



www.avsi.org

The human being:
the core of a sustainable city

THE HUMAN BEING: THE CORE OF A SUSTAINABLE CITY

1. FOREWORD

The case dealt with in this paper is a development project that took place at Salvador Bahia, Brazil, between 2001 and 2006. The “protagonist” is AVSI¹, an Italian NGO of Catholic inspiration linked with the Communion and Liberation movement.²

This project is defined as “urban upgrading” in the terminology of cooperation for development and consists of the integration in the city of informal areas or “favelas”.

It is part of a process that began in the early 1990s, when Card. Moreira Neves, The Archbishop of Salvador Bahia, struck by the inhuman living conditions of the inhabitants of the favela of Novos Alagados, requested the help of AVSI who had been collaborating with pastoral initiatives to improve and legalize the living conditions of the favela population in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

That was the beginning of AVSI’s charitable presence in Novos Alagados, with educational activities, in a favela inhabited by 15,000 people, 30% of whom lived in houses built on pile-dwellings (palafittes) along the bay shoreline. The advantage of such shanties was that nobody owned them or the area, so it was possible to occupy them. Through a series of steps, this charitable activity developed into such a sizeable project that it now affects the living conditions of 500,000 inhabitants of the Bahia favelas.

As will be highlighted below, the educational approach has proven to be essential: on the one hand, the Catholic education of the organization launching the project has determined the method, on the other hand it became evident that a process of global education activating the persons’

¹ AVSI is a not-for-profit, non-governmental Italian based organization, founded in Italy in 1972, presently active in 39 countries of the world, with some 111 development cooperation projects. At present, AVSI is operating in Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia, in the areas of health and sanitation, care of children in difficult conditions, education, vocational training, upgrading of informal urban areas, agriculture, environment, promotion of small businesses, food security, ICT, and emergency relief. The mission of AVSI is to support human development in developing countries according to the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church, with special attention to education and promotion of the global dignity of every person. Since 1973, AVSI is recognized as an NGO for international cooperation by the Italian Government; it is registered as a private and voluntary organization (PVO) with USAID (N°10013, July 22 1991); it holds General Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York, the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Vienna and the UN Fund for Children (UNICEF) in New York, and is recognized on the NGOs Special List of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva. AVSI is also an approved body to deal with international adoptions in Italy and abroad. www.avsi.org

² **Communion and Liberation** is an ecclesial movement whose purpose is the education to Christian maturity of its adherents and collaboration in the mission of the Church in all the spheres of contemporary life. It began in Italy in 1954 when Fr Luigi Giussani established a Christian presence in Berchet high school in Milan with a group called Gioventù Studentesca (Student Youth), GS for short. The current name of the movement, Communion and Liberation (CL), appeared for the first time in 1969. It synthesizes the conviction that the Christian event, lived in communion, is the foundation of the authentic liberation of man. Communion and Liberation is today present in about seventy countries throughout the world. There is no type of membership card, but only the free participation of persons. The basic instrument for the formation of adherents is weekly catechesis, called “School of Community.”

talents is necessary in order to set up a development process in an urban area ridden with poverty, violence and human squalor.

This paper deals with: the origin and the history of the project, its description, what we learnt in terms of method and the connections with Catholic social teaching, and education as an open challenge.

2. THE ORIGIN AND THE HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The experience of this project is part of the several international programs of “urban upgrading”³ and it began as a very simple charity action in one of the most degraded favelas in the outskirts of Salvador. In Novos Alagados the population used to live in conditions of extreme poverty, on wooded stiles over extremely polluted water, in absolutely precarious physical, environmental, sanitary and social conditions, in one of the inner bays of Baía de Todos os Santos, that once used to be renowned for their beauty.

Cardinal Moreira Neves, in the early 1990s, urged a group of young volunteers to begin a “charity action” with street children that were not allowed to access kindergartens. In Luigi Giussani’s charismatic words, charitable works are born out of our natural “urge to get interested in others. When there is something beautiful in us, we feel compelled to tell others. When we see others who are worse off than we are, we feel urged to help them with something that is ours... But Christ let us understand the profound reason of all this by revealing the law of life: charity. The supreme law of our being is sharing the others’ being, placing ourselves in common. I can wholly explain the word ‘charity’ when I think that the Son of God, loving us, did not send his riches revolutionising our situation, but made himself as poor as we are, he shared our nothingness.”⁴

That was the first act of solidarity embracing the total reality of those children and their families. That great experience taught the volunteers themselves that those people’s needs were enormous, yet they would never be met by either new houses or new services, because what those people really need is meaningfulness. “It is the discovery of the fact that just because we love them, it is not us who make them happy; and that not even the most perfect society, the wisest and most legally sound organisation, the biggest wealth, the strongest health, the purest beauty, the best-educated civilisation will ever make them happy. It is Another who can make them happy”⁵ These are the bases of the ensuing development of the initiative in Novos Alagados. The experience of the “first ones” in Novos Alagados is the same that originates AVSI’s present-day projects: “This I discover through the final impotence of my love: and true culture is the experience where intelligence merges with wisdom.”⁶

The first educational action was made possible through the love for the persons encountered; that was even before any social actions. That is, it started with a very simple welcoming, with moments of playful sharing – an opportunity to look at the persons encountered in their totality.

Thus, meeting those children and their families with this outlook, meant being there as active subjects, with a total humanity made of heart and reason. This real and full experience of “widening of reason” also allowed us to find the adequate operating and planning means to respond to the needs as they showed up – not defined beforehand but become evident through human

³ According to the *Human settlement report* (2003), favelas or slums are inhabited by: almost one billion people; about one sixth of the world population; half of the world urban population; the forecast for 2050 is that one of half the world population will live in cities. Pope Paul VI had already perceived the level of the challenge “Is not the rise of an urban civilization [...] a true challenge to the wisdom of man, to his capacity for organization and to his farseeing imagination?” (Paul VI, [Octogesima Adveniens](#), 9-10).

⁴ Luigi Giussani, *Il senso della caritativa*, in *Tracce*, 2006 reprint of the 1961 document, p. 4.

⁵ Ibid p. 10

⁶ Ivi pag. 11

relationships based on the awareness that all those people had something in common: the same heart⁷ and the same desire for happiness.

Since that start, AVSI has been present in the Novos Alagados community for over 15 years now, but its action – now manifold and very complex, with programs involving international agencies and financing - could not be understood if their educational method were ignored, where education means “introduction to reality and ultimately to total reality”⁸, which determined our approach to reality from the beginning.

It was indeed this vision of man as a unique being – and therefore to be viewed in his totality – that since the first presence of volunteers gave birth to the organisation and the building of a kindergarten for those children: a small room at first, then an educational structure proper. While organising the kindergarten activities, the same attentive outlook towards the person, focussing on the resources and the positive features intrinsic in any human reality, was capable to begin facing those children’s problems too, that could not be answered by the kindergarten only: the family, health, housing, a school for their older brothers, the problem of jobs and income, the unhealthy conditions of the whole community, and so on.

The Christian education that gave origin to AVSI and guided our actions in these communities and in the world is based on the awareness that the experience of the encounter with Christ makes it evident that the needs and desires of human being are always infinite and therefore the material responses that any project may offer are limited. But when actions, structures and projects arise from a “self” whose awareness and education recognise a link with the infinite in every human reality, even in the most degraded, then these actions or projects become “works” and visible signs, opportunities to meet people with whom to lead a common process of sharing, not just of problems or difficulties, but also of the ultimate meaning of life.

In the above-mentioned **kindergarten**, dedicated to Pope John Paul II and built in 1993, today run by a private association that recognises its history and value, the following sentence by Luigi Giussani, in big letters, reminds us of its origin:

The heart of man is thirst for the infinite. This is what we educate, work and build for.

Once the children from kindergarten entered the school system – a precarious one in those areas – they showed problems in the learning process, with phenomena of retardation and dropping-out. With the support of an Italian foundation, an **educational centre** was opened in 1999 for about 300 young people of school age, integrating an informal educational activity with **formal schooling**. Besides helping learners to catch up with the school syllabus, it provided opportunities for getting together and sports activities – a place where to grow up next to someone who can be an authoritative adult presence.

Besides, a **vocational training** centre was opened in 1999 in the field of civilian building, training 250 people every year; they then join a cooperative that has been active for several years already in the urban development program of the Bahia government, building houses for the same community where they grew up.

In 2004, beside the Kindergarten and the Educational Centre, AVSI started, with private donations, the **Family Orientation Centre (FOC)**, an advisory centre, with the specific aim of looking after the most vulnerable families of the children attending the Kindergarten, the Educational Centre and the community. In particular, the FOC also carries out a project against **infant malnutrition**, financed by private donors and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accepting 300 families a year. Indeed malnutrition, that hit 40% of the community children, shows a phenomenon of extreme family degradation, where it is necessary to act not just in favour of the children but above all attacking the families’ hardships that are at the origin.

⁷ “The demand for truth, love, justice, happiness: these questions constitute the heart of man, they make up the essence of reason, that is of the awareness that man has of reality as seen throughout all its factors.” Luigi Giussani, *L’io, il potere, le opere*. Marietti, 2000, p. 36.

⁸ J.A. Jungmann, *Christus als Mittelpunkt religiöser Erziehung*, Herder&Co, G.M.B.H. Verlagsbuchhandlung, Freiburg, 1939, p. 5.

The conscience of the common destiny uniting the recipients as well as the actors of the projects is the conscience that on the one side stirs the technical ability of raising private and public funds to implement actions in favour of these realities and on the other hand makes it very clear what ideals urge towards the involvement of public administrations, of any political orientation, in favour of the people whose needs we have chosen to share.

In 1993, AVSI obtained from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs the funds to implement a **pilot project of integrated urban development**, both replacing pile dwellings with safe houses and investing human and financial resources on educational works and personal services. This meant experimenting a new method of work, based on a vision of Man and of development that “compelled” to integrate physical actions (streets, houses, sewerages, etc.) with social actions, thus providing, as we have seen, a companionship that went beyond the services offered and the material goods.

The pilot action in Novos Alagados, in an area with 15,000 inhabitants, promoting the reclamation of the bay, the replacement of pile-dwellings with new houses, improving the socio-economic indexes of the community and the participation and involvement of the recipients, aroused the interest of international financiers and institutions. It was evident, above all, that unlike what had happened with the early urban upgrading projects of the 1970s and 80s, the local population itself has never again allowed the construction of new stile-houses or new favelas.

In view of this outcome, the State of Bahia decided in 1999 to extend the method experimented in Novos Alagados to the whole surrounding area (40,000 families and 135,000 inhabitants), thus launching what was called the Ribeira Azul Program. It involved a complex local and international partnership: the local and international civil society (local organizations, AVSI, etc.). the Local Government, the institutional international community (the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the World Bank, the Cities Alliance⁹).

With the PATS, Technical and Social Assistance Program to the Ribeira Azul, AVSI were entrusted the task to join the Local Government in the “control room” of the program, for the planning and for the “socio-economical development” component. The control room, worth about 4 ml USD, coordinates an action, worth about 70 ml USD for infrastructures (houses, streets, waters...) and services (education, health, employment...), to make the territory fit to improve life condition its 135,000 inhabitants.

The PATS project, carried out between 2001 and 2006, saw a further scale-up as its outcome: t*he extension of this method to 8 urban areas of the city of Salvador and to other cities of the state of Bahia.

By using the experiences of Novos Alagados and of the Ribeira Azul program as a workshop, the State of Bahia decided in fact to further widen the urban upgrading action, reproducing the same method of integrated development and launching the Dias Melhores Program. For the first time among the international programs of urban development, it establishes that 25% of the resources be allocated for actions of social development and support of the civilian society. The same partners were involved by the State of Bahia in the new enterprise: the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has donated 6 million euros so that AVSI might still offer technical assistance and guarantee continuity in the methodological experience; the World Bank and the Cities Alliance as international partners specialising the urban sector. The program, currently under way, reports in

⁹ The Cities Alliance (www.citiesalliance.org) is a global coalition of cities and their development partners committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction;

The Alliance brings cities together in a direct dialogue with bilateral and multilateral agencies and financial institutions; Alliance members promote the developmental role of local governments and help cities of all sizes obtain more coherent international support;

By promoting the positive impacts of urbanisation, the Alliance helps local authorities plan and prepare for future growth;

The Alliance helps cities develop sustainable financing strategies, and attract long-term capital investments for infrastructure and other services.

its documents the points of method (summarised below) that characterise this experience, the same points that oriented the first charitable actions right from the start.

Therefore these have been very big challenges, not only and not so much from a technical point of view, because they obviously implied a remarkable growth of the local branch of AVSI in the last few years; above all they have been challenges that demanded an in-depth analysis of a method that could no longer be valid only for the educational “works” of Christian inspiration run by AVSI on private funds, but was to be tested within a governmental program with international funding, without losing its efficacy and originality, that is the way of looking at persons that had urged the first volunteers ten years before.

The ensuing effort was to translate into technical and operational terms the teachings of the Catholic social teaching, which proposes a method of development moving from the person, the family, the intermediary bodies and subsidiarity.

All the actions taken within this project, from kindergartens to home assistance, from the care of malnourished children to partnership with international donors, from meetings with Bahia government officers to house-building, everything followed the same method – an essentially educational method – because each action was driven by the same ideal: the centrality and sacredness of human life, the human, spiritual and social growth of the subjects, all beginning with a relationship, an encounter.

The origin and originality of the Novos Alagados experience derive, then, from a Christian education and clear ideals which turned into a working hypothesis, from which practical instruments came up which generated concrete actions that have become an experience that can be described, diffused and evaluated.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Here is an outline of the steps of the project.

3.1 FACT-FINDING PHASE

The Novos Alagados experience has highlighted how even the most destitute communities hide capabilities and human resources in themselves that are the communities assets¹⁰. Placing the dignity of human persons at the centre of the action means recognising that their value cannot be reduced to their poor social conditions, and valuing what they have built.

The first phase of the intervention was then a fact-finding phase¹¹, carried out through census and sample surveys, by contacting families and the existing local organisations, and mapping the results on a geo-processing system¹².

¹⁰ Caroline Moser, former anthropologist/social policy specialist of the World Bank, in “The asset vulnerability framework: Reassessing urban poverty reduction strategies” (1998) proposed a new approach on the urban poor: Identifying what the poor have, rather than what they do not have, focusing on their **assets**. She categorized the assets of the urban poor in terms of an “asset vulnerability framework”, including both tangible assets, such as labour and human capital, less familiar productive assets, such as housing, as well as intangible assets, such as household relations and social capital. Referring to a urban study, show that the poor are managers of complex asset portfolios, and illustrate how asset management affects household poverty and vulnerability. Translated into operational practice this framework facilitates interventions promoting opportunities, as well as removing obstacles, to ensure the urban poor use their assets productively.

¹¹ Getting to know a community cannot be done without a socio-economic study that investigates all the aspects of its patrimony. In specific actions, the fact-finding phase analyses, by means of home-by-home interviews of the inhabitants, the condition of the house, of jobs and income, of health, of education, of the services that are present and used and of the forms of community participation. Such investigation allows actions that respond to the needs emerging from the portrait, needs that are thus “read from the inside”, thus avoiding the risk of basing one’s actions on abstractions, arbitrary readings or sociological interpretations coming from the outside, through a specific tool, the portrait itself, that reduces interpretations to a minimum in order to let reality “speak out” as much as possible.

This fact-finding work involved the local community, the existing community-based organisations (CBOs), thus allowing us to establish a true relationship with the realities we were preparing to intervene on. During the Novos Alagados pilot project, this phase gave rise to reactions of mistrust from the local community. In the case of Ribeira Azul, since the previous pilot project of Novos Alagados had yielded tangible results, it was more favourably accepted by local communities.

Here are the three most relevant points that determined the intervention plan:

- The picture revealed some aspects of severe degradation of the environment and of the homes:
 - 59% of the active population had a monthly income of less than half the minimum salary (about one US dollar per day)
 - 31% of the houses had no bathroom and 64% had an incomplete one
 - 21% of the school-age population had dropped out of school and 71% were behind the expected level
- A sort of “family effect” was detected: for example the presence in the family of adults who had completed the compulsory education was correlated with a lower drop-out rate in the children and a better level of maintenance of the house;
- It was clear that there was a wealth of social aggregations, that we will call “intermediate bodies”, although fragile and informal; about 70 of them actively and systematically participated in the whole development of the project, showing their sincere interest for the common good.

3.2 PLANNING PHASE

This portrait, analysed with the local community, led to the intervention priorities as regards both the infrastructures and the socio-educational component.

- **Urban upgrading:** new houses were built, replacing those on stilts, and the ones on dry land were upgraded; the water and sewerage systems were prioritised in view of health and environment considerations
- **Economic and social development:** focus on investments in favour of the family, education and jobs.

Intervention strategies were also defined:

- CBOs participation and empowerment
- Institutional building

In the case of a poverty-reduction program on a metropolitan level, the fact-finding phase requires an investigation with a large-scale reading grid. In fact, the polygon area of Ribeira Azul includes communities that cannot be considered homogeneous because they host different populations, with different histories, with different links and ties between one another and with the formal city. So, by aiming at a systemic view of the whole, one can only conclude that investigating the several communities making up the Ribeira Azul area separately would not be enough, because “the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts” (Von Bertalanffy’s General System Theory).

¹² The following analyses were carried out:

- A socio-economic investigation of the areas that will receive physical actions: individual interviews, home by home, investigating the aspects of patrimony (health, housing, job/income, family, forms of free aggregation).
- A sample socio-economic study of the communities that will receive a social action.
- A study of the associative and aggregative forms typical of civil society, of public and private intermediate bodies, operating in the Ribeira Azul area.
- A study on the social vulnerability of the area (drugs, violence, early maternity, infant malnutrition, etc.).
- An investigation on the state of the environment in the Ribeira Azul area.
- A study of the Public Programs and Policies concerning the intervention area of the Ribeira Azul Program.
- A study of the programs and services actually used by residents in the Ribeira Azul area.
- An anthropologic investigation of the Ribeira Azul area: history of the communities, population dynamics, migration, origin and relationships of the communities between one another and with the formal city, aggregative tendency of community groups.

3.3 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

3.3.1 Involvement and reinforcement of intermediate bodies

The Novos Alagados experience and the fact-finding phase highlighted how the local people had freely given rise to initiatives – especially in the educational sector – to meet the requirements of everyday life: kindergartens, places for informal or after-school education, meeting places (above all for adolescents, the group that was most at risk), welcoming houses for abandonment cases, places for the support of teenage and/or unwed mothers, home-providing associations, etc.

The project bet everything and totally relied on these intermediate bodies, that were already active with their services to the person, for the following reasons:

- as they are already operating within the local reality, they know the people's real needs and have already outlined a possible response
- they are a real and traceable presence within the community, and can mobilise resources and persons
- they are motivated towards the common good: the interest that started them originally and makes them survive (often in extremely marginal conditions) is the interest to provide the community with real services, towards the common good
- they are a factor in the plan sustainability

The reinforcement of the intermediate bodies was implemented through:

1. **their participation** in the process of planning and implementation of the project actions
2. **training and technical assistance**, from making their existence legally recognised to the improvement of their organisations
3. **financing of the projects** they proposed

3.3.2 Strengthening of the institutions

A major added value of the PATS was the setting up of a mixed team of technicians from AVSI and from the State of Bahia for the management, systematisation and planning that developed a global plan for the intervention and, above all, the co-responsibility for the whole project. Within this collaboration the Bahia Government mainly operated in the management of city planning and housing actions, with the technical assistance of AVSI. At the same time AVSI planned the social actions necessary to guarantee that the physical intervention be integrated into the lives of the communities and of the intermediate bodies – always following the World Bank's administration rules. Field offices were set up in order to achieve a presence that could provide a direct link with the inhabitants and the local associations, directly involved in all the actions of the project.

This brought about three important results:

1. it disseminated, to the public technical staff, a way to approaching situations of human deprivation based on an outlook towards the whole person
2. it brought the presence of public institutions into the community, whereas institutions and local communities have always been conflicting in the poorer urban areas
3. it led to the formulation of the above-mentioned large-scale program for the upgrading of 8 areas in the city of Salvador and in other cities of the State of Bahia, allotting 25% of the funds to socio-educational actions, i.e. to human development

3.3.3 Economic and social development

The above strategy for the development of intermediate bodies was decisive in the interventions for economic and social development. The actions that were carried out followed the logic that intermediate bodies are actors in the processes of economic and social development.

1. **Participation:** first of all, the 70 personal-service intermediate bodies or CBOs became effective stakeholders in the project, the main community interlocutors, protagonists from the planning to the implementation of the actions, in an intense process of meetings and visits (ownership).
2. **Technical training and assistance:** The training offered by the project, besides the course itself, guaranteed individual guidance for over a year, daily followed by AVSI technicians in a personal relationship with each association, about topics related with aspects of administration and management, fund raising and project planning, methodological and educational training, formalisation process and help to obtain public documents and legal recognition, educational training for kindergarten teachers, training in cooperativism and assistance to cooperatives, etc.
3. **Financing of projects launched and run by local associations, with AVSI's technical assistance.** This action offered a development and curriculum opportunity to local CBOs by favouring their growth and consolidation processes. The selection of processes went through internal competitive evaluations among several local associations in order to implement actions in the educational sector, for job and income creation, for health, family support, beside sports and cultural activities of great interest for the community. This approach has yielded interesting results also in economic terms and as regards sustainability in the future (all the PATS-financed activities have been going on after the end of the project, exactly because the intermediate bodies are subjects with an ideal motivation that guarantees sustainability). AVSI's technical assistance secured the financiers' willingness to collaborate with CBOs. The dialogue, more and more open and constructive, greatly contributed to the positive evaluations, in terms of community participation, give by the same associations and reported in the PATS evaluation documents (see paragraph on Evaluation below). In order to operate along these lines it was necessary to create new types of contracts and rules accepted by the World Bank and by the Local Government, that recognised and supported those new experiences in favour of the CBO's who thus became full-fledged partners to the program. The projects also gave them the opportunity to extend, restore or build their structures. AVSI kept the direct management of some socio-educational projects as concrete examples providing know-how to other CBO's.

A few figures about the results of directly-managed actions for social development:

- 73 CBOs were strengthened;
- 13 community structures were built or restructured/extended;
- 1.339 social workers were qualified;
- 78 social projects were completed in the fields of education, family, health, jobs and income, environment education;
- 7 job cooperatives were established or launched in the sectors: textiles, fishing, food-processing and building;
- 306 people were trained in vocational courses;
- 240 community persons worked as contracted builders;
- 79 kindergarten teachers were trained through a course of infant education involving both theory and practice;
- 562 young people took part in sports, cultural and/or recreational events.

3.3.4 Urban upgrading and land and property titling

As regards the priority accorded to interventions on houses and infrastructures, the PATS aimed at accelerating the process and at turning it into a job opportunity for local communities. In fact it made it possible for local businesses and cooperatives to participate in calls for tenders to public authorities, although they lacked the official qualifications to compete (curriculum, official recognition, etc.); this was achieved through a training-on-the-job process, that is with technical assistance provided by a specially qualified team.

In this way, the following main results were obtained:

- 1268 pile-dwellings were removed
- 984 families moved into new houses
- 373 embryo houses were built (191 financed by PATS)
- 221 houses were upgraded (101 financed by PATS)
- 52,643 sq. mts. of mangrove area were rebuilt or preserved
- 17 Kms of street were asphalted;
- Access roads and access to basic services: water, sewerage, electricity, street cleaning and rubbish collection, etc.

ACCESS TO COMMUNITY SERVICES IN NOVOS ALAGADOS – COMPARISON OF YEARS 2000 AND 2006

Novos Alagados – example of access to public services		
Services	2000	2006
Street cleaning and rubbish collection	50%	80%
Connection to water network	37%	71%
Connection to electric network	72%	88%
Connection to sewerage	21%	84%
Houses without a bathroom	31%	3%

3.4 PROJECT EVALUATION

The final evaluation of the project was carried out by the University of Trento, that was also in charge of the monitoring.¹³ Intermediate evaluations were carried out in the course of the project following the PSIA (Poverty and Social Impact Analysis) methodology, combining quantitative (cost effectiveness) and qualitative tools, also based on a survey by the Universidade Federal da Bahia on the project's social component.¹⁴

The final evaluation of the project gave the following results:

- the relevance was high;¹⁵

¹³ Giuseppe Folloni, Università di Trento, PATS Final evaluation report, Trento 2006.

¹⁴ Judy L. Baker, The World Bank, Integrated Urban Upgrading for the Poor: The Experience of Ribeira Azul, Salvador, Brazil; *Policy Research Working Paper 3861*; available online at <http://econ.worldbank.org>

Other reference documents: "Analisando os Impactos Sociais e na Pobreza do Desenvolvimento Urbano Integrado na Bahia, Brasil". Task Manager: Judy Baker e Ivo Imparato – 2005, January

"Análise de um programa de desenvolvimento urbano integrado, na perspectiva de seus beneficiários, através de uma abordagem qualitativa". Universidade Federal da Bahia, Instituto de Saúde Coletiva, prof. Ana Cecília de Sousa Bastos (Coordenação). 2005, January

¹⁵ "First, because it's an integrated slum upgrading program whose themes and critical issues are those faced by many other projects around the world. The experience gained can therefore provide input to other projects as well. Secondly, in the State of

- the efficacy in the management of the project was high, especially as regards the social component and institutional reinforcement;¹⁶
- the efficacy in attaining the objectives was substantially high;
- the efficiency in the use of resources was substantially high.

84% of associations and intermediate bodies judged the project and its contribution to their development as good to excellent.

Out of the 74 indicators in the implementation plan, 70 were met with positive or highly positive values, 4 were not satisfactorily met.

The project's most significant aspects, detected both in the final evaluation and in progress, were two:

- the “extended partnership” between the actors involved, namely the CBOs, the international NGO, the local institutions, the World Bank, the Cities Alliance and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- the participation of the local community through CBOs.

Trento University states that the project has offered a new model of cooperation between the various actors, defined as **participant partnership**.

In traditional views, in fact, the pivot NGO – AVSI in the present case – unbalances its alliance either towards the community or towards the public institutions.

In the case of PATS, **participant partnership** has been found to be an alternative model, different from all the others described in the literature about cooperation projects, characterised by **positive alliance with both parties** – community and public local system – allowing both parties to establish a constructive relationship of positive **reciprocity**.

Finally, four challenges were identified in the final evaluation paper, that also accommodate the evaluations in progress:

- Housing models: a cultural challenge, a sector where new technologies and tradition can open up new possibilities;
- Land tenure and cost recovery: a problem of clear rules, where the cost of moving from informality to formality is at stake;
- Jobs and connection with the urban system, a crucial aspect for the sustainability of local developments;
- extension of the partnership to other institutions that might be involved (**extended partnership**) and sustainability of the **participant partnership** model in projects on a larger scale.

As regards the social component of the program, we point out that the PSIA evaluation carried out qualitative surveys with panels and interviews to community people.

Bahia in particular, the project experience has represented a first 'rank shift' from which policy lessons can be learnt when designing further, larger-scale projects such as Dias Melhores.” Folloni, pag. 59

¹⁶ “The results as regards social development are outstanding. High levels of beneficiary satisfaction are coupled with an evident new sense of dynamism.” Folloni, p. 59

Here are a few passages from J. L. Baker's document:

Focus groups and in-depth discussions were carried out with residents in Novos Alagados II to better understand their perceptions on what has worked well with the integrated urban development approach and what has not. Feedback from beneficiaries point to many positive aspects of the Ribeira Azul Program. These include a range of perceptions from general improvements in quality of life to reductions in urban violence, health and nutritional improvements from the social programs, expanding educational and training opportunities for children and youth, positive impacts from having educators in the community, and increased opportunities in the labor market through the cooperatives. All of these elements contributed to an increased sense of dignity which residents emphasized in many of the discussions.

Among the 'negative' aspects of the Project mentioned by beneficiaries was a demand for increased opportunities through the Project, ultimately a result of the positive perceptions mentioned above. (p. 4)

Most of the problems were in some way related to the implementation of works, particularly housing. This included general problems with construction, as well as with the community in their dissatisfaction in the size and other features of the housing units. Other challenges exist with inter and intra governmental relations, and resulting gaps in service delivery in the Ribeira Azul area. (p. 13)

As regards the evaluation of cost effectiveness and sustainability, "The costs of most of the physical and social interventions appear to be in line with current spending patterns for the State. Providing housing under the resettlement program, specifically for the larger houses, is somewhat costly and affects issues of affordability and cost recovery for the State."

4. THE LESSONS WE LEARNED

On reviewing our experience in order to draw the necessary lessons, the very principles of the Social Teaching emerged: the PATS project showed that indeed the teachings of the Church's Social Teaching can give shape and efficacy to projects of international cooperation.

However, they do not emerge as prescriptive elements but as elements of experience.¹⁷

4.1 CENTRALITY OF THE PERSON

Persons in their fundamental relationships, family and community, are the centres of every action, their dignity and human development are the ultimate ends of any kind of intervention¹⁸.

What does PERSON mean, in the PATS project? The risk of cooperation programs is starting from the person as a sociological category defined by its needs. Persons defined by their needs and therefore projects aimed at meeting the needs without looking any further.

If the method is imposed by the object, and the "object" is human being, then it is necessary to start from man's nature, from an anthropological outlook¹⁹.

A person living in poverty is a man who cannot exploit his talents, because he devotes all his resources to primary needs and survival. He is a man who lives in conditions that are not worthy of his being a unique and irreplaceable creature. He is a man who cannot face reality with a method,

¹⁷ « Elle (La doctrine sociale) n'est pas davantage prescriptive. Elle ne propose pas de solutions concrètes à la variété des situations que rencontrent les hommes dans l'organisation et le fonctionnement de la société. Elle n'est pas une synthèse des éthos existants. Elle vise à mettre en lumière les artères vitales qui irriguent toute société qui se veut digne de l'homme. » cfr. Les principes fondamentaux de la doctrine sociale.

La question de leur interprétation. - Prof. Roland Minnerath - Archevêque de Dijon

¹⁸ "a people's development does not derive primarily from money, material assistance or technological means, but from the formation of consciences and the gradual maturing of ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. Man is the principal agent of development, not money or technology". John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (n. 58 – 59)

¹⁹ "Society does not account for the totality of our factors: we are not just cogwheels in a machine or bricks of the social building. The aim of society does not account for the human being as a whole." Luigi Giussani, *L'io il potere, le opere*, Marietti, Milano, 2000, p. 92

with an outlook going beyond the horizon of “living day by day”, with a sensitivity that, starting from reality, can retrieve the dimension of meaningfulness. In urban areas, in particular, poverty is also the loss of identity, of ties of belonging, and it leads to fill this vacuum with the idols alive in big cities, such as wealth and money.

Getting out of poverty obviously depends on a number of factors, both external and internal to the person.

The persons’ perceptions of their needs are essential, and their reactions to these as an attempt to overcome their poverty conditions – for example, illegality, violence, vagabondage, beggary. Evidently, poverty does not allow man to reason freely and face life freely: poverty is “everything”. Thus man loses the dimension of meaningfulness, of dignity, of ethics, of respectfulness, and identifies himself with his immediate need.

The poor, then, are **those who do not have the physical, material, human and spiritual conditions allowing them to recognise and understand their own needs and therefore to realise their deepest desires, since an access to real opportunities to develop their potentialities is missing.**

The project offered opportunities through which the persons could experience hope for themselves and discover their requirements as human beings.

By way of example, here are four witnesses:

“The FOC helped me to know myself better and to reflect on what I want from life. I applied to the FOC because I was unsure, because my relationship with my father had not been one of the best, and because I had some doubts. We focussed on the relationship with my father and my sister, and on my behaviour. A change has taken place, I even talk to my sister a little. I no longer fear to begin trusting people.” L. F. S., aged 18, Uruguay district.

“The FOCs suggestion is to improve a few things, such as the family environment, to be more objective with my children, to be more careful, to care a bit more about myself too, as we sometimes worry more about the others than about ourselves. For example, now I am less oppressive with Tamara and she has improved as a schoolgirl. They had told me that a psychologist listens to your problems and is a person you can talk to. I felt very well there. I always thought of my problems and lived in the Emergency Unit, always with diabetes and high blood pressure. Now I like life better. I used to get angry and my pressure went up, now I no longer need to rush to the Emergency Unit. I have also started dieting, and so has Tamara, and this is helping me, I sleep better. Things have improved. Large families always have problems and now I am planning not to linger on these problems any more, I want to join a group and learn embroidering. There is a problem between me and my husband, too: he knows how much I care for my children, he is jealous and doesn’t want me to go to school. Now, even if he doesn’t want, I talk to my children and go to school.” M. L. P., aged 58, Novos Alagados district.

“At the FOC we mostly spoke about the relationship I have with the others and in fact a great change has taken place in my way of acting and thinking. I was able to speak about all the things that worried me and all have been seen to with great responsibility and most of my problems have been solved. The guidance is very good, everything is planned and organised, the people who work at the FOC are above all friendly, beside the rest. (...) this is like receiving a compass that will orient me along my life.” A. J., aged 15, Novos Alagados district.

“The FOC is an aid for family difficulties. It gave more self-assurance to my personality. In my case it was my daughter’s school that addressed me to it, because she was very nervous about the fact that I used to beat her a lot, since I thought that her father had left me because of her. Now I have changed. I am reconciling things, loving the girl as she is and respecting her father’s choice. I have learned to relate to other people (...). I still have to learn not to mind my relatives and neighbours and stop thinking that everybody is laughing at me because of what has happened, because I will meet this kind of people wherever I may go.” - M. J. S., aged 27, Uruguay district.

4.1.1 Needs

Saying that poor persons are not in a position to recognise their own need is certainly a risky statement because the perception of needs risks to become subjective, arbitrary or ideological. Cooperation projects or “social” projects often fall within this limitation²⁰. The risks of a superficial view of needs can be summarised as follows:

- **Unseen need:** those who are immersed in a situation of extreme poverty, and cannot compare it with other realities, tend to believe that the destitution they live in is a normal condition for themselves, do not feel the need for change and cannot recognise their needs
- **Partial or distorted need:** it is often the immediate need of individual persons, an unshared necessity, but immediate and personal, generally material and not complete, the fulfilment of which leads to the discovery of ever new needs, partial and limited too
- **Induced need:** it is the need “suggested” to the community by those who plan actions to reduce poverty; they act as those who, from above and the outside, pretend to know what is good for those people and set up their intervention basing themselves on this assumption.

So, how can the responses to poverty situations be set up in development actions? The process through which the need becomes known is crucial.

The most realistic solution to this dilemma seems to be “**sharing**”, which allows a process very similar to what Edith Stein calls empathy: an understanding, “a grasping, that is a perception of the value of the person”.

The affective proximity allows one not to reject a priori the partial need expressed by people – indeed it starts from the partial necessity expressed in order to “read” it with a view to the totality of the human being. Any need, albeit only material or limited, always reflects a desire that goes beyond it; with proximity, it can be listened to and expanded into other directions so as to be exploited in a more edifying way at the level of individual and social growth. An external presence, both friendly and authoritative, and therefore educational, plays an essential role²¹.

4.1.2 Access and opportunities

Poverty, as defined above, beside the complexity of the reading of needs, poses another fundamental question, the one of the access to real opportunities for the development of talents. A person’s access to opportunities of various kinds depends on at least three factors:

1. The existence of opportunities
2. The real possibility to access them
3. The desire and individual will to access them

In fact, in the poor areas of big cities, if services or development programs exist, they do not always operate in ways that are adequate to the context but they often have features that exclude the weakest layers of the population. But above all, the weakest layers of the population exclude themselves, just because they do not perceive their own needs and their own talents. A mother at the educational centre John Paul II, after being involved in educational actions for parents said: “Well, I feel important here, I didn’t think I could come to these meetings myself!”

²⁰ “What if what I bring is not what they really need? It is not me who knows what they need, who measures what they need, who has what they need. Laws and judiciary systems can be oppressive if they forget – or pretend to replace – the only concreteness existing: the person and the love per the person.” Luigi Giussani, *Il senso della caritativa*, op. cit. p. 9.

²¹ “The first condition for comprehension – remarks Hans Urs von Balthasar – is the acceptance of the data such as they are given. The first thing we need in order to see objectively is to allow what we see to be what it is. The first thing is not to seize, through the subject’s categories, some material ready for perception, but to place ourselves at the service of the object, to adore... The grandeur of reality does not leave the reason indifferent... reality acts on reason as an inescapable invitation to discover meaning.” Julián Carrón, “L’urgenza della ragione”, in *Allargare la Ragione*, V&P, 2006, p. 33

4.2 STARTING FROM THE POSITIVE

Each person, each community, however wanting, represents a wealth and presents its own patrimony. This methodological principle tends to give value and strength to what the persons have built, to their history, to the existing relationships, that is to the social texture and to the body of experiences that make up their patrimony in life. This is a fundamental action point, born of a positive approach to reality that lets persons understand their values, their dignity; at the same time it is a help towards **responsibility**.

Starting from the positive does not mean denying the problems present in a community or its vulnerability, but detecting the existing resources within the community, in order to consolidate and enhance them.

The whole process of knowledge relationship is essential in this. But what allows this interaction process? “What allows us to become friends although we are historically determined by different traditions and cultures? It is the presence in each of us – wherever in the planet we may have been born – of the same primary experience, that Fr Giussani himself defines as ‘a complex of original needs and “evidences” which are tools for that encounter. So original are these needs or these “evidences” that everything man does or says depends on them²²’. We can identify this structural human identity with the biblical word *heart*²³.”

4.3 “DOING WITH”

A project imposed “from above” is violent because it is not participated or it is ineffective because it is only charitable. The way in which AVSI proposes the project and implements it is “doing with the persons”, that is, starting from the relationship with the people addressed to by the project and building it up on the basis of the steps that come into being with them.

The involvement of the recipients in the actions is a “conditio sine qua non” for the implementation of any project, because development is the movement of active and free subjects who responsibly work for their own individual and social growth.

In order to rediscover both personal talents and the interest for the common good, a development project is first of all an educational opportunity.

DOING WITH became concrete in the PATS in the operational actions of technical assistance to the CBOs present and to socio-educational actions, works and “schooling” projects for the diffusion of know-how. In the presence of affective closeness, through which one grows together with the community, the actors are guided by doing with them while respecting their culture and their unique life history. This becomes evident when AVSI implements specific projects or collaborates in the management of social and educational structures: the personnel trained by AVSI shares, day after day, the life experience of the project recipients, their difficulties and their small daily achievements. It is exactly the encounter of Persons that brings about the most evident signs of change and of individual – and consequently, social – growth.

4.3.1 Scaling up

Moving from the Novos Alagados pilot project to the Ribeira Azul meant facing the challenge on a larger scale. It was clearly impossible to reach all the project recipients personally, so “doing with” became “doing with aggregate subjects” and “teaching how to ‘do with’ “ working with the same method on a different level. It became fundamental to work with intermediate bodies, turned into “multipliers”, and to entrust social change to a chain of encounters. The method that in Novos Alagados had been adopted with schoolchildren, with PATS was adopted with teachers and principals, with the heads of the social workers active in the area, with public officials

²² Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, p. 7.

²³ Julián Carrón, *L’urgenza della ragione*, cit. p. 23.

4.4 DEVELOPMENT OF INTERMEDIATE BODIES AND SUBSIDIARITY

The PATS program highlighted the value of intermediate bodies within a context of poverty. The hypothesis of sparking off the process of mobilisation of the development resources was based on this evidence. This is a very interesting feature of relational dynamics in Brazilian favelas. During the fact-finding phase, it was perceived that if these subjects were capable to serve the common good in extremely precarious conditions, then contributing to their reinforcement could have been the spark that sets a virtuous circle into motion.

The subsidiary process and freedom have shown how they can overcome the situations with a “diseased” balance of powers, and restore order in the relationships between persons and subjects. Poor urban areas often see distortions in the relationships between the different social levels, easily giving rise to exploitations, to political “patronage”, excess of welfarism. This happens because needy people are fragile and prone to be blackmailed. On the other hand, there are situations where “social organisations” pretend to defend “the poor” from the political powers’ attempts to subdue them.

In the case of the favelas, many subjects fell into the temptation of dealing with those people as if they were not capable of free actions. Any relationship arising with a subject from outside the favela becomes a relationship of dependence, as non-gratuitous help, in neither direction.

This project, while re-launching the challenge of people’s freedom, re-launched the capability of single persons and of aggregations to relate with what is outside the community with a faculty of free dialogue that is not ascribable to either charity or patronage.

In this project, the organisations were involved and supported exactly because of the service they were giving to the community. One representative of the consulting committee, who had opened a kindergarten and managed it, commented that the project had given dignity to their work. The president of another organisation declared that she, at last, had discovered what participation means, that is not just claiming but being a protagonist on the basis of work in favour of the community.

This value of the intermediate bodies present within the community also entails different dynamics in the relationship between the community, that discovers its riches, and the city, above all in terms of mutual access to resources and mutual recognition.

A major result achieved by PATS as regards intermediate bodies was indeed the recognition, by both financing bodies and the public administration, of the public usefulness of these subjects, thus starting the process of their accreditation with local institutions.

4.4.1 Community participation

A lot of emphasis is given to community participation in development projects.

There are several distorting interpretations given to the participation process.

The concept of “community participation” is frequently identified with “non intrusion”, by the partner and the financing bodies, into the community choices, so that a project tends to be considered participative when it is the community that proposes actions, carries them out, manages them and, at the same time, controls them.

At other times participation was given the value of claiming, emancipation, apparently with liberation as its end but in reality chaining the persons to the social category they should have emancipated from. This is how many attempts at liberation have become ideological degeneration, losing sight the very value of human dignity and man’s relation with the infinite.

The form of community participation proposed by the PATS is active, aware and responsible participation.

To participate means “being players in the game” in a reciprocity relationship, each with their own capabilities and possibilities, while respecting each person’s freedom of action, in order to solve

problem that are not only individual but tied to the “common good”, involving other actors, sharing responsibilities, respecting different roles.

It is a form of participation that does not turn into a conflict for the management of “power” but represents a true, open and transparent dialogue that opens up the limited vision of each of the subjects involved and, at the same time, respects the different roles and abilities of each stakeholder in the process.

Participation for AVSI is a process, a form of sharing, involving all the subjects in different forms. The community is involved and has the fundamental role of orienting the actions, of being at the same time the subject and actor of the planned actions, of helping the partners in the detection of needs, of joining meetings and debates, both with the financiers and the people in charge of the programs (consulting committee) and with the other actors within the development process, and, besides, of representing the inhabitants of the area affected by the program and of negotiating the benefits requested from the program. In order to do that, however, the community must be conscious of the limitations deriving from being *just one* of the subjects involved, so that, as the financing body cannot venture to “read” the reality without listening to the community, likewise the community, however conscious, only knows one side of the reality, often suffocated by the urgency of daily needs. Reality is generally much more complex.

The whole process can be enacted only through a relationship, a proximity.

By way of example, here are two witnesses, representatives of local CBOs:

“Because at first we thought, many of us thought, that participation means simply making demands, and no more, but now we understand that participation means much more. It is not only claiming things and making demands, but it means being part of a process, and this is not so easy to do, I would say that it is another great challenge. But now that we are all involved in this challenge, as actors, we are more motivated because we know we can achieve positive results and I believe that we will manage to achieve those results.” (...) “And the participation that we have experienced, has been of a different kind. The idea is that we really feel part of this process, as if it was one of our children”. Interview with Maria Lourdes do Nascimento (Lourdinha), President of a local CBO.

“As a community, we are capable of organising projects. Over and above the specific project our organisation has been directly involved in, we have followed all the PATS process, within the community, right up to today. It is a process of discussion with technical experts, with the community, making strategic choices for housing, the environment, health and other topics of fundamental importance for the community. We have all undergone a major process of maturing, working on this project. When I say “we”, I mean the community, all the bodies and the people in an organised community, because we have been able to and we are still able to share all our suggestions and anxieties, all the baggage we carry with us, in a discussion with the community to which we can bring all our problems because we know alternative solutions can be found.”. Interview with Raimundo Nascimento, Representative of CAMA.

4.5 PARTNERSHIP

In development programs it is fundamental to set up alliances finalised towards the common objective: a **partnership** between subjects to set synergies and large amounts of resources into motion. The role of AVSI was exactly the one of aggregating and involving local administrations, social forces, international institutions, according to their respective roles, to meet the needs confronting them, for the common good.

The Ribeira Azul action, aiming at coordinating the subjects involved, operated with partnerships at different levels, where each actor contributed to the program objectives in different roles and with different specific traits

- International institutions (World Bank, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,...) whose role was to have technical-managerial know-how and financial resources converge

- Public local institutions (State, Municipality, ...) whose role was to govern the resources converging on the territory and to invest on the action themselves
- Private businesses, providing technical know-how and work
- NGO and third sector, whose role was a link between the community and the other subjects, by activating financiers, competencies and human resources
- CBOs, orienting the program actions

The program had the peculiarity to have a large wealth of resources converge on the territory, through the partnership network, thus opening up the area towards the world and the world towards the area.

5. THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION

In order to give an idea of the value of education in this program, let us hear the words of a young protagonist, José Eduardo Ferreira Santos, who experienced the program from the beginning to this day in his own life. José Eduardo is the son of a family who lived in a pile-dwelling until ten years ago. After getting a degree in Education and a Ph.D. in development psychology, he has worked as a professional with the socio-educational component of the program. He is the person who can best of all witness to the value of a creative presence that changes life.

After being involved as a teenager in the beginning of the program in the early 1990s, and finding a way to hope, José Eduardo took care of the complicated lives of many young people of his community – lives reported in his book “Travessias – a adolescência em Novos Alagados”²⁴.

Going back to his teenage years, he remembers that the coming of social and educational initiatives allowed the teenagers in the area to experience something new and different and to get to know the outside world. Urbanization brought about job opportunities, the social mobility induced by the social actions created ties between persons and families.

The advent of informal educational actions brought the presence of adults who began to become a reference point for the teenagers, a reference point they had lost. And these actions began to favour schooling strongly, so much that some groups of young people went to University. This chance changed the lives of many teenagers whose prevalent experience had been violence. Ferreira Santos emphasises how, in front of two possibilities open to them – sport, culture and education on one side and drugs and theft on the other – some of them followed hope, others chose marginality.

As a person recognising himself among those who followed hope, Eduardo describes this alternative through four stories of boys he had coached as an educator when they were 14 or 15, overseeing their road in life until the age of 24-26, and highlighting the traces of the educational orientation they had received as teenagers. Eduardo remarks that one common trait in all the boys interviewed is the presence of the death of boys of their age – showing how powerful violence is in the life of this community.

Perhaps the most moving story is the one where the protagonist lived his teenage years on the borderline between a regular life and crime; there, as the same protagonist used to say, what was decisive was the relationship with an adult of the educational centre he attended, the proposal of a life oriented towards the beauty of music and sports. Around 18, at the end of his school years. the boy followed the dream of a regular job and got some work as a labourer or helper. Around 24, still leading a life that strove to get out of marginality, albeit with some falls, after aiding his brother-in-law stabbed by an aggressor, he was hit as well and died. His mother, with whom he had had a conflicting relationship, but still with love and respect anyhow, commented that her son’s wish to get out of marginality had come true, in a way: the newspaper headline was: “young electrician killed”, recognising him as a worker killed by violence.

²⁴ José Eduardo Ferreira Santos, *Travessias – a adolescência em Novos Alagados*, Bauru SP, Edusc, 2005.

Other stories like this tell of persons whose life changed through an encounter with adults whose proposal responded to human desire.

The human being, before a proposal of beauty and good, is fascinated by it even when it is immersed in the experience of violence, marginalisation, precariousness. The challenge is to enable him or her to make a choice. This is the educational significance of a project.

The PATS was this, after all: the opportunity so that people could experience a way out, an alternative, hope.