

Memory equipment for democracy in the urban territory: Buenos Aires and São Paulo in 2024

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Abstract

Based on a comparative policy approach, a look at urban territory and a normative assumption concerned with deepening democracy, the aim is to analyze the activities carried out by facilities to promote memory for democracy in two major Southern Cone cities in the first half of 2024. The initial effort provides brief conceptual and methodological delimitations on the nature of the policies and facilities studied. The background analysis draws on interdisciplinary contributions to raise reflections on the context of the construction, location and operation of the facilities in the urban territory, based on the progress of the democratic political process involving the state and society. Consideration is given to institutional constructions, the potential for disseminating messages, the experiences provided in the spaces, the involvement of social actors and cultural interaction.

Keywords: Historical Memory. Political Awareness. Democracy. Urban Territory.

Equipamentos de memórias para democracia no território urbano: Buenos Aires e São Paulo em 2024

Resumo

A partir da abordagem de política comparada, do olhar para o território urbano e do pressuposto normativo preocupado com o aprofundamento da democracia, pretende-se analisar as atividades desenvolvidas pelos equipamentos para promoção de memória para a democracia em duas grandes cidades do Cone Sul no primeiro semestre de 2024. O esforço inicial traz breves delimitações conceituais e metodológicas sobre a natureza de políticas e dos equipamentos estudados. A análise de fundo serve-se de contribuições interdisciplinares para suscitar reflexões sobre o contexto de construção, a localização e o funcionamento dos equipamentos no território urbano, a partir do avanço do processo democrático político envolvendo o Estado e a sociedade. Consideram-se as construções institucionais, o potencial de difusão das mensagens, as experiências proporcionadas nos espaços, o envolvimento dos atores sociais e a interação cultural.

Palavras-chave: Memória Histórica. Conscientização Política. Democracia. Território Urbano.

1 Introduction

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Brazil and Argentina are neighboring countries, with continental dimensions and regional economic and political importance, and having experienced civil-military dictatorial regimes in recent times. They have some similarities and differences in historical processes, but have followed different models of transition to democracy. Both countries experienced recent dictatorships associated with each other in Operação Condor¹ and aligned with the United States in the Cold War.

Argentina recorded more disappearances and direct deaths caused by the repression (an estimated 30,000, compared to around 500). One peculiarity was the recurrent use of degrading methods, such as the kidnapping of babies, which stimulated the movements of mothers and grandmothers. The Brazilian dictatorship prosecuted ten times as many opponents as the Argentine one (7,000 against 700) and would have left more deeply damaging marks for the present, persistent authoritarian structures that make it impossible to affirm the rule of law (Teles, 2013).

The two countries followed different models of judicial transition, with Brazil favoring conciliation to the detriment of memory and truth policies, while in Argentina the transition process was more complete, encompassing all the “key elements” of transitional justice (Van Zyl, 2011, p. 25) and marked a more incisive break with the previous regime (Jelin, 2013; Munck; Leff, 1997; Sanz Dias, 2023).

This work promotes an interdisciplinary effort to raise reflections on the context of the construction, location and operation of facilities in the urban territory, based on the advancement of the political democratic process involving the state and society. Aspects of the materialization of certain public policies in facilities located in the urban territory of São Paulo and Buenos Aires are addressed, especially from a specific moment in the functioning of these apparatuses in time, referring to the beginning of the year 2024, in the midst of the international crisis of democratic regimes and the rise of authoritarian political

¹ Operação Condor (Operation Condor) was a political-military cooperation operation between dictatorial regimes in South America in the 1970s.

movements, including in Brazil and Argentina. The initial effort falls on the methodological and theoretical delimitation of the section and the object of study, starting with the exposition of the concept adopted here for public policies linked to the promotion of memory for democracy.

We move on to comparative empirical research, analyzing aspects of equipment in operation in the cities of São Paulo and Buenos Aires, considering its construction in the urban space, in the territories, in the legal and relational aspects involved. Consideration is given to institutional constructions, the potential for disseminating messages, the experiences provided in the spaces, the involvement of social actors and cultural interaction.

It should be noted that in the literature on memory some authors have adopted different approaches to the relationship between equipment and the city and the territory, with different emphases and approaches. Comparative empirical studies were identified, with different approaches, and some that dealt with the initiatives studied here. Gumieri (2012) compared two specific memory spaces, the Memorial da Resistência in São Paulo and the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada in Buenos Aires.

Guglielmucci's thesis (2011) dealt with the category “*memoria sobre el terrorismo de Estado*” and its incorporation as an object of state public policy in Argentina. Cabral (2019) looked at the former clandestine centers of the Argentine dictatorship in Buenos Aires that have become spaces of memory, emphasizing processes of “memorialization” and “spatialization”. Kobashi, Jatene and Crivelente (2019) studied places of memory based on the effort to build a website to map places of memory on the continent. A more specific work, focused on just one space, that deserves mention is Messina's thesis (2010), which deals with the former clandestine detention center Olimpo. The aim is to add to these and other efforts by adopting an unusual approach in this literature.

2 Methodology

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First of all, it is important to clarify the choice of cases for a comparative empirical study. Both cities are huge, populous metropolises of great socio-economic importance. Both countries have a history of exploitative European colonization, resulting in situations of deprivation and inequality. In addition, they have experienced dictatorships in recent periods, and society has made efforts in recent decades to establish a democratic regime. The repressive apparatuses of Brazil and Argentina were associated with each other and promoted exchanges within the framework of Operação Condor.

More than testing causal propositions and formulating theory, there are important elements of approximation for this comparative approach undertaken here, such as the character of the interaction between state and society (Perissinoto, 2013; Borges, 2007) and the potential exchange of some of the experiences and activities investigated at a given historical moment. These are institutional arrangements with similarities and the potential to develop activities in defense and promotion of democratic values. This comparative study at a time of crisis in the democratic ideology of these societies, with a qualitative approach based on a limited number of cases, in order to avoid false generalizations (Marques, 2014), observes the activities carried out and the way the facilities are built based on the normative assumption of defending democracy and considers aspects such as the patterns of distribution of facilities in the territory in question and the relationships established between the spaces, the state and the social actors.

The time frame of the research focuses on the operation of these facilities in the first half of 2024, a time of the international rise of political groups linked to the extreme right in the ideological political spectrum, with authoritarian tendencies and which usually encourage the revision and denial of facts and processes that have been long documented and discussed in academic studies of History².

² We recommend reading Camargo (2018).

Argentina is going through the beginning of Javier Milei's liberal-conservative government, and Brazil is going through the initial period of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third government, which faced a failed coup attempt in the first few days under the leadership of people and groups involved in the Jair Bolsonaro government who didn't accept defeat in the 2022 elections. In May 2024, representatives of both groups with illiberal characteristics met in Madrid to celebrate a major international meeting of far-right leaders, organized by the Spanish political party VOX, signaling their strength and power of articulation (Chad, 2024). In the face of the profound threats and upheavals that many democratic regimes are facing, there is an urgent need to reflect on valuing and protecting democratic freedoms and values.

The concept of “equipment”, for this research, corresponds to a physical space with a building for educational and cultural policies aimed at memories of past events, which may or may not have undergone a process of musealization. In this way, signs, artistic works, such as paintings or sculptures, or isolated signposts in the urban territory, although they undeniably have their importance in a larger and articulated context of interventions in the territories, do not really correspond to equipment.

The facilities chosen for the empirical research make up the list of places of memory listed by the Red de Sitios de Memoria Latinoamericanos y Caribeños initiative, known by the acronym RESLAC³. According to the Red's official website:

The institutions that make up the Red de Sitios de Memoria Latinoamericanos y Caribeños work to recover and build collective memories of the serious human rights violations and resistance that took place in the region in the recent past, during periods of state terrorism, internal armed conflicts and high levels of impunity, with the aim of promoting democracy and guarantees of non-repetition (RESLAC, s.d.).

In São Paulo, they include the following spaces: Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo – Associação Pinacoteca Arte e Cultura (APAC), Museu da Imigração, two spaces

³ The RESLAC network brings together 44 institutions from 12 countries, including Brazil and Argentina. It is also linked to the Coalizão Internacional de Sites de Consciência, which has seven regional networks around the world. (Available at: <https://sitiosdememoria.org/pt/quem-somos/>. Accessed on: February 28, 2024.)

coordinated by the Núcleo da Preservação da Memória Política, Casa do Povo and Museu da Pessoa (see map 01).

Mapa 01. Lugares da Memória da RESLAC em São Paulo/ SP – BRA



Fonte: Mapa da página da RESLAC. Acesso em 06 maio 2024.

The Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo is located in the building of a former military regime repression unit – the DEOPS⁴ – and is dedicated to preserving and transmitting references to the memory of both resistance and political repression in republican Brazil. The Museu da Imigração reflects on the migration process as a whole, from the living conditions in the country of origin to the difficulties faced in the new destination, with cultural shock and exchange and conflicts of various kinds. The Casa do Povo brought together a left-wing group in the ideological political spectrum of the Jewish community in the resistance to the military dictatorship and continued to function as a cultural center. The Núcleo Memória was formed as a Fórum Permanente de Ex-Presos e

⁴ The acronym DEOPS stands for the Departamento de Ordem Política e Social (Department of Political and Social Order), a political police force that operated in Brazil between 1924 and 1983.

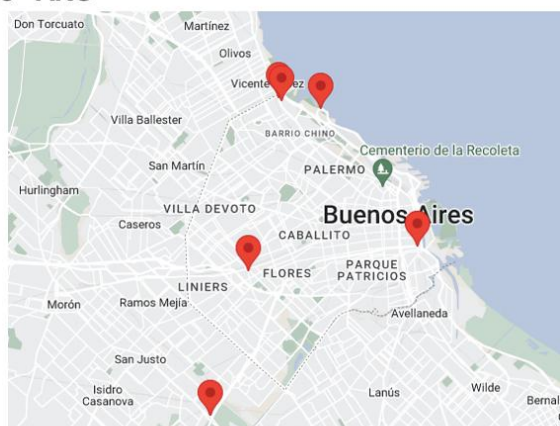
Perseguidos Políticos and organizes two facilities on the site of the former DOI-CODI⁵, the dictatorship's repression apparatus, and is working, in partnership with the São Paulo chapter of the Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil, to build a space for visitors in the former building of the Auditoria Militar de São Paulo, which is about to come into operation under the name Memorial da Luta pela Justiça. Both are located close to Avenida Paulista, in the city's central-southern region, the former towards the center and the latter to the side of Ibirapuera Park. The Museu da Pessoa is based on an open and collaborative proposal that values people's history and diversity, with a view to building a culture of peace, but it is not really a facility, as it has no structure for visitors, which is why it will not be covered in this study. The headquarters, located in the Pinheiros neighborhood on the west side of São Paulo, function almost solely for administrative purposes⁶.

In Buenos Aires, the following sites are linked to RESLAC: Espacio para la Memoria y la Promoción de los DDHH (ex-CCDTyE Olimpo), Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA, Memoria Abierta, Comisión Vesubio y Puente 12, Parque de la Memoria and Espacio para la Memoria (ex-CCD Club Atlético). See them on map 02.

⁵ The acronym DOI-CODI refers to the Destacamento de Operações e Informações – Centro de Operações e Defesa Interna (Operations and Information Detachment – Operations and Internal Defense Center), a repression agency created in 1970.

⁶ The materials produced are exhibited online, on the World Wide Web. From time to time, the organization holds exhibitions and in-person events in other spaces, such as the Mário de Andrade Library and Sesc units.

Mapa 02. Lugares da Memória da RESLAC em Buenos Aires - ARG



Fonte: Mapa da página da RESLAC. Acesso: 06 maio 2024.

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Most of this equipment refers to spaces used by repression during the military dictatorship, such as the clandestine centers [more precisely called the Centro Clandestino de Detenção, Tortura e Extermínio⁷]. These include the ESMA complex, the former CCD Olimpo, Club Atlético and El Vesubio. The Parque Memória is a kind of memorial park in honor of the victims of state terrorism during the dictatorship, built on the banks of the River Plate. Memoria Abierta is an initiative between six human rights organizations⁸ that coordinates cultural activities at the Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti in the ESMA complex. It is restricted to these catalogued places so as not to expand the “n” too much and to maintain the same criteria for choosing the places of memory in the two cities⁹.

This researcher knows most of the equipment personally, having made some of the visits exactly at the beginning of 2024, including the two mentioned in connection with the work of the Núcleo Memória in São Paulo. In the case of a concept of memory that values experience, the personal construction and elaboration of content and language is

⁷ In Spanish, they are called Centros Clandestinos de Detención, Tortura y Exterminio, which forms the acronym CCDTyE.

⁸ These organizations are members of Memoria Abierta: Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, Comisión de Homenaje a las Víctimas de Vesubio y Protobanco, Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas, Fundación Memoria Histórica y Social Argentina and Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

⁹ There are other facilities of a similar nature in these cities with the potential to be part of the RESLAC network, such as the Museu Afro Brasil, the Museu de Culturas Indígenas in São Paulo, the former Automotores Orletti machine shop and the former Virrey Ceballos detention center in Buenos Aires.

important. Despite the search for analytical distance, some specific notes will be influenced by this place of participant observer. He did not visit only three facilities in Buenos Aires (Comision Vesuvio y Puente 12, the Espacio para la Memoria [ex-CCD Club Atletico] and the Espacio para la Memoria y la promocion de los DDHH [ex-CCDTyE Olimpo]) and one in São Paulo (Museu da Imigração), in which case information from official websites and academic studies will be used.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Brief conceptual notes

Public memory policies for democracy are addressed, emphasizing their crucial role in promoting historical and cultural learning and in extracting fundamental lessons for building, defending and deepening the democratic regime. The analysis presents an integrated view of the concepts of public policies, memory and democracy, articulating them in a cohesive theoretical construction.

Public policies are understood as complex processes of transforming diffuse purposes, originating in the political and social spheres, into concrete government actions and programs. This approach, in line with contemporary perspectives in the literature (Marques, 2013; Souza, 2002), does not focus exclusively on the state, but recognizes the plurality of actors involved, their interactions, disputes over interests, beliefs and institutions that shape the political process.

The concept of memory is explored based on the seminal contributions of Walter Benjamin and Elizabeth Jelin. Benjamin's intellectual career reveals a multifaceted understanding of memory, emerging from interdisciplinary dialogues between philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature. His approach highlights aspects such as distinct temporalities, voluntary and involuntary dimensions, and the interaction between the conscious and the unconscious (Galzerani, 2020; Matos, 1992). Jelin (2002), in turn, emphasizes the plurality of memories, problematizing the notion of a monolithic collective

memory. She proposes considering a multiplicity of individual memories in constant dialogue, recognizing the existence of dominant voices that can constitute “hegemonic or official memories”. Jelin distinguishes three perspectives on memory learning: cognitive, psychoanalytic and cultural, offering a rich analytical framework for understanding the construction of memory equipment and the relationship between the authoritarian past and the democratic present.

Democracy is approached in a demanding way, transcending the minimalist vision focused merely on electoral procedures. The concept adopted encompasses fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, citizen participation, public deliberation, effective representation and institutional, electoral and societal controls. This robust vision of democracy vehemently opposes authoritarianism and prioritizes human dignity as a central value.

Public memory policies for democracy are conceived as multifaceted instruments that address cultural, historical, educational and psychological aspects of society. They aim not only to defend human dignity, but also to combat structural inequalities and violence against marginalized populations. They are clearly distinct from policies aimed at building foundation myths or exalting national heroes, focusing instead on democratic achievements and the inclusion of historically excluded groups.

Michael Pollak (1992), who treats memory as a socially and individually constructed phenomenon, closely linked to the formation of identity and a sense of belonging, problematizes ways of working with memory, including the “work of framing memory” and the “work of memory itself”. However, these approaches can, in certain cases, stray from the idea of public memory policy for democracy, which should prioritize plural coexistence, mutual respect and pluralism.

In principle, any public policy on memory, history and culture, such as those linked to foundation myths, the exaltation of heroes or national or local references, memories and tributes to any feat of an army in a war or an action or career of a particular citizen, is of no interest, unless this remembrance allows us to illuminate inequalities and profound situations of injustice and human rights violations that can mean historic achievements – or build barriers – for the inclusion of certain groups in a democratic regime.

In this nature of public policy, the dimension of ideas and conflict gain weight. In the public policy process, considering the historical resistance of various conservative and military groups and their sympathizers, the political dimension is very important.

3.2 Empirical research: equipment in the territories

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This section starts with the institutional constructions in a context of democratization of the urban state apparatus, so that aspects linked to the territory, social participation and efforts are observed, seeking to involve communities in order to broaden the scope of the equipment.

Meyer (2006) argues that the territory of large contemporary cities, such as Buenos Aires and São Paulo, is made up of several diffuse “urban pieces”. The complexity and expansion of urban scales has led to the abandonment of the idea of an urban totality, focusing instead on specific demarcated spaces. Public memory policies must be designed with this urban fragmentation in mind.

This view is supported by the urban planning regulations of both cities. Brazil and Argentina have their own regulatory frameworks, based on their Constitutions. In Brazil, the Estatuto da Cidade (2001) and São Paulo's Plano Diretor Estratégico (2014) stand out. Argentina has the Política Ambiental Urbana (2016), the Plano Urbano Ambiental (2008), and Buenos Aires has its Código Urbanístico (1977, updated in 2022) and Constituição Municipal (1996).

These ordinances are in line with the ONU's New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2030, which promote principles such as the right to the city, inclusion, sustainability and social participation. In Brazil, the Estatuto da Cidade institutionalized participatory mechanisms, influencing the drafting of municipal master plans (Santos Junior; Montandon, 2011). In Buenos Aires, Eberhardt (2015) highlights social participation in urban policy, with semi-direct mechanisms for updating the Código Urbanístico. Both countries are linked to the Inter-American Human Rights System, which defends the rights to reparation, truth and memory. Argentina has specific legislation for sites of memory (Ley n. 26.691/2011), while

in Brazil initiatives are generally developed within the framework of state and municipal cultural and educational policies.

For Pierre Nora (1993, p. 22), places of memory are efforts to “materialize the immaterial [...] to trap the maximum of meaning in a minimum of signs”. They can be natural and artificial, where memory and history interact and produce effects in the material, symbolic and functional senses, which can coexist simultaneously. They don't necessarily constitute a public facility, they can even be an archive, a calendar, a document, a history book, even a cemetery, a museum, a monument, “intellectually elaborated places”. It treats places in a broad way, without concern for the substance of their link to democracy.

The location of these facilities is crucial to the impact of memory policies, although it is often determined by specific historical meanings and can result in locations that are difficult to access. However, when it comes to public policies of this nature, there is sometimes no option for the manager to choose their location. They are usually located where a place with a certain significance once existed. Many of the facilities can be located in more distant places, with difficult access. This is the case, for example, of some clandestine places chosen by state agents of the Armed Forces or public security agencies in dictatorships – and even in democratic regimes – to carry out torture and bury murdered people.

Analyzing equipment according to income inequality data from Nossa São Paulo 2021 for the city of São Paulo¹⁰, it can be seen that the facilities are concentrated in the areas with the highest income distribution in the city, a long way from the suburbs and poorer areas. Even the two facilities linked to the Núcleo Memória, one under construction and the other operating informally, seeking institutionalization, are located near Avenida Paulista, in the center-south area of the city of São Paulo, a region with a high level of *per capita* income.

¹⁰ MAPA da desigualdade 2021 é lançado. **Rede Nossa São Paulo**, 2021. Disponível em: <https://www.nossasaopaulo.org.br/2021/10/21/mapa-da-desigualdade-2021-e-lancado/>. Acesso em: 12 out. 2024.

Looking at the distribution of RESLAC's facilities in Buenos Aires, according to poverty data by *comuna*¹¹, it can be seen that most of them are located in areas with a higher income, such as the Nuñez neighborhood and the Floresta neighborhood. Club Atlético is located in a macro region with a poorer population, but in the most central and touristy part of the area, which is San Telmo. El Vesubio is the most peripheral facility.

Comparing the maps of the two cities, Buenos Aires has a clear advantage in the wider spatial distribution of facilities in the territory compared to São Paulo, which has spaces concentrated in a single region. The fact that spaces are more spread out in the territory, even outside the wealthiest regions, is democratic in itself and tends to facilitate mobility and access to facilities for people from different income strata.

One phenomenon that helps explain the spatial distribution of equipment in municipalities is the fact that opposition groups to the dictatorships discovered more clandestine centers of repression within the urban area of Argentine cities than in Brazil. Most of the centers discovered in Brazil are located in rural areas, such as farms, and in cities in the interior, and there was not enough mobilization to turn the two spaces discovered in the city into facilities (the house in the Mooca neighborhood and the training center in Ipiranga)¹².

The list of initiatives compiled deals, for the most part, with memories linked to what Jelin (2013) referred to as a short period of time, covering issues of repression and resistance dating back to recent dictatorial periods, especially alluding to the state terrorism promoted between 1966 and 1973 and between 1976 and 1983 in Argentina, and between 1964 and 1984 in Brazil. Spaces such as the Museu do Imigrante, the Núcleo Memória, the Memorial da Resistência and even the Haroldo Conti space in the ESMA complex deal with human rights violations from periods much longer and more remote than these recent

¹¹ PORCENTAJE de población bajo la línea de pobreza según Comuna. **Instituto de Estadística y Censos de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires**, 2006. Disponível em: <https://www.estadisticaciudad.gob.ar/eyc/?p=53627>. Acesso em: 12 out. 2024.

¹² Examples of clandestine facilities discovered outside of Brazil's major cities are: Petrópolis' Casa da Morte, Fazenda Boa Sorte, Fazenda 31 de Março, Sítio de Arujá, Casa de Itapevi and Fazenda da Rodovia Presidente Castelo Branco. (Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/2rmyk449>. Accessed on: May 18, 2024.)

dictatorial regimes and which usually result in structural and cultural violence against social and ethnic groups and minorities in terms of representation in power, affecting deeper challenges for the consolidation of a social democracy.

The construction of memory sites depends on multiple factors, such as the actors and resources involved and the urban social contexts. The past histories of the places, the violence that took place there, the actions of state terrorism and even resistance, are decisive for the “processes of ‘memorialization’, ‘spatialization’ and ‘heritage activation’, constituting the main layer mobilized to present them to the public” (Cabral, 2019, p. 326).

A common revelation of Truth Commissions and other investigative work, such as the Peruvian case (Jelin, 2013) and the discovery of the Perus Ditch, in the northern part of the city of São Paulo (Mayer, 2022) and the Cemetery of Peace in Barbacena-MG (Arbex, 2013), was that the greatest victims of dictatorship regimes were usually the poorest people, not necessarily those with political engagement.

Given this evidence, it would be desirable to have facilities in more peripheral areas, on the bangs of the territory, where large portions of the poorest populations tend to live.

One way of facilitating access is through the public transport system. Considering mobility by mode of transport on rail and assuming that large Latin American cities have high levels of motor vehicle traffic, let's look at the location of equipment in relation to modes of transport on rail, which usually guarantee greater fluidity for users. Most of the facilities in the cities studied can be reached by train and metro. In São Paulo, the Casa do Povo (Luz station), the Memorial da Resistência (Luz station), the Museu da Imigração (Bresser-Moooca station) are all within a relatively short radius of metro stations. The former DOI-CODI facility, where the Núcleo Memória coordinates visitation activities, is not located near metro stations.

In Buenos Aires, the subway is called a *subte* and has only six lines, which cover part of the city and do not serve the facilities properly. Other parts of the territory, the outskirts of the city and some of the facilities can be reached by train. The ESMA complex, the former CCD Olimpo and El Vesubio can be reached by train (Rivadavia, Floresta and

María S. de Mendeville stations, respectively). Club Atlético does not have a train or metro station nearby.

Morel (2016) points out that, in anthropology, the concept of place is imbued with meanings attributed by local communities. The notion encompasses associations between cultural and spatial aspects, reflecting dominant visions, but also problematizes the multiple meanings constructed by different groups. Managers of public memory facilities for democracy must therefore work on these meanings together with local communities.

Contemporary Brazilian urban geography offers relevant perspectives for territorial public policies. One approach focuses on the political dimension, in which power relations between agents give meaning and symbolism to places (Sposito; Saquet, 2016). In the context of the dictatorship's clandestine facilities, for example, the discovery of crimes and the installation of new equipment gave these spaces new meanings (Souza, 2008).

The appropriation of spaces and the construction of facilities involve a symbolic demarcation, ideally conceived with community participation. In addition to local integration, these public policies must seek integration in the wider territory, requiring investments in accessibility, transportation, lighting, maintenance and security.

Another strand of Brazilian urban geography explores the cultural dimensions of the territory, recognizing micro-territorialities that express individual and group identities, establishing alterities and boundaries (Sposito; Saquet, 2016). People influence and form identities within the territory, and the territory encompasses a symbolic dimension that influences people (Derosso; Cury, 2019).

In the construction of memory spaces, grounded in Benjamin's work, Bergson emphasizes the idea of consciousness and the ability to articulate temporalities, suggesting the use and combination of different languages to deal with this issue, something that is of great interest when thinking about the functioning of the public facilities studied. In the idea of remembrance, overcoming the ghost of forgetfulness, the involuntary dimension of memory and the unconscious, the work of the author of critical theory suggests the effectiveness of the use of allegories (Galzerani, 2021). When you think about micro-territorialities and the groups that occupy the territory, you have to be aware of the

languages that will be most accepted and attractive to people, including non-traditional and peripheral artistic forms.

According to Cavalcanti and Cunha (2017), good innovations in services and public policies include measures that strengthen the role of citizens in their territory, something that can be seen in the construction and management of many of the facilities.

The recovery of the Puente 22 space (former CDC Olimpo)¹³, in Buenos Aires, and a good part of the facilities in Buenos Aires that were clandestine centers of the dictatorship had the active involvement of neighbors. They provided photographic records and testimonies to reconstruct the histories and practices of the place, adding to the efforts of survivors, family members and activists from organizations. These spaces marked the territories and constituted material evidence for justice. Guglielmucci (2011) describes a dilemma faced in the construction of the facilities regarding the nature of the intervention in the buildings, between preserving the structures as much as possible for the purposes of forensic anthropology investigations and intervention for the purposes of visitation and musealization. In the case of the former CCD Olimpo, the author narrated “una fuerte discusión entre sus activadores sobre qué conservar y qué transformar” (p. 296).

Gumieri (2012) analyzed the Memorial da Resistência (Brazil) and ESMA (Argentina), identifying more similarities than differences. Both were built in buildings used by the dictatorial repression, with the aim of promoting citizenship, democracy and human rights. They seek to transmit and reflect on truth, justice and memory of authoritarian periods, acting as policies of collective symbolic reparation.

These spaces have invested in musealization, offering tours of preserved or reconstructed facilities, with adaptations. The participation of academics and cultural professionals influenced their occupation strategies.

Jelin (2002) distinguishes between “passive memories” (stored in minds and archives) and “active memories” (mobilized to interpret the past). The facilities studied

¹³ View in: <https://www.exccdolimpo.org.ar/memorias-de-vecindad>. Accessed on: 17 maio 2024.

articulate both, maintaining documentation centers and promoting visits, varying in their musealization infrastructure.

Casa do Povo, in central São Paulo, was not a dictatorship facility. On the contrary, it was a space of resistance initially linked to sectors of the Jewish community in São Paulo that were sympathetic to democracy. The space has been maintained and occupied by collectives, social movements and civil society organizations. There are visitors, the possibility of access to documents and testimonies, but there is no structure for the musealization of other equipment. It functions as a space for meetings, for collective actors and for cultural and training activities. Among the services offered at the time of writing, for example, there is psychoanalysis in an open clinic, boxing training and a chess club operating in the space¹⁴.

Articulation based on the territory, learning from interaction with the public in the surrounding area and even with visitors to the facilities, and beyond the territory, bringing together the various social actors in networks such as RESLAC and in plural initiatives such as Memoria Abierta, Núcleo Memória and even Casa do Povo in the critical construction of reflections and debates, can have the power to foster a virtuous process on different scales, open to plurality, difference and dialog, producing changes in their own repertoires, including new actors, agendas and demands, impacting the subjectivity of the memories experienced there. Since the creation of ESMA, there has been a concern to involve the neighborhood, by collecting testimonies, and to encompass the historical relationship between the neighborhood and the space (Espacio Memoria, s.d.).

The collection and the permanent arrangements for visitation are generally linked to that central layer of creation of the equipment, in the case of this investigation, references to the dictatorship, the violence of repression and state terrorism predominate, shorter-term memories. The permanent exhibitions, however, tend to deal with a variety of themes, many of which are more far-reaching issues, either from a more distant past, or from the permanence or after-effects of the democratic period and the present.

¹⁴ Available at: <https://casadopovo.org.br>. Accessed on: May 18, 2024.

In April and June 2024, in São Paulo, this researcher visited the temporary exhibition “Women in Struggle”, then on show at the Memorial da Resistência. In addition to artistic interventions and image recordings of current feminist movements, it evokes testimonies from women during the dictatorship and democratization periods, especially from movements of mothers of victims of state violence, in creative arrangements developed through the use of audiovisual editing technologies.

In January 2024, he had the opportunity to visit exhibitions in the building coordinated by the organizations within the framework of Memoria Abierta in the ESMA complex. An artistic intervention depicted violence suffered by people of LGBTQIA+ identity and orientation, while another room displayed photos of women's movements in the streets of South America. On the upper floor, an exhibition brought together works produced over a decade of poster and fanzine workshops for people deprived of their liberty at Villa Devoto's Penal Unit No. 02, a prison education program run by professors from the University of Buenos Aires. These are situations of denouncing violence, protesting for rights and promoting human rights that are consistent with a vibrant democratic life.

Worth mentioning is *Sábados Resistentes*, an initiative that has been running continuously since 2008, even during the social distancing of the pandemic, when it migrated to a hybrid format. It is the result of a partnership between the Núcleo Memória and the São Paulo Memorial da Resistência. The Memorial's programming history encompasses demands from various social groups that were victims of human rights violations beyond the period of the dictatorship, such as indigenous peoples, racial and gender issues and numerous artistic interventions from various cultural expressions. At the same time as the *Sábados Resistentes*, there are usually rounds of talks, free courses, soirees, workshops and Afternoons of Memories, which generally involve playful and therapeutic games mediated by the museum's educational staff and involve themes such as repression, resistance and human rights¹⁵. Guaranteeing a frequency of events is an

¹⁵ To find out more about these initiatives, click here: <https://memorialdaresistenciasp.org.br/calendario/>.

element that tends to produce more permanent links with the community, beyond sporadic visits.

In general, the facilities studied here offer various services and utilities, such as spaces for visiting, meetings, events, documentation and research centers. Even though most of them have as their central motto the link with structures of repression in the dictatorial period, the programs of activities usually include references to memories of short and long-term violence, even covering more recent times of democratic rule, such as violence against specific social groups, revealing cultural and structural aspects of inequalities and injustices.

In these spaces that have been conquered and materialized in the public sphere, many individual and collective actors come together, articulate and develop their collective actions better, even potentially strengthening activities and strategies that have advanced further into the territories. As Gugliemucci (2011) and Cabral (2019) show, this process is not without conflicts within the field of civil society in defense of human rights and the universe of activists and scholars.

Researchers such as Messina (2010), Gugliemucci (2010) and Cabral (2019) have identified less formal territorial marking practices in the Argentine capital, such as the *Escraches* (public demonstrations of denunciation), the *Baldosas de la memoria* – memorial plaques installed on sidewalks and specific signs in the urban space. Although these initiatives do not fall within the strict definition of memory facilities, they are complementary strategies that increase the capillarity of the messages disseminated by official memory sites. They are the result of the creativity and commitment of the social actors involved in the construction of collective memory and act in an integrated way with formal facilities, contributing to a wider network of marking and preserving memory in the urban space.

The facilities and the entities that work to build and manage the facilities interact with each other and with other civil society actors within the framework of organizational ecologies, in search of affirmation and survival in a field, demanding diverse resources,

financial, human, institutional, technological and political¹⁶. An initiative like RESLAC works in the mode of articulation, which results in something fundamental for the protection of the equipment itself in the face of threats from authoritarian and far-right movements and governments. This articulation operates from the micro scale, from the neighborhood in the territories, with survivors and family members, through civil society organizations and social movements, to a macro scale, in networks in cities, provinces or states, at the national and transnational levels.

4 Conclusions

Democratization in Argentina and Brazil brought significant innovations in democratic arrangements for urban management and planning, including memory equipment for democracy. Buenos Aires and São Paulo, cities marked by historical inequalities and violence, exemplify the challenges of democratic consolidation in these countries. Recently, authoritarian political movements with denialist and revisionist discourses have threatened this process. Memory spaces face the challenge of expanding their reach in a context of eroding democratic foundations. The management and planning of these facilities must take into account their integration into the urban territory and access for local communities, crucial aspects for their effectiveness in disseminating democratic content and experiences.

Politics and the democratic order are social realities constructed with a view to peaceful social coexistence with freedoms, conflict mediation and respectful dialog between thoughts, ideologies and plural worldviews. They need the support of democratic institutions, the law, the rule of law and also various public policies that deal with memory, truth, reparations for victims and the defense and promotion of human rights.

The plurality and diversity of memory sites in Buenos Aires can be explained in part by the transitional justice approach taken in Argentina, a model that has dealt with

¹⁶ We recommend reading Ferreira (2023) to better understand the assumptions of the organizational ecologies approach to defending human rights.

issues of truth and memory from the outset, including holding perpetrators of serious human rights violations accountable. Taking advantage of the great social commotion in the face of the degree of violence practiced by the state and a regime weakened by the defeat in the Malvinas, Argentina's transition managed to contemplate all the key elements of Van Zyl's theory of transitional justice (2011), while Brazil started from an imposed reconciliation and took decades to make progress on elements such as revealing the truth about the crimes of the dictatorship and never made progress on condemning the perpetrators of violence and reforming institutions (Teles, 2009).

Although the number of clandestine apparatuses located in the Argentine capital is higher, the fact is that as of the date of publication of this article, the old building where the DOI-CODI was located, on Rua Tutoia, remains precariously institutionalized and without a musealization apparatus.

The initiatives gathered here bring with them different examples and approaches to producing experiences for current and future generations on aspects of the past and present. Located in dense urban areas, in central and peripheral regions, they offer numerous activities for the population. Several of these spaces take care to value and involve the communities in the neighborhood, opening up to plural cultural perspectives in their programming. In addition to this local interaction, the spaces are linked to other places of memory in the country and abroad, in networks that foster learning through diverse exchanges. The path to meeting the institutional objectives of these spaces must be followed in conjunction with the various players at local, national and international level, valuing freedoms, plurality and differences.

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