

Consulting firms and professionals: from project to management, the network of outsourced agents who manage housing policy in São Paulo

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Since the late 1980s, state agencies that take care of the production and implementation of housing policy in São Paulo have been going through an intense, growing and uninterrupted process of outsourcing their management functions by hiring private engineering companies specialized in management and consultancy. These companies provide services to the government in programs and projects, performing activities concerning administration and the control of design, feasibility, implementation and operation of these projects.

The companies, all medium or large, are not committed to direct production processes, but to those related to design, management and regulation. Once contracted by the public agent, they act as a kind of "administrative interposer", which puts them in a position that at first we would understand as a "traditional" governmental responsibility, supervising the work of other contractors, controlling construction schedules, making sure deadlines are met, checking products, etc. These firms often serve also as a medium for outsourcing professionals to work inside the premises of the public agency, as public servants - architects, engineers, sociologists, geographers, and others - working as managers and operating the implementation of housing programs.

In addition, the expertise in engineering consultancy also enables such firms to operate in other functions besides management – project design and construction supervision, for example. It often results in a duplication of the roles played by the companies that can accumulate different contracts with the public agent at the same time, sometimes as managers, other times as designers.

These companies are contracted in highly restrictive bidding processes that have caused the formation of a kind of "circuit", in which a rather small number of companies and professionals takes turns to work alongside the public officials responsible for housing policies in São Paulo, thus composing a network of strong links, characterized by clear forms of cooperation between agents, with very little openness to new actors and exercising a huge influence over the shaping of politics.

Based on the report and analysis of this empirical experience, this paper aims to advance the discussions about the role that urban policies (such as housing) and the production of the city have in the structuring of networks of businesses and professionals, while also discusses the influence of such private agents in urban

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regulation. Although the network notion is used here in its metaphorical sense, and not specifically as an analytical tool for the study of specific social contexts, the effort to map the institutional, corporate and professional entanglements that characterize this circuit intends to feed important discussions on the relationship between public and private in the Brazilian state. But more than that, the case study presented can also indicate broader trends related to governing models in large cities and the networks' role in this dynamic. This makes it possible to connect ideas on governance and networks from reflections on an empirical experience in which there are evident interdependences and permeability between public and private actors as well as influences of this interaction for the production and implementation of the policy.

Key-words: housing policy, consulting firms network, management, São Paulo

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