvements to neighborhood-wide programs - could help us understand how partnership dynamics shift with project complexity and available resources. Finally, exploring the policy implications of successful partnership models might inform how lessons from NGO collaborations could influence public housing improvement programs and municipal technical assistance approaches.

References.

- Arantes, O., Vainer, C., & Maricato, E. (2000). *A cidade do pensamento único: Desmanchando consensos* [The City of Single Thought: Dismantling Consensus]. Vozes.
- Balbim, R., Krause, C., Santiago, C., Benedetto, C., Nunes, A., & Marinho, S. (2023, December). *Melhorias habitacionais e assistência técnica de habitação de interesse social (ATHIS): diretrizes e estratégias para uma política nacional* [Housing improvements and technical assistance for social housing (ATHIS): guidelines and strategies for a national policy] (Dirur: Nota Técnica, 48). Ipea. <http://dx.doi.org/10.38116/dirur48>
- Balbim, R., Krause, C., Cunha, L. F. B., & Santiago, C. D. (2024, February). *Inadequações habitacionais: dimensão e custos para sua solução com base em experiências de melhorias habitacionais* [Housing inadequacies: dimension and costs of their solution based on experiences of housing improvements] (Dirur: Nota Técnica, 51). Ipea. <http://dx.doi.org/10.38116/dirur51>
- Barata-Moura, J. (2002). *Totalidade e contradição: Acerca da dialética* [Totality and Contradiction: On Dialectics]. Edições Avante.
- Barella, J. (2024). Visibilizing empowerment as topological resonances: Analysis of a participatory mapping and enumeration project as strategy for active waiting for housing in Khayelitsha (South Africa). *SAGE Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241234567>
- Barreto, V. S. (2024). *Cidade Canteiro: Autoconstrução, Mutirão e Assessoria Técnica em Fortaleza* [City as a Construction Site: Self-Construction, collective self-help construction, and technical assistance in Fortaleza] [Master 's Thesis, Universidade Federal do Ceará].
- Baruah, B. (2007). Assessment of public–private–NGO partnerships: Water and sanitation services in slums. *Natural Resources Forum*, 31(2), 226–237.
- Bhan, G. (2019). Notes on a Southern urban practice. *Environment and Urbanization*, 31(2), 639–654. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247818815792>
- Bhide, A. (2021). Informal settlements, the emerging response to COVID and the imperative of transforming the narrative. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 23(Suppl 2), 280–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40847-020-00119-9>
- Bolnick, J. (2007). Development as reform and counter-reform: Paths travelled by Slum/Shack Dwellers International. In A. Bebbington, S. Hickey, & D. Mitlin (Eds.), *Can NGOs make a difference?: The challenge of development alternatives* (pp. 316–334). Zed Books. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350218833.ch-016>
- Braathen, E., Dupont, V., Jordhus-Lier, D., & Sutherland, C. (2015). Introduction: Situating the politics of slums within the 'urban turn'. In V. Dupont, D. Jordhus-Lier, C. Sutherland, & E. Braathen (Eds.), *The politics of slums in the Global South: Urban informality in Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

Braga, R. (2012). *A rebeldia do precariado: Trabalho e neoliberalismo no Sul Global* [The Rebellion of the Precariat: Labor and Neoliberalism in the Global South]. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial.

Brasil. (2001). *Lei nº 10.257, de 10 de julho de 2001: Regulamenta os artigos 182 e 183 da Constituição Federal, estabelece diretrizes gerais sobre a política urbana e dá outras providências* [Law No. 10,257, of July 10, 2001: Regulates Articles 182 and 183 of the Federal Constitution, establishes general guidelines on urban policy, and makes other provisions]. Retrieved from https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/leis_2001/l10257.htm

Burch, S., Hughes, S., Romero-Lankao, P., Schroeder, H., Elmqvist, T., Bai, X., & McPhearson, T. (2018). Governing urban sustainability transformations. In *The urban planet: Knowledge towards sustainable cities* (pp. 303–326). Cambridge University Press.

Caldeira, T. P. R. (2017). Peripheral urbanization: Autoconstruction, transversal logics, and politics in cities of the global South. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816658479>

Câmara, N.C. & Bueno, L. M. M. (2024). Assistência Técnica e os desafios da implementação no estado de São Paulo [Technical Assistance and the Challenges of Implementation in the State of São Paulo]. *Vernáculo: territórios contemporâneos*. 2(7).

Cardoso, F. S., & Lopes, J. M. de A. (2022). Assessoria e assistência técnica para habitação de interesse social: Do discurso à construção da prática profissional [Technical advice and assistance for social housing: From discourse to the construction of professional practice]. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.22296/2317-1529.rbeur.202210pt>

Corporate Scorecard 2024. (n.d.). Cities Alliance. Retrieved August 29, 2025, from <https://www.citiesalliance.org/resources/publications/scorecard/corporate-scorecard-2024>

Coelho, C. B. (2017). *Melhorias habitacionais em favelas urbanizadas: impasses e perspectivas* [Housing improvements in urbanized favelas: impasses and perspectives] [Master's Thesis, Universidade de São Paulo]. <https://doi.org/D.16.2018.tde-08062017-103739>

Corburn, J., Vlahov, D., Mberu, B., Riley, L., Caiaffa, W. T., Rashid, S. F., Ko, A., Patel, S., Jukur, S., Martínez-Herrera, E., Jayasinghe, S., Agarwal, S., Nguendo-Yongsi, B., Weru, J., Ouma, S., Edmundo, K., Oni, T., & Ayad, H. (2020). Slum health: Arresting COVID-19 and improving well-being in urban informal settlements. *Journal of Urban Health*, 97(3), 348–357. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-020-00438-6>

Crawford, G., & Morrison, C. (2021). Community-led reconstruction, social inclusion and participation in post-earthquake Nepal. *Development Policy Review*, 39(4), 548–568. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12516>

Crispi, G., & Lewis-Lettington, R. (2022). *Slum upgrading legal assessment tool*. UN-Habitat. unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/05/slum_upgrading_legal_assessment_tool_web_2022.pdf

Davis, M. (2006). *Planet of slums*. London: Verso.

Devkar, G., Thillai Rajan, A., Narayanan, S., & Elayaraja, M. S. (2019). Provision of basic services in slums: A review of the evidence on top-down and bottom-up approaches. *Development Policy Review*, 37(3), 331–347. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12385>

Dovey, K., & Recio, R. B. (2023). Harnessing settlement re-informalization: Morphogenesis of on-site upgrading at Sitio Pajo. *Habitat International*, 131, 102724. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2023.102724>

Espinosa, L., & Rivera, O. A. L. (2018). UNICEF's Urban Basic Services Programme in illegal settlements in Guatemala City. *Urbanisation*, 3(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455747118770432>

Ferreira, J. S. W. (2005). A cidade para poucos: Breve história da propriedade urbana no Brasil [A City for the few: A Brief History of Urban Property in Brazil]. In *Simpósio Interfaces das representações urbanas em tempos de globalização*. UNESP, Bauru.

Frediani, A. A., Cociña, C., & Roche, J. M. (2023). *Improving housing in informal settlements: Assessing the impacts in human development*. IIED. <https://pubs.iied.org/21576iied>

Fortaleza. (2009). *Lei Municipal Complementar nº 62, de 02 de fevereiro de 2009: Plano Diretor Participativo (PDPFor)* [Complementary Municipal Law No. 62, of February 2, 2009: Participatory Master Plan]. Diário Oficial do Município de Fortaleza, 13 de março de 2009.

Fundação João Pinheiro. (2021). *Déficit habitacional no Brasil – 2016-2019* [Housing deficit in Brazil – 2016-2019]. fjp.mg.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/21.05_Relatorio-Deficit-Habitacional-no-Brasil-2016-2019-v2.0.pdf

Galiani, S., Gertler, P. J., Undurraga, R., Cooper, R., Martínez, S., & Ross, A. (2017). Shelter from the storm: Upgrading housing infrastructure in Latin American slums. *Journal of Political Economy*, 125(3), 767–819. <https://doi.org/10.1086/691697>

Giannella, L. de C., Soares, J. de S., & Franco, C. de O. (2024). O poder do ato de nomear: o compromisso do IBGE diante das favelas e comunidades urbanas brasileiras [The power of naming: IBGE's commitment to Brazilian favelas and urban communities]. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, 29(11), e04232024. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-812320242911.04232024>

Gordilho Souza, A. (1995). Existem ONGs, ONGs e ONGs: Perspectivas de novas práticas socioespaciais relacionadas à questão da habitação [There Are NGOs, NGOs, and NGOs: Perspectives on New Socio-Spatial Practices Related to the Housing Issue]. *FAU/UFBA*, 121–137.

Habitat para a Humanidade Brasil [Habitat Brasil]. (2022). *Relatório da Pesquisa de Percepção de Mudanças com as famílias atendidas pelo Programa Wash em 2021* [Report of the Change Perception Survey with families served by the Wash Program in 2021] [PDF]. https://habitatbrasil.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FINAL_2.pdf

Harvey, D. (2001). *Spaces of capital: Towards a critical geography*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Harvey, D. (2006). *The limits to capital*. London: Verso.

Huchzermeyer, M. (2023). NGO representation of informal settlements: The case of Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI). In A. Mayne (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the modern slum* (pp. 373–389). Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190879457.013.26>

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE]. (2019). *PNAD: Pesquisa nacional por amostra de domicílios contínua* [Continuous National Household Sample Survey]. From https://tratabrasil.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/liv101707-informativo_compressed.pdf

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE]. (2023). *Fortaleza: Panorama*. From <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/ce/fortaleza/panorama>

Instituto Pólis. (2021, July 14). *20 anos do Estatuto da Cidade: Entrevista com Raquel Rolnik* [20 Years of the City Statute: Interview with Raquel Rolnik]. From <https://polis.org.br/noticias/20-anos-do-estatuto-da-cidade-entrevista-com-raquel-rolnik/>

Islam, R., & Walkerden, G. (2015). How do links between households and NGOs promote disaster resilience and recovery? A case study of linking social networks on the Bangladeshi coast. *Natural Hazards*, 78(3), 1707–1727.

Kapp, S. (2018). Grupos sócio-espaciais ou a quem serve a assessoria técnica [Socio-Spatial Groups or Whom Does Technical Assistance Serve?]. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais*, 20(2), 221–236. <https://doi.org/10.22296/2317-1529.2018v20n2p221>

Lessa. (2021). *Até o chão: produção de moradia com assessoria em Fortaleza* ["Down to the Ground": Housing Production with Technical Assistance in Fortaleza] [Master's Thesis, Universidade Federal de Fortaleza].

Lines, K., Mitlin, D., Mwelu, J., Njenga Maina, J. P., Okoyo, O., Otibine, E., Wakesho, T., & Wambui, M. (2020). *Bridging the affordability gap: Towards a financing mechanism for slum upgrading at scale in Nairobi – Analysing NGO experiences with local-level finance* (GDI Working Paper 2020-042). University of Manchester.

Lopes, M. S. B. (2023). Plataforma Rede Moradia-Assessoria: Reflexões sobre a Assessoria Técnica popular. *XX ENANPUR*. Associação Nacional de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa em Planejamento Urbano e Regional.

López, E. V., & Flores-García, M. (2023). Urbanization in the context of global environmental change. *Urban Climate Adaptation and Mitigation*, 1-22.

Magalhães, F. (Ed.). (2016). *Slum upgrading and housing in Latin America*. Inter-American Development Bank.

Maricato, E. (2015). *Para entender a crise urbana* [Understanding the Urban Crisis]. São Paulo: Expressão Popular.

Maricato, E. (2017). The future of global peripheral cities. In T. Angotti (Ed.), *Urban Latin America* (pp. 41–61). Rowman & Littlefield.

- Maricato, E. (2019, março). Moradia urbana tem que levar em consideração a política urbana, principalmente de terra urbana [Urban Housing Must Take into Account Urban Policy, Especially Urban Land Policy]. *Instituto Humanitas Unisinos*.
<https://www.ihu.unisinos.br/categorias/159-entrevistas/587974-moradia-urbana-tem-que-levar-em-consideracao-a-politica-urbana-principalmente-de-terra-urbana-entrevista-e-special-com-erminia-maricato>
- Martins, A. N., & Rocha, A. (2019). Risk and resilient architectural practices in informal settlements – The role of NGOs. *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment*, 10(4), 276–288. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJDRBE-09-2019-0063>
- Mello, B. C. E. (2021). ATMI: gênese da Lei de Assistência Técnica em Habitação Social [ATMI: Genesis of the Technical Assistance Law in Social Housing]. *Risco - Revista de Pesquisa em Arquitetura e Urbanismo*. 19(1).
<https://doi.org/10.11606/1984-4506.risco.2021.166911>
- Miraftab, F. (1997). Flirting with the enemy: Challenges faced by NGOs in development and empowerment. *Habitat International*, 21(4), 361–375.
- Mitlin, D. (2001). The formal and informal worlds of state and civil society: What do they offer to the urban poor? *International Planning Studies*, 6(4), 377–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563470120092386>
- Mitlin, D. (2016). Spatial informality in the Global South: new challenges for service provision and neighbourhood improvement initiatives. In *Rethinking Precarious Neighbourhoods* (pp. 147–160). Agence Française de Développement.
- Moreno, T. M. (2022). *Negócio de impacto social, melhorias habitacionais e mercado financeiro: a moradia dos pobres como oportunidade de renda* [Social Impact Business, Housing Improvements, and the Financial Market: Poor People's Housing as an Income Opportunity] [Master's thesis, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais].
- Nascimento, E., Ribeiro, W., & Pasternak, S. (2023). Por que o investimento e foco em questões habitacionais é também uma medida de saúde [Why Investment and Focus on Housing Issues Is Also a Public Health Measure]. *Estudos Avançados*, 37, 25–40.
<https://doi.org/10.1590/s0103-4014.2023.37109.003>
- Oliveira, F. (2003). *Crítica à razão dualista: O ornitorrinco*. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial.
- Pasternak, S. (2016). Metrôpole e saúde [Metropolis and Health]. *Estudos Avançados*, 30(86). <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-40142016.00100004>
- Ramanath, R., & Ebrahim, A. (2010). Strategies and tactics in NGO–government relations: Insights from slum housing in Mumbai. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 21(1), 21–42.
- Pequeno, L. R. B., & Freitas, C. F. S. (2012). Desafios para implementação de Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social em Fortaleza [Challenges for Implementing Special Zones of Social Interest in Fortaleza]. *Cadernos Metrôpole*, 14, 485–506.
- Pequeno, L. R. B. (2023). Implantação das Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social em Fortaleza: Entre retrocessos e desafios [Implementation of Special Zones of Social Interest in Fortaleza: Between Setbacks and Challenges]. *Revista Brasileira de Direito*

Urbanístico / RBDU, 9(16), 63–90.

<https://biblioteca.ibdu.org.br/direitourbanistico/article/view/833>

Ponte, T. O., et al. (2025). *Caminhos para melhorias habitacionais: Uma proposta a partir da assessoria técnica popular* [Pathways for Housing Improvements: A Proposal Based on Popular Technical Assistance]. Taramela Assessoria Técnica e Arquitetura e Cidade. ISBN 978-65-982575-1-4. Disponível em:

https://www.taramela.org/files/ugd/ec9e34_cd8a58d53d3a4ae6a1bf3f78876ac97a.pdf

Reis, N., & Lukas, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Beyond the megacity: New dimensions of peripheral urbanization in Latin America*. University of Toronto Press.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv2p7j4pv>

Rolnik, R. (1989). Territórios negros nas cidades brasileiras: Etnicidade e cidade em São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro [Black Territories in Brazilian Cities: Ethnicity and the City in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro]. *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, 17(1), 29–41.

Rolnik, R. (2015). *Guerra dos lugares: A colonização da terra e da moradia na era das finanças* [The War of Places: The Colonization of Land and Housing in the Age of Finance]. Boitempo.

Rolnik, R. (2013). A cidade para poucos: Breve história da propriedade urbana no Brasil [The City for the Few: A Brief History of Urban Property in Brazil]. *Cidades para que(m)?*.

<https://cidadesparaquem.org/textos-academicos/2005/8/21/a-cidade-para-poucos-breve-historia-da-propriedade-urbana-no-brasil>

Rosim, D., Santos, A., Scatena, T., & Baptista, D. (2025). Advocacy for Land Regularization in a Multi-risk Scenario: the case of the urban informal settlement ‘Ocupação em Busca de Uma Moradia.’ *RevCEDOUA*, 50, 91–111. https://doi.org/10.14195/2182-2387_50_4

Roy, A. (2005). Urban informality: Toward an epistemology of planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), 147–158.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360508976689>

Roy, A. (2009a). The 21st-century metropolis: New geographies of theory. *Regional Studies*, 43(6), 819–830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400701809665>

Roy, A. (2009b). Why India cannot plan its cities: Informality, insurgence and the idiom of urbanization. *Planning Theory*, 8(1), 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095208099299>

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2. ed). SAGE Publ.

Shatkin, G., Mishra, V., & Khristine Alvarez, M. (2023). Debates paper: COVID-19 and urban informality: Exploring the implications of the pandemic for the politics of planning and inequality. *Urban Studies*, 60(9), 1771–1791.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980221141181>

Silva, J. M. P. (2024). Reflexões acerca da interdisciplinaridade no desenvolvimento urbano e na assistência técnica [Reflections on Interdisciplinarity in Urban Development and Technical Assistance]. *Revista Movimentos Sociais E Dinâmicas Espaciais*, 13.

<https://doi.org/10.51359/2238-8052.2024.260384>

Simone, A. (2018). *Improvised lives: Rhythms of endurance in an urban South*. Polity Press.

Simone, A., & Pieterse, E. (2017). *New urban worlds: Inhabiting dissonant times*. Polity Press.

Smit, W. (2021). Urbanization in the global South. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Global Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190632366.013.251>

Strychar, L., & Day, J. (2019). Community assessment of NGO housing delivery: Lessons from Port Vila, Vanuatu. *Development in Practice*, 29(4), 464–476.

Taramela. (n.d.-a). Assessoria na Regulamentação de ZEIS. <https://www.taramela.org/assessoria-na-regulamentacao-zeis>

Taramela. (n.d.-b). Uma mão lava a outra. <https://www.taramela.org/uma-mao-lava-a-outra>

United Nations. (2003). *The challenge of slums: Global report on human settlements*. UN-Habitat.

Universidade Federal do Ceará [UFC]. (2019). *Caderno de Diagnóstico Socioeconômico, Físico-Ambiental, Urbanístico e Fundiário do Plano Integrado de Regularização Fundiária da ZEIS Pici* [Socioeconomic, Physical-Environmental, Urban and Land Diagnostic Report of the Integrated Land Regularization Plan of ZEIS Pici]. 2019.

UN. (2015). In UN-Habitat (Ed.), *Slum almanac 2015–2016: Tracking improvement in the lives of slum dwellers*. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/slum_almanac_2015-2016_psup.pdf

UN-Habitat. (2008). *State of the world's cities 2008/9: Harmonious cities*. Earthscan.

UN-Habitat. (2023). *Factsheet SDG 11.1*. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/07/2023_hlpf_factsheet_sdg_11_1.pdf

Watson, V. (2009). Seeing from the South: Refocusing urban planning on the globe's central issues. *Urban Studies*, 46(11), 2259–2275. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0042098009342598>

World Bank Group. (2021). *Demographic trends and urbanisation*. World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/35469>

08

Appendices.

Appendix 01. Data Crossing Matrix: Sub-Questions x Categories and Themes

Data Crossing Matrix: Sub-Questions x Categories and Themes					
SUB-QUESTIONS	ORGANISATION MODELS, NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS	KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGIES	RESOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY	URBAN GOVERNANCE AND POLITICS	INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING MATERIAL CONDITIONS
Sub-question 1: How do NGOs navigate between formal institutional systems and informal practices in housing improvement initiatives?	• Legitimacy and Territorial Trust • Community mediation as execution prerequisite • Territorial control and criminal organization • Evolving relationship with communities • Permanent partnership with social movements • Implementation through specialized partners • Ideological alignment over technical partnerships • Creating a professional practice field	• External authority for technical legitimacy • Community mediation as execution prerequisite • Absence of participation in technical solutions • Community-recommended workforce versus professional standards • Technical assistance as critical mediation • University education for territorial work • Creating a professional practice field	• Autonomy vs Organizational Dependence • Corporate interests and territorial needs • Full financial responsibility without detailed accountability • Permanent municipal policy versus federal dependency • Access to resources via network	• Legitimacy and Territorial Trust • Political repercussions and clientelism • Territorial control and criminal organization • Advocacy for third sector • Refusal to be merely a service provider • Neoliberal cooptation of terminology • Strategic language shifts obscuring class struggle • Public sector limitations • Recognition and Territorial Diversity • Revision of onerous concessions	• Security risks affecting implementation • Territorial control and criminal organization • Community-recommended workforce versus professional standards • Recognition and Territorial Diversity
Sub-question 2: How do NGOs' housing improvement projects balance community-specific contextual adaptation with standardised and replicable implementation models?	• Network Articulation and Strengthening Strategies • Flexibility Strategies for adaptation • National scope with regional focus • Mandatory local partnership requirement • National strategy design within global directives and parameters • Empirical continuity for new projects • Voluntary work as extension of community solidarity	• Participatory methodology • Flexibility Strategies for adaptation • Pilot projects as proof of concept • Need for individualized attention in popular territories • Conflicts between technical designs and family expectations • Empirical continuity for new projects • Methodology-focused training approach • First direct construction implementation	• Flexibility Strategies for adaptation • Expectations versus resource reality • Resource limitations for home improvements • Access to resources via network • Challenges of Financial Sustainability	• Pilot projects as proof of concept • National scope with regional focus • Recognition and Territorial Diversity • Peripheral territorial formation through historical occupations • Materiality as advocacy catalyst • Current favorable context for technical assistance	• Conflicts between technical designs and family expectations • Need for individualized attention in popular territories • Exclusion of most needy cases due to technical unfeasibility • Widespread Precariousness • Recognition and Territorial Diversity • Lack of bathroom chosen as the worst precariousness • lack of basic sanitation and its implications

		experience			
Sub-question 3: How do NGO partnerships integrate immediate housing improvements with long-term systemic transformation objectives?	• Network Articulation and Strengthening Strategies • Permanent partnership with social movements • Creating a professional practice field • Critique of project-based model • Legitimacy and Territorial Trust	• Network Articulation and Strengthening Strategies • Critique of project-based model • Technical assistance as critical mediation • University education for territorial work • Pilot projects as proof of concept	• Critique of project-based model • Project work and Political Advocacy Integration • Critique of isolated interventions versus public policy • Housing Improvements as continuous and recurring action • Permanent municipal policy versus federal dependency • Challenges of Financial Sustainability	• Project work and Political Advocacy Integration • Integration of project work and political advocacy • Dual approach construction and advocacy • Critique of project-based model • Critique of isolated interventions versus public policy • Losing political horizon in urgent demands • Permanent critical stance toward own practice • Integration between housing policies • Improvements as citizenship building space • Historical experiences of improvement policies • Climate adaptation as urban emergency • Accumulated historical demands • Housing in climate change debates • Concrete next steps and follow-ups • Urgency of master plan update	• Critique of isolated interventions versus public policy • Critique of isolated project model • Housing Improvements as continuous and recurring action • Complementarity between major works and improvements • Accumulated historical demands • Subsequent problems compromising results • Climate adaptation as urban emergency

Methodological Notes:	KEY THEMATIC INTERSECTIONS	IDENTIFIED PATTERNS
	“Legitimacy and Territorial Trust” appears across multiple sub-questions.	Sub-question 1 concentrates on themes related to legitimacy, mediation, and power relations.
Each theme was assigned to the sub-question and category where its contribution was most relevant.	“Network Articulation and Strengthening Strategies” is central to organizational issues.	Sub-question 2 emphasizes flexibility, methodological adaptation, and territorial recognition.
Some themes appear in multiple cells due to their transversal nature.	“Critique of the project-based model” cuts across sustainability concerns and systemic transformation.	Sub-question 3 focuses on systemic integration, critique of the project-based model, and structural transformation.

Elaboration: the author.

Appendice 02. Interview protocols.

Guiding questions Habitat for Humanity:

Institutional trajectory and framework

- How did Habitat for Humanity establish its presence in Brazil?
- What are the implications of being part of a global network operating in so many different countries?
- What are the main programmes and projects currently?
- How does the organisation allocate its efforts across its areas of activity?
- Could you provide more details about the housing improvement work happening within the organisation?
- How does Habitat access funds, and what does the origin of the funds imply internally?
- How does Habitat for Humanity Brazil select and collaborate with various types of partners at different levels?
- How is your relationship with communities?
- How do you engage with government institutions and representatives?

WASH project and the partnership with local Technical Assistance Organisations

- What is the context and purpose of WASH programs for the institution?
- How were the projects implemented? What adaptations were necessary for the Brazilian context?
- What is the role of each actor involved in the project?
- How did the partnership with popular technical assistance organisations in the Northeast develop?
- Was any training, tools, or capacity-building provided by Habitat for Humanity to the local organisations?
- How were communities/families and houses identified and selected?
- How do you see the role of the community and residents in this type of project?
- What social and technical challenges emerged during implementation? How were they addressed?
- How do you balance pressures for replicability with adaptation to local contexts?
- How did the specific partnership with Taramela in Fortaleza develop?

Evaluation and perspectives

- How do you evaluate the project results?
- What are the unfolding consequences of the project? Have you monitored the continuity and impact of this project on the communities where the works were carried out? As well as on the institutions that participated in the partnership?
- How does the organisation document the project's experiences and outcomes?
- How are these outcomes used and disseminated?
- What lessons can be extracted for future partnerships and projects in Housing Improvements?

Guiding questions Taramela:

Organisational trajectory and framework

- How was Taramela founded, and what is its trajectory in the housing field?
- What are the main activities and focus areas?
- How does the organisation distribute its efforts across its areas of activity?
- How does its institutional networking work? What are the different scales and levels involved, and what guiding principles shape these partnerships and collaborations?
- What is the nature of your relationship with communities?
- How do you engage with government institutions and their representatives?
- Are there plans to align the organisation's activities with international frameworks or professional networks?
- What prior experience did Taramela have with housing improvements? What were the main challenges for the organisation in this area?

Partnership with Habitat for Humanity

- How did the partnership opportunity with Habitat for Humanity come about?
- Were any negotiations or adjustments necessary to establish the partnership?
- How do you assess the partnership? What similarities and differences do you observe between the organisations and their working methods? What are the potential benefits and challenges of the partnership?

WASH Project implementation

- How were the projects implemented?
- What is the role of each actor involved in the project?
- Was any training, tools, or capacity-building provided by Habitat for Humanity?
- How were communities, families, and houses identified and selected?
- What social and technical challenges arose during implementation? How were they addressed?
- Did Taramela need to adapt its existing practices and methods for this project? How do you assess this adaptation process, including its potential and challenges?
- How do you evaluate the outcomes of the projects?
- How does the organisation document the project's experiences and outcomes? How are these outcomes used and disseminated?
- What lessons can be extracted for future partnerships and projects in Housing Improvements?
- How do you assess the community relationships before and after the project?

Guiding questions Pici Community Leader:

Community context and project Implementation

- First, I would like you to introduce yourself and explain your role within the community, then provide a brief description of the community, including what it's like and the challenges it faces, as well as the existing associations today.
- What is the relationship between the Pici community and the NGO Taramela?
- In what context did the Habitat for Humanity housing improvement project arrive in the community?
- How would you describe the project and your involvement in it? (the objectives, the stages, who was involved, what you worked on, how agreements were made, the work carried out, responsibilities, etc.)
- Was Habitat for Humanity an active presence during implementation? In your opinion, what was Habitat's role in the project?
- How was the contact with families, and how were the houses/families selected?
- Did you follow the construction stage? How was the interaction with local labor and the purchase of building materials?
- Could you describe the overall implementation process?

Evaluation and perspectives

- How do you evaluate this type of housing improvement project and its impacts and repercussions? (for the directly benefited families, for you as community leaders and mobilizers, and for the community's broader struggles for rights). Did you receive any feedback from the families?
- If this project were to be repeated or expanded, what recommendations would you make?

Appendice 03. Thematic analysis of the interviews.

Thematic Analysis Habitat for Humanity Brazil Interview

Data Source Overview

SOURCE CODE	DATA SOURCE TYPE	PARTICIPANT	PROFILE DETAILS	DURATION/FORMAT	ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS
INT_HABITAT In the text: Habitat Interview	Semi-structured Interview	Mohema Rolim National Program Manager Habitat for Humanity Brazil	Architect-Urbanist + Public Management Expert • MBA in Project Management • 8+ years experience in public management (Pernambuco State Government) • Infrastructure and housing sectors specialization • Since 2015 at Habitat for Humanity Brazil • National Program Manager leading social housing initiatives • Expert in precarious settlement interventions and housing improvements (urban/rural) • Post-2022 intensified focus on climate change and socio-environmental justice • International network coordination and policy advocacy • Disaster response and vulnerable population adaptation projects	74 minutes Google Meet Audio recorded and Portuguese transcribed with the Tactiq App to Google Docs	National institutional and international network perspective

Thematic Analysis

1. NATIONAL SCOPE WITH REGIONAL FOCUS

Core phrase: "We look at Brazil as a whole"

National headquarters located in Northeast Brazil (Recife)

Strategic prioritization of regions with higher vulnerability

Recognition that social vulnerabilities compound each other

Differentiated national strategy from organizations based in South/Southeast Brazil

2. BALANCE OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS WITHIN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Core phrase: "Being part of this global network means following standards"

Mandatory compliance with Habitat International policies

National strategy design within global parameters

Specific limitations

Access to resources via network

Balance between global directives and local needs

Dependence on Habitat International intermediation for foreign funds
National fundraising as exclusive organizational responsibility
Need to justify each project to specific funders
Absence of unrestricted funding
3. CHALLENGES OF HOUSING ADVOCACY
Core phrase: "Housing as a cause is very difficult"
Difficulty communicating the importance of adequate housing
Complexity in mobilizing individual donors
Housing as gateway to other social rights
Individual donation strategy proved costly and ineffective
4. DUAL APPROACH: CONSTRUCTION AND ADVOCACY
Core phrase: "We're not just talking about physical construction"
Building participatory community processes
Creating empowerment opportunities
Influencing public policy and public opinion
Integration between direct intervention and policy advocacy
5. COMMUNICATION AND MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES OF HOUSING IMPACT
Core phrase: "The housing cause is a very difficult cause... it's difficult to communicate this"
Housing differs fundamentally from other social causes in public appeal
Contrast with simpler messaging of other organizations ("with one real per day, you can make sure this child is fed for a month")
Difficulty articulating broader benefits of housing improvements to potential donors
Recognition that housing can be "a gateway to other rights" and "can generate other gains, health and such"
Gap between actual impact potential and ability to measure and communicate impact narrative for fundraising purposes
Inherent complexity of housing interventions creates both measurement and communication barriers
6. HOUSING IN CLIMATE CHANGE DEBATES
Core phrase: "Put housing at the center of climate change debates"
Specific political advocacy strategy
International-funded advocacy projects
Multi-year comprehensive projects
Coordination with international networks
7. UNFAIR COMPETITION WITH PRIVATE SECTOR

Core phrase: "We live in a state of unfair competition"
Private companies competing in public housing tenders
Profit motivation versus social impact
Lack of unrestricted funds for organizational development
Criticism of outsourcing models favoring private companies
8. PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORK STRATEGIES
Core phrase: "Partnerships are more like coordinated networks"
Different partnership formats according to intervention area
Subgrants to local organizations
Support for territorial groups and collectives
Accountability requirements limiting full resource transfer
9. IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH SPECIALIZED PARTNERS
Core phrase: "Almost 100% of our projects are implemented through partners"
Invitation model instead of public selection processes
Pool of certified partners
Executive partners versus service providers
Social work maintained by Habitat's own team
10. PRIORITIZING SMALL ORGANIZATIONS OVER CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES
Core phrase: "We don't want to work with construction companies, we want to work with small organizations"
Preference for partners with social commitment
Experience working in popular territories
Advance payment of 50%+ to facilitate execution and enable small partners
Exclusive work with formalized organizations (CNPJ required)
11. OPERATIONAL INCOMPATIBILITIES WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS
Core phrase: "We really want to work with technical assistance, but we haven't managed to"
Recognition of deeper, more theoretical work by technical assistance organizations
Different dynamics between technical assistance and housing improvement demands
Need for accelerated pace incompatible with technical assistance methodology
Technical assistance focused on supporting struggles rather than construction execution
12. PARTNER ORGANIZATIONAL FRAGILITY AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES
Core phrase: "It's a sector that needs to strengthen, just like technical assistance organizations"
Partners changing from companies to third sector organizations for tax reasons
Habitat lacks sufficient demand to sustain all partner organizations

Need for better remuneration and dignified working conditions
Dependence on scale resources for sustainability
13. FLEXIBLE AND PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY
Core phrase: "We want and need flexibility"
Package contracts with redistribution possibilities
Case-by-case family assessment
Participatory committees for priority setting
Visiting more families than selected (transparency policy)
14. RESOURCE LIMITATIONS FOR HOME IMPROVEMENTS
Core phrase: "Resources for improvement are limited"
Difficult choices between different needs (roof versus sewage)
Structural problems exceeding intervention capacity
Need for difficult decisions with families
Insufficient resources for actual demand
15. CORPORATE INTERESTS AND TERRITORIAL PREFERENCES
Core phrase: "Each corporation wants to do the work in their backyard"
Corporate interest focused on specific locations
Difficulty directing resources according to technical need
Need to demonstrate data about housing deficit
Constant negotiation about resource allocation
16. ADVOCACY FOR THIRD SECTOR LEADERSHIP
Core phrase: "This type of project should come from the third sector"
Methodologies tested by social organizations
Criticism of profit-oriented construction company execution
Defense of public policy directed toward third sector
Inspiration for public policy design
17. MANDATORY LOCAL PARTNERSHIP REQUIREMENT
Core phrase: "We don't enter a territory without local partnership"
Partnerships with neighborhood associations, cultural groups, social movements
Network coordination strategy
Need for territorial legitimacy
Partnership consolidation across all activities

Research implications

This analysis reveals how international networked housing NGOs navigate between:

Global standards versus local autonomy in program design

Direct service delivery versus systemic change through advocacy

Organizational sustainability versus community impact in funding strategies

Standardized processes versus contextual flexibility in implementation

Professional expertise versus community participation in decision-making

The findings suggest that community-based housing improvement interventions require a really sophisticated organisational model that can simultaneously maintain international credibility, secure diverse funding streams, and respond to local territorial dynamics through partnerships.

Thematic Analysis

Taramela Technical Assistance (First Interview)

Data Source Overview

SOURCE CODE	DATA SOURCE TYPE	PARTICIPANT	PROFILE	DURATION/FORMAT	ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS
INT_TARAMELA01 In the text: Taramela Interview 1	Semi-structured Interview	Thais Oliveira Ponte - Founding Partner and General Coordinator Taramela Technical Advisory	Urban Planner & Architect • General Coordinator at Taramela Technical Advisory (Ceará) • PhD candidate in Architecture and Urbanism at University of São Paulo (USP) • Coordinated locally the (WaSH) public spaces interventions in the Habitat Partnership	84 minutes Google Meet Audio recorded and Portuguese transcribed with the Tactiq App to Google Docs	Organizational strategy and critical analysis

Thematic Analysis

1. CREATING A PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE FIELD

Core phrase: "If the opportunity doesn't exist, we create it"

No existing professional perspective for technical assistance in Fortaleza

Collective desire to create new field of practice

Previous university experience with housing and community work

Expansion from housing focus to broader right to the city

2. REFUSAL TO BE MERELY A SERVICE PROVIDER

Core phrase: "We refuse to simply provide a service"

Demands that are purely service provision

Projects that interweave service with social and political issues

Refusal to work without broader social commitment

Technical products as tools for political pressure

3. INTEGRATION OF PROJECT WORK AND POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Core phrase: "There's much more interconnection between these things"

Technical projects generating documents for political pressure

Residents using technical products to request public policies

Housing secretaries attending organization seminars

Actions impacting both social movements and communities

4. PERMANENT PARTNERSHIP WITH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Core phrase: "This partnership has existed since we were founded"
Ongoing support for the Front for Dignified Housing
Administrative support for resources movements cannot receive directly
Formal and informal partnerships with important social movement
Operational support for movement activities
5. EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNITIES
Core phrase: "We've been moving away from the idea that we can solve problems"
Transformation of community engagement over time
Learning specific forms of communication
Abandoning university logic of communities as case studies
Joint proposal construction with effective community participation
6. ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES
Core phrase: "Difficulties remunerating staff to work on projects"
Persistent financial sustainability problems
Difficulty finding professionals interested in the field
Working with demanding and specific themes
Challenges that persist from project to project
7. TERRITORIAL LEGITIMACY THROUGH LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS
Core phrase: "We didn't have partnership with local movements"
Problems when lacking prior contact with territorial movements
Conflicts over community equipment location
Complications due to drug trafficking in some communities
Need for local partnerships for effective insertion
8. NETWORKS AS COLLECTIVE STRENGTHENING STRATEGIES
Core phrase: "Networks enable collective action strategies"
Northeast Network of Popular Technical Advisors
International funding accessed through network participation
Access to events and institutions through network membership
Difficulty maintaining continuous action due to lack of resources
9. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING WITH LARGER PARTNERS
Core phrase: "We learn a lot"
Habitat as more consolidated and professionalized organization
Learning about budgeting and project planning
Departmentalized staff as organizational model

Standard materials and processes facilitating proposal development
10. NEGOTIATING WITHIN PARAMETERS
Core phrase: "There is rigidity, but it's not intransigence"
Rigid criteria imposed by funding organizations
Technical limitations on intervention quality
Difficulty explaining budget constraints to residents
Possibility of negotiation within established parameters
11. CURRENT FAVORABLE CONTEXT FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
Core phrase: "We've never had a scenario with so many opportunities"
New Peripheries Secretariat creating opportunities
Return of Cities Ministry with new programs
Specific calls for technical assistance work
No need to adapt practice to fit funding requirements
12. CRITIQUE OF ISOLATED PROJECT MODEL
Core phrase: "Once again, here we go"
Criticism of repeated projects without implementation prospects
Territories with existing plans receiving new planning processes
Involving communities in processes without implementation guarantees
Overlapping different actions for the same territory
13. NEOLIBERAL COOPTATION OF TERMINOLOGY
Core phrase: "The capitalist system captures all ways to escape it"
Sustainability as market profit strategy
SDGs as mandatory language for international organizations
Strategic use of criticized terms to access funding
Critique of university appropriation of quilombola knowledge
14. STRATEGIC LANGUAGE SHIFTS OBSCURING CLASS STRUGGLE
Core phrase: "Latin surplus value has no poor, it has peripheries"
Abandoning "poor" terminology as emancipation discourse
Complexity of language change and its objectives
Dispersed struggle when not identifying the "common villain"
Resistance as jargon that obscures what is being fought
15. LOSING POLITICAL HORIZON IN URGENT DEMANDS

Core phrase: "We lose clarity of this horizon in our choices"
Immersion in urgent demands hinders strategic reflection
Need for reflection moments to build guidance frameworks
Research as opportunity to think about own practice
Life as process of trial, error, and learning
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS
This analysis reveals how local technical assistance organizations navigate between:
Professional consolidation versus political commitment in service delivery
Autonomy versus dependency in partnerships with larger organizations
Direct action versus systemic change through integrated advocacy
Local knowledge versus standardized processes in territorial work
Immediate needs versus long-term vision in project implementation
The findings highlight the complexity of community-based technical assistance that must simultaneously maintain political principles, achieve organizational sustainability, learn from larger partners, and respond to urgent territorial demands while building capacity for systemic transformation.

Thematic Analysis

Taramela Technical Assistance (Second Interview)

Data Source Overview

SOURCE CODE	DATA SOURCE TYPE	PARTICIPANT	PROFILE	DURATION/FORMAT	ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS
INT_TARAMEL A02 In the text: Taramela Interview 2	Semi-structured Interview	Jessica Chaves Ribeiro - Founding Partner Taramela Technical Advisory	Urban Planner & Architect • Extensive experience in technical support and project management • Strong territorial embeddedness in Fortaleza peripheral communities • Led community-driven projects during the COVID-19 pandemic • Coordinated locally the (WaSH) housing interventions in the Habitat Partnership	48 minutes Google Meet audio recorded and Portuguese transcribed with the Tactiq App to Google Docs	Local institutional implementation perspective

Thematic Analysis

1. PARTICIPATORY SELECTION AND CONSTRAINTS

Core phrase: "We understood that the resources wouldn't be enough for what needed to be done"

Selection process in council format with multiple stakeholders

Visiting multiple families VS avoid false expectations

Exclusion of structurally unfeasible cases

Operational model, methodology and budget limiting flexibility for extreme cases

2. COMMUNITY-RECOMMENDED WORKFORCE VERSUS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Core phrase: "They weren't good, I don't think the construction quality was good"

Local workforce hiring as project directive

Community-based recommendations for contractors

Technical quality unsatisfactory according to professional standards

Significant improvement compared to initial conditions

3. FULL FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT DETAILED ACCOUNTABILITY

Core phrase: "We manage all the resources, make all the purchases"

Taramela responsible for complete financial management

Partnership with local supplier for daily purchase facilitation

Credit system with weekly settlement arrangements

Habitat requiring service reports rather than detailed financial accountability

4. METHODOLOGY-FOCUSED TRAINING APPROACH
Core phrase: "They explained the methodology, I wouldn't call it training"
Scope presentation rather than comprehensive capacity building
Explanation of standardized forms and procedures
Expanded training sessions with other implementing groups
Focus on specific methodological procedures
5. FIRST DIRECT CONSTRUCTION IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE
Core phrase: "Taramela had never executed construction work this way before"
Opportunity to build unprecedented practical experience
Previous desire to work in implementation but lack of opportunities
Earlier attempts to secure implementation funding
Partnership as pathway to achieving desired experience
6. IMPORTANCE OF PRE-EXISTING TERRITORIAL TRUST
Core phrase: "These are trust relationships that were built previously"
Need for prior community relationships
Trust as foundation for family selection and local arrangements
Pre-existing relationships facilitating implementation
Known territory as condition for effective execution
7. PROVING IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY THROUGH STRUCTURED PARTNERSHIP
Core phrase: "It enables us to put theory into practice with our principles"
Opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge practically
Demonstration of organization's implementation capacity
Confirmation that resources are the main limiting factor
Strengthening internal organizational confidence
8. MATERIALITY AS ADVOCACY CATALYST
Core phrase: "When we have the materiality of things, it gives us momentum"
Concrete construction strengthening policy advocacy work
Material results necessary for architecture professionals
Cycle between concrete achievements and political advocacy
Material evidence supporting continued policy pressure
9. PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY, THEORY VS PRACTICE
Core phrase: "There was no participatory process in design and construction"
Methodology not providing for participation in technical definitions

Resource, timeline, and scope limitations preventing flexibility
Standardized bathroom solutions
Different possible levels of participation unexplored
10. IDEOLOGICAL ALIGNMENT OVER TECHNICAL PARTNERSHIPS
Core phrase: "It was very superficial, running into different visions"
Contact with social impact organizations (Bem Viver)
Purpose and operational differences hindering partnerships
Preference for ideologically aligned partnerships
Seeking paths of least organizational conflict
11. NETWORK SCALE FOR LARGER PROJECTS
Core phrase: "At their scale, it makes more sense to work with network coordination"
Habitat preferring to work with regional networks
Technical assistance networks as more efficient interlocutors
Sink installation projects executed through networks
Scale logic determining partnership forms
12. CRITIQUE OF ISOLATED INTERVENTIONS VERSUS PUBLIC POLICY
Core phrase: "This isn't charity, this is a call to pressure for public policy"
Refusal to repeatedly implement small quantities
Advocacy for public housing improvement policy
Use of isolated projects as pressure for systemic policies
Critical communication about implemented interventions
13. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY WITH PUBLIC SECTOR
Core phrase: "How do we add up and create this governance design"
Public sector with primary responsibility but complete incapacity
Need to combine different actors and responsibilities
Shared governance design to enable solutions
Recognition of each actor's limitations and potential
14. RESOURCE ACCESS DIFFICULTIES DUE TO SPECIALIZATION
Core phrase: "We have great difficulty accessing resources"
Limbo in funding ecosystem
Architecture specialization as possible limiting factor
Very local focus with limited broader connections
Operational logic different from market logic

15. PERMANENT CRITICAL STANCE TOWARD OWN PRACTICE
Core phrase: "We always have a critical stance"
Constant critique of own practice in all actions
Tension between need for paid work and principles
Injustice of refusing opportunities for community
Self-criticism as permanent methodological stance
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS
This analysis reveals how local technical assistance organizations experience:
Quality tensions between professional standards and community-based implementation
Resource management challenges requiring comprehensive local coordination
Methodological constraints limiting participatory approaches despite organizational values
Capacity building paradoxes where structured partnerships enable learning while restricting flexibility
Advocacy integration using concrete projects as political tools for systemic change
The findings highlight the complex navigation required when small and locally engaged organisations engage with structured methodologies from larger institutions, balancing the need for practical experience and resources against commitments to participatory processes and political transformation.

Thematic Analysis

Pici Community Leader Interview

Data Source Overview

SOURCE CODE	DATA SOURCE TYPE	PARTICIPANT	PROFILE DETAILS	DURATION/FORMAT	ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS
INT_COMM In the text: Community Leader Interview	Semi-structured Interview	Vilguemberg Silva do Nascimento - Vice-president of the Pici Community Management Council since 2018	Geographer, graduated from UECE. Vice-president of the Fumaça community management council since 2018. Experience in housing and food security projects.	90 minutes Google Meet Audio recorded and Portuguese transcribed with the Tactiq App to Google Docs	Empirical and local perspective on implementing community housing projects.

Thematic Analysis

1. PERIPHERAL TERRITORIAL FORMATION THROUGH HISTORICAL OCCUPATIONS

Core phrase: "The most peripheralized part is the Fumaça area"

Historical formation through invasions that became settlements (1960-1990)

Different occupation periods in distinct neighborhood areas

Fumaça as most distant area from avenues and services

Gradual consolidation of occupations in peripheralized territory

2. COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATION DURING PANDEMIC

Core phrase: "The people from Fumaça were helping each other"

Seamstresses collectively buying fabric to make masks

Solidarity distribution of donations through leader's house

Coordination with MST and other social movements

Social organisational structure and centrality facilitated contact for the project

3. PARTICIPATORY SELECTION PROCESS WITH SOCIAL CRITERIA

Core phrase: "We managed to interview and select"

Sociodemographic and economic interviews with more families than available slots

Priority for people with disabilities and large families

Participatory case-by-case evaluation process

Attempting to interview 10 people but managing only 7

4. EXCLUSION OF MOST NEEDY CASES DUE TO TECHNICAL UNFEASIBILITY
Core phrase: "Those who needed it most couldn't be included"
Houses without bathrooms but with very precarious structures
Exclusion due to risk of compromising existing structure
Technical limitations preventing assistance to most needy
Frustrations generated by inability to help extreme cases
5. COMMUNITY MEDIATION AS EXECUTION PREREQUISITE
Core phrase: "The project should be entirely community-based"
All beneficiary houses from Fumaça community itself
Local workforce hired for implementation
Only supplier outside neighborhood due to tax receipt requirements
Centralized organization through community leader's house
6. CONFLICTS BETWEEN TECHNICAL DESIGNS AND FAMILY EXPECTATIONS
Core phrase: "People didn't understand the project well"
Families wanting modifications not included (flooring, painting, other rooms)
Internal conflicts between contractors and families
Need for Taramela mediation as authority figure
Technical drawings not corresponding to family desires
7. VOLUNTARY WORK AS EXTENSION OF COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY
Core phrase: "For me it was just another project to help people"
Daily construction monitoring without remuneration
Voluntary work as natural for those already engaged in social projects
Others unaccustomed to volunteer work might expect payment
Mediation facilitating relations between external technicians and families
8. POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS AND COUNCILOR ASSOCIATIONS
Core phrase: "Everyone imagined it had been some councilor"
Community initially associating project with local politicians
Expectation that leader had received money from councilor
Two councilors promising similar projects after repercussions
Demand for community-coordinated self-managed renovations
9. TERRITORIAL RECOGNITION AND EXPANSION DEMAND
Core phrase: "He became known as the bathroom boy"
Constant requests for new projects during two months

Project knowledge spreading to other neighborhood areas
Broad repercussion generating political proposals
People asking how to bring project to other communities
10. EXTERNAL AUTHORITY FOR TECHNICAL LEGITIMACY
Core phrase: "It's better to have someone from outside manage the whole project"
Local people having credibility constantly questioned
External authority seen as more legitimate for technical decisions
Need for local leadership for territorial mediation
Combination of external management and local mediation
11. NEED FOR INDIVIDUALIZED ATTENTION IN POPULAR TERRITORIES
Core phrase: "Give more attention to people, they want to talk and understand"
Work in favelas requiring maximum possible attention
People needing dialogue and individualized explanations
Criticism of approaches treating people as disposable
Simultaneous execution generating comparisons and neighbor conflicts
12. EMPIRICAL CONTINUITY FOR NEW PROJECTS
Core phrase: "We have something empirical to show how it works"
Experience serving as basis for new grant proposals
Participation in Taramela's subsequent proposals
Technical manual based on practical experience
Local knowledge validating housing improvement methodologies
13. SUBSEQUENT PROBLEMS COMPROMISING RESULTS
Core phrase: "Only two houses still have working bathrooms"
House caught fire three months after completion
Wheelchair-using beneficiary woman died months later
Family expelled from house shortly after construction completion
External problems compromising improvement sustainability
14. SECURITY RISKS AFFECTING IMPLEMENTATION
Core phrase: "There was a dispute between factions in this area"
Three houses located on street dividing two factions
Confrontations preventing passage with materials and technicians
Security-related delays in territorial implementation
Habitat technician visiting on dangerous confrontation day

15. EXPECTATIONS VERSUS RESOURCE REALITY
Core phrase: "It wasn't possible, there wasn't money for that"
Families wanting improvements beyond planned scope
Budget limitations generating frustrations
Project specifically focused on WASH improvements
Mismatch between broad needs and specific resources
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS
This analysis reveals how community leaders navigate between:
Territorial legitimacy versus external authority in project management
Community solidarity expectations versus technical limitations in project scope
Local mediation needs versus standardized methodologies in implementation
Individual attention demands versus efficiency requirements in popular territories
Immediate improvements versus long-term sustainability in housing interventions
The findings highlight the critical role of community leadership in translating between external technical interventions and local territorial dynamics, while managing expectations within resource constraints and dealing with external factors that challenge project outcomes.

Thematic Analysis Public Debate on Housing Improvements					
Data Source Overview					
Source Code	Data Source Type	Participant(s)	Profile	Duration/Format	Analytical Contribution
PUB_DEB In the text: Public Debate	Event online observation	Multiple Stakeholders	Multi-voice Composition: Academic Voices: ▪ Professor Renato Pequeno - Academic/researcher providing historical analysis and future perspectives on housing improvements Civil Society/NGO: ▪ Marcela - TARAMELA NGO representative discussing community-based technical assistance and participatory approaches Government/Policy: ▪ Councilwoman Adriana - Policy implementation perspective and climate adaptation challenges ▪ Rogério - Government official addressing current housing programs and institutional arrangements ▪ Jonas - Current Secretary (newly appointed government official) Pici Community Voices: ▪ Francisco - Community representative posing strategic questions about policy articulation and resource allocation ▪ Dona Cícera - Elder community member sharing lived experience with housing conditions and improvements ▪ Conjunto Palmeiras Resident - Personal experience with housing projects and community development ▪ Various community mobilizers - Residents who worked as facilitators and mediators in housing improvement projects	70 minutes Event broadcast on YouTube and transcribed with the Tactiq App to Google Docs	Forum dynamics and multi-stakeholder perspectives across academic, institutional, and community voices; Triangulation of policy discourse with grassroots experience.

Thematic Analysis
1. HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS AS CONTINUOUS AND RECURRING ACTION
Core phrase: "It's a continuous action, houses grow, families grow"
Need for permanent resources for recurring actions
Families and houses in constant transformation
Continuous process within favela urbanization
Moving beyond isolated intervention logic

2. INTEGRATION BETWEEN HOUSING POLICIES
Core phrase: "Integrate housing improvements with land regularization"
Leveraging proximity to families for multiple policies
Avoiding separate and redundant processes
Resource and team optimization
Comprehensive approach to housing problems
3. IMPROVEMENTS AS CITIZENSHIP BUILDING SPACE
Core phrase: "Help in citizenship building, people understanding rights and duties"
Close dialogue with families as educational opportunity
Political formation through technical interventions
Strengthening community participation
Awareness of housing rights
4. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AS CRITICAL MEDIATION
Core phrase: "Technical assistance has a very critical demarcated position"
Clear political positioning beyond legal function
Collective construction integrating technical and popular knowledge
Horizontal relationship with affection and involvement in others' lives
Using technical knowledge for more just cities
5. HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES OF IMPROVEMENT POLICIES
Core phrase: "Casa Melhor program was based on how much a bathroom cost"
Casa Melhor as historical microcredit program
Reforma Mais for productive projects
Partnership with IFCE for technical surveys
Groups of six families through associations
6. URGENCY OF MASTER PLAN UPDATE
Core phrase: "We need to update, implement the Master Plan"
Outdated Master Plan after management changes
Need for social movement involvement
Effective implementation beyond legal approval
Review with popular participation
7. COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN MAJOR WORKS AND IMPROVEMENTS
Core phrase: "Complement favela urbanization with housing improvements"

Urbanization shouldn't be limited to major works
Interventions reaching inside houses
Leveraging resources like PAC program
Construction industry interests
8. REVISION OF ONEROUS CONCESSIONS
Core phrase: "What companies pay in concessions is very little compared to what they earn"
Companies paying insufficient amounts
Need for value revision
Allocation for infrastructure recovery
Prioritizing peripheral neighborhoods
9. CLIMATE ADAPTATION AS URBAN EMERGENCY
Core phrase: "Fortaleza has had climate refugees for 6 years"
Warao indigenous people as climate refugees in tenements
Worsening floods in precarious city
Need for adaptations in peripheries
Extreme heat requiring housing adaptations
10. PERMANENT MUNICIPAL POLICY VERSUS FEDERAL DEPENDENCY
Core phrase: "We need to have municipal public resources"
Avoiding exclusive dependency on federal resources
Creating permanent and continuous state policy
Annual earmarked resources for housing
Examples from other states with continuity
11. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR TERRITORIAL WORK
Core phrase: "The university is training lots of people to work"
Need for opportunities for trained professionals
Creating technical assistance offices in regional centers
Decentralizing services
Encouraging new organizations like Taramela
12. PUBLIC SECTOR ANXIETIES AND LIMITATIONS
Core phrase: "There are so many accumulated historical demands, so many urgencies"
Public servant recognizing repressed demands
Historical anxiety since student times
Institutional and budgetary limitations
Need for professionals with territorial perspective

13. ARTICULATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT SCALES AND ACTORS
Core phrase: "How do we add up and create this governance design"
Each actor's role according to their capabilities
University, movements, government in coordination
Municipal conferences as advocacy spaces
COAHB as discussion forum
14. COMMUNITY RECOGNITION AND DIGNITY
Core phrase: "With improvements, people already give their address"
Small improvements generating immediate dignity
People not giving addresses due to shame
House front painting making a difference
Project generating territorial recognition
15. CONCRETE NEXT STEPS AND FOLLOW-UPS
Core phrase: "Build a housing improvement policy for Fortaleza city"
Solemn session for priority areas
CAU-CE 2025 call with R\$ 120,000
Public hearing on technical assistance
Public "Morar Bem" program in development
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS
This multi-voice debate reveals how housing improvement policies emerge through:
Institutional convergence across academia, civil society, government, and communities
Historical continuity building on previous policy experiences while addressing current limitations
Scale articulation connecting individual housing needs with municipal policy frameworks
Climate urgency reframing housing improvements as adaptation strategies
Participatory governance requiring new models of resource allocation and decision-making
The findings highlight the complexity of translating community-based technical assistance into systematic public policy, requiring sustained political commitment, diversified funding sources, and institutional arrangements that maintain both technical quality and community participation across changing political administrations.

Figure 01. Urban settlement in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.....	19
Figure 02. Vidigal slum, an urban informal settlement located in one of the most valued areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.....	19
Figure 03. Urban landscape contrasts, highlighting the juxtaposition of high-rise/high-end buildings with lower-income neighborhoods and densely built informal housing in the foreground.....	20
Figure 04. The image highlights the self-built occupation in a hillside area in Santa Marta Favela, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.....	20
Figure 05. Summary chart of the applied methodology.....	46
Figure 06. Fortaleza is a metropolis marked by social inequality, with areas of high-class population concentration.....	60
Figure 07. Preliminary network of actors involved in the case study of the WASH project implemented in the Pici community.....	64
Figure 08. Graphic demonstration of method approach showing the relations between source, themes and categories.....	68
Figure 09. Network of actors involved in the case study of the WASH project implemented in the Pici community.....	90
 Table 01. General data on WASH housing improvement projects in 2020-2021...	51
Table 02. General data on the WASH housing improvement project carried out in the Pici community, in Fortaleza, Brazil.....	52