

# Territórios de Fragilidades: Envelhecimento e Políticas Públicas – um projeto de educação continuada

Territories of Frailty: Aging and Public Policy  
– A Project of Continuing Education

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## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, the progressive aging of the population is both a major achievement and a huge challenge for developing countries, especially when it relates to public policies for the elderly. The scenario is particularly worrying in peri-urban spaces, which we call 'territories of fragility', in which multiple deficiencies overlap — basic sanitation, housing, accessibility, education and health — those aspects coupled with the disruption of community ties, negatively impact the aging process. In this article, we analyze the previously presented scenario through the results of a continued education project that had as students 420 professionals that currently work in the Secretariat of Social Assistance of the city of São Paulo (Brazil). The aim of the project was the improvement of the work in the social assistance services network, especially the ones that are a part of the basic social protection, aimed at the most vulnerable part of the population. The use of professional-centered training methodology takes into account what happens in the field, it is based on daily

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problems, on the perception of skills and abilities, on the challenges and opportunities given by occupied spaces, in a dialogical and critical perspective. In other words, the result was a collection of 420 ‘first-hand’ narratives that unveils a reality that is the opposite of what was expected. For the enrichment of the reflection, we present the commitments to this educational process - through the narratives of teachers and supervisors - in the work of recognizing the action field, the difficulties and achievements in the implementation of the project, and in practice with the groups. Content analysis indicates, in the complexity of the narrative, how all individuals that were a part of the project overcame life-work challenges and articulated knowledge about the aging process in territories of fragility.

**Keywords:** aging; continuing education; public policies; territories of fragility.

## RESUMO

O envelhecimento populacional é considerado hoje como uma grande conquista e, simultaneamente, como um enorme desafio para os países em desenvolvimento, em especial no âmbito das políticas públicas para as pessoas idosas. O cenário é mais preocupante nos espaços periurbanos, que denominamos como “territórios de fragilidades”, nos quais se observa a sobreposição de carências múltiplas — saneamento básico, habitação, acessibilidade, educação e saúde — aliadas à desestruturação dos vínculos comunitários, os quais têm um impacto negativo na longevidade das populações. Propomos, neste texto, analisar este panorama através dos resultados do projeto de educação continuada para 420 profissionais da Secretaria de Assistência Social da cidade de São Paulo (Brasil), com o objetivo de aperfeiçoar a resposta dos serviços sociais, especialmente os que integram a proteção social básica da população mais carente. A metodologia de formação utilizada é centrada no profissional, no seu campo de atuação, e nos problemas cotidianos com que se depara através da análise das suas competências e capacidades para lidar com os desafios e oportunidades destas comunidades, o que possibilita a obtenção de várias narrativas em “primeira mão” e nos permite ter acesso à realidade vivida nestes espaços. Contribuindo para o enriquecimento desta reflexão, podemos observar as narrativas dos professores e supervisores, no âmbito do trabalho de campo, as dificuldades e conquistas na implementação do projeto, e a interação com os grupos de trabalho, o que nos permitiu, atenta a complexidade da temática, reunir dados decorrentes da atuação de todos estes intervenientes, em superação dos desafios associados ao equilíbrio das vidas pessoais e laborais, sobre o envelhecimento em territórios de fragilidades

**Palavras-chave:** envelhecimento; educação continuada; políticas públicas; territórios de fragilidades.

## 1. Introduction

São Paulo is the largest and most prosperous city in Brazil, a reference as a financial and cultural centre, with a population of 12.18 million inhabitants living in 96 districts<sup>[1]</sup>, with 15% of people over 60 years of age, i.e., 1.7 million elderly people,

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1. Administratively, the municipality of São Paulo is sub-administered through 32 subprefectures that administer the 96 districts in the municipality. The districts are officially grouped into nine regions (or “zones”), taking into account the geographical position and history of occupation, cf. Decennial Plan of Social Assistance of the City of São Paulo 2016-2026.

of whom 5,776 are 100 years of age or more (SEADE, 2017)<sup>[2]</sup>. A city of contrasts, multiracial, overpopulated, large, alive, and unequal — living and working space — an extremely challenging scenario in which the Continuing Education project for professionals of the Social Assistance Secretariat was developed.

We begin by summarizing the different phases of implementation of the project from its implementation and development process, followed by the analysis of the narratives of the teachers and professionals involved in this project gathered by the research coordinators. This project is the result of a contract between UNESCO and the São Paulo Foundation<sup>[3]</sup>, conducted in the city of São Paulo — Brazil — in the course of 2017, with the objective of training a universe of 420 professionals, from different areas of knowledge, from the staff of the Municipal Social Assistance and Development Service (SMADS). The service is composed of technicians and supervisors from the Social Assistance Reference Centres (CRAS), technical team and managers from the Elderly Coexistence Centres (NCIs). The work with these different actors intended to adapt their intervention according to the methodology of Social Gerontology which considers aging as an integral part of the life cycle where the rights and duties of citizens, such as freedom, respect and dignity are fundamental values, and which guide the different ways of living and aging.

The profile of professionals was composed by 41.2% of the Social Service area, 32.4% of Psychology, 20.6% of Education — areas required, by regulation, in the composition of the teams-, and 5.8% of other areas, such as Law, Physical Education and Occupational Therapy.

NCI is a service of the basic social protection network<sup>[4]</sup>, which covers elderly people aged 60 and over in situations of vulnerability and personal and social risk. It offers socio-educational activities planned according to the needs, interests and motivations of the elderly person, leading to the construction and reconstruction of their individual and collective histories and experiences, in the family and in

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2. The State of São Paulo, which has the same name as its capital — the city of São Paulo — has a population of 44.3 million inhabitants. It has an area of 248.2 km<sup>2</sup> and a GDP of 2 trillion reais (SEADE, 2017).

3. Edict No. 0126/2016 of 27/07/2016 of UNESCO, formalized through the Service Provision Contract — ref. SHS 00808/2016 –SA 2820/2016. Project 914 BRZ 3019 — Single Social Assistance System — São Paulo. Having as contractor UNESCO and as contractee the São Paulo Foundation, manager of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP).

4. According to the National Classification of Social Assistance Services, the social assistance protection network is composed of basic protection network and special protection network (of medium and high complexity). <[https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/upload/assistencia\\_social/arquivos/portarias/portaria\\_46-2010.pdf](https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/upload/assistencia_social/arquivos/portarias/portaria_46-2010.pdf)>

the territory. Professionals also identify which elderly people can benefit from social benefits such as the Continuous Cash Benefit (BPC)<sup>[5]</sup>.

The general objective of the project was to contribute through theoretical, methodological, technical, operating and ethical models to the critical and creative construction of new alternatives of intervention for the workers of the Single System of Social Assistance (SUAS); to raise the quality of service provision, programmes, projects, social benefits, grants/funding and management of the System; to contribute to the reconfiguration of the public policies of the municipality's<sup>[6]</sup> Social Assistance and to enhance the full fulfilment of its functions and guarantee of its rights<sup>[7]</sup>, in order to establish comprehensive and preventive programmes that ensure the access of citizens to their social rights.

The methodology that supported the training project was based on Problem Based Learning (PBL) — a model best suited to the reality of the professionals to be trained, seeking an innovative teaching that could go beyond the traditional approach, combining theory and practice (Berbel, 1999; Savin-Baden, 2000; Ribeiro, 2008). The PBL pedagogical strategy, widely used in medicine and similar areas, can also be applied in groups linked to the areas of social sciences and humanities as a facilitator of the construction of knowledge necessary to face the challenges imposed by the personal-professional reality of the professionals of this project.

A new way of thinking and looking at reality has thus been put into practice by recognising the potential that exists between the exchange of knowledge accumulated with other types of knowledge, formal or otherwise. As Berbel (1998, w/p) indicates in this training methodology, the problem is the main point of the continuous educational process, since it serves as a stimulus for lifelong learning by

provoking motivation; promoting knowledge of new areas of knowledge; stimulating creativity; boosting critical thinking; fostering analysis and decision-making skills; developing skills and competences of working in groups and stress management; and working with skills.

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5. Cf Ordinance No. 46/SMADS/2010. The active search service consists of home visits — highlighted as one of the main attributions of Social Assistance, with the objective of mapping out the beneficiaries of BPC, established by the Federal Constitution of 1988, regulated by the Organic Law of Social Assistance, in 1993, with implementation in 1996. As of Decree No. 8.805/2016, registration in the Single Registry became a mandatory requirement for granting and maintaining the benefit. A further requirement for its granting is registration in the Cadastro de Pessoas Físicas (Individual Taxpayer's Registry) — a document issued by the Federal Revenue that serves to identify taxpayers — of the applicant and family members: <[http://www.mds.gov.br/webarquivos/publicacao/assistencia\\_social/Guia/Guia\\_BPC\\_2018.pdf](http://www.mds.gov.br/webarquivos/publicacao/assistencia_social/Guia/Guia_BPC_2018.pdf)>.
  6. Municipality: territorial division of the State that has administrative autonomy, with its own government and laws. City Hall: home of the Executive Power of a city, where the Mayor, duly elected by the democratic process, practices acts of government.
  7. Resolution of the National Council of Social Assistance (CNAS) No. 6 of 13/04/16.

This methodological perspective combines with participant observation, specific to the anthropology of others, which ties the theories of continuing education to the reality of territories, a fundamental principle of interdisciplinary practices and studies. In the continuing education of professionals, the interdisciplinary perspective began to be used from the 1970s, as a result of the discussion on the lack of integration of disciplines, relying on fundamental theorists such as Jean Piaget and Paulo Freire, who indicated the subject as the central focus of learning.

In this perspective the teacher assumes the role of a ‘mediator’ of multiple types of knowledge and tries not to reproduce the traditional role of ‘teaching something to someone who does not know’. He is the point of support in the articulation of theoretical knowledge with know-how so that the learner can articulate these two types of knowledge, building his own knowledge. Altenfelder (2015, w/p) states that the teacher assumes the role of mediator in the organisation of the “student’s relationship with the objects of knowledge, giving concreteness, enabling and guaranteeing the learning process”, and finishes by saying:

It is important to note that we are not talking about any learning, but a process that allows the individual to develop. In this perspective, it stems from the knowledge and questions derived from the daily work of each professional, brought to the group to be trained for reflection, sharing, and seeking basic perspectives that guide the practices, considering the challenges for social work in the different regions of the city of São Paulo, its diversity and peculiarities.

In this way we sought the promotion of a space for dialogue (Freire, 1980; 2005) between the teams involved, aiming at their professional, technical and ethical-political improvement, the reflection and study of daily issues associated with the work and professional practices of the teams, contributions to new professional practices and techniques, methodologies and new work processes and routines. Providing the teams with theoretical and practical knowledge about the social phenomena, contexts and dynamics of the territories. Ending with practices based on prejudice, welfarism and stigmatisation, while promoting the development of cooperative, horizontal and interdisciplinary work of the teams, especially through actions that strengthen community ties (Brandão, Côrte & Silva, 2017).

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, to designate it. If in speaking their words, in calling the world, men transform it, dialogue is the way in which men find their meaning as men; dialogue is therefore an existential necessity. (Freire, 1980, p. 82-83)

In this perspective, the conception of the teacher as the ‘subject of change’ must be assimilated by the teacher, because one cannot propose the exercise of a

‘renewed gaze’ on social realities and practices if the mediating teacher maintains a conservative, inflexible and undemocratic posture. The exercise of dialogue and sharing is fundamental, not only in formative practices, but in life in society. We have thus sought to align ‘hearts and minds’ through dynamic actions, committed to service and in solidarity in attitudes — among co-workers, the elderly, family and the community.

In this project, the recognition of the ‘floor’ of social work in the complexity of the metropolis of São Paulo assumed, from its conception, a fundamental relevance. In this way, the methodological conception was also elaborated based on our experiences as researchers and teaching mediators in this ‘territory of fragilities and inequalities’ which is the most developed metropolis in our country. Daily life teaches us, theories aside, the challenges of living in adverse conditions in a city that presents us with two faces, that of wealth and misery living side by side — a mirror of national inequality. In this way, the project has been elaborated and proposed in the broad context of a complex society/city, marked by an expressive longevity, from the perspective of Social Gerontology.

In the face of the growing elderly population and the prospects of advanced longevity, elderly people aged 85 and over, in a context of growing precariousness of spaces and relationships, the project proved to be a possibility of reorganising knowledge and practices, starting from peer meetings — an effort of critical reflection, cooperation and solidarity — aiming at improving the practices used (Côrte & Brandão, 2018; Schon, 2007).

## **2. São Paulo and Public Policies**

The city of São Paulo offers us its many faces, asking and challenging us. In its diversity it welcomes immigrants from all countries and internal migrants — a dense ‘broth of cultures’, indigestible to many, tasty, but with ‘sweet and sour experiences — an anthropophagic city, which welcomes all, ‘devours’ them in a certain way and, by incorporating them, challenges the maintenance of the identity of the subjects — fundamental in the development of sense/sense of belonging and, consequently, social involvement.

From a small village founded in 1544 by Jesuit priests to a large metropolis, many are the stories of the countless challenges to its development, which has been slow and unequal for two centuries. From the 18th century onwards, many merchants from different origins visited the country for the potential offered by its territorial extension and the countless natural riches. Gradually, immigrants from different parts of Europe, fleeing armed conflicts, hunger and religious persecution, arrived in the country in search of a place to live, work, freedom and progress, and many settled in the city that was progressing. It is noteworthy that

around 1870, the Brazilian government considered organized immigration to be beneficial to the expanding national economy, especially the production of coffee in the State of São Paulo<sup>[8]</sup>, also due to the end of the slave labour cycle (1888) and the quest for the “whitening” of the population.

Spurred by the Brazilian government’s propaganda on ‘the land of opportunity’, many Europeans — Germans, Austrians, Poles, mostly Italians, Portuguese and Spaniards — emigrated between this period and the beginning of World War I — and settled in different regions, particularly in the south of the country. Among the cities in the Southeast, São Paulo was already booming.

The different peoples who settled in the city, and who joined the large population of slave descendants, spread out to other regions of the State and the country, promoting the miscegenation of the territory, marking the diversity in the formation of the Brazilian identity, and that of São Paulo, marked by interculturality. São Paulo can be called ‘the city of a thousand peoples’, as it is home to the country’s largest concentration of foreigners, an example of which is the largest community of Lebanese and Japanese emigrants living outside their country; the largest community of north-easterners outside the Northeast; and the large African descendant population, structurally excluded<sup>[9]</sup>. Communities that have been aging, making São Paulo today the fifth capital with the highest percentage of elderly population (SEADE, 2017).

The city of ‘multiple identities’ developed and grew by occupying more or less organized spaces — the peripheries — formed since the 1940s by many ‘anonymous and strange’ immigrants and migrants from different regions of the country, who came in search of work in a city undergoing industrialization and urban growth, and which settled formed, from the outset, in territories of inequality and fragility.

There were no urban spaces for workers and no government social housing programmes, leaving them only as an alternative the ‘self-construction’ of precarious housing on the outskirts of downtown São Paulo, without access to sanitation and other public services — transport, education and health. The precariousness of housing starts to worsen, especially since 1970, with increasingly unstable constructions — wooden shacks in areas of risk — on the edge of streams, on hills, swamps — the so-called ‘favelas’, examples of the expansion of urban precariousness, and which remains to this day (Scarito & Alves, 2018).

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8. Brazil is a Federative Republic organized politically into states, municipalities and districts, and in administrative terms the country is divided into federal, state and municipal governments.

9. According to the census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) conducted in 2010, the black population represented 37% of the inhabitants of the municipality of São Paulo, and most live in the peripheral regions of the city.

In this context, we consider territory as a concrete geographical physical space — the city of São Paulo — and its subdivisions into regions — multifaceted and multidimensional — but also as a stage of power relations, of symbolic exchanges, of its history, in a contradictory and challenging movement, in which the worker seeks to develop his work and exercise his citizenship. Social support programmes aim, among other objectives, to promote the exercise of citizenship by those most in need — allowing social exchanges, interactions and the establishment of real-life relationships with their challenges. The territory is thus considered as a complex geographic and social space of struggles and conquests (Saquet & Sposito, 2009). The City of São Paulo's Decennial Plan of Social Assistance — 2016-2026, clearly indicates its complexity and the challenge it poses to social work today and in the near future:

São Paulo, a metropolis of 96 cities. Its districts, ground of the diversity of its geography, trajectory and social topography, are the starting point to think about its future. The city is not the sum of districts, but of life circuits in which each settlement is part of the characteristics of the sense of city and citizenship in the metropolis of São Paulo. To think of the city for the present and future under the gaze of social assistance means to adjust the lenses of the gaze under the filter of human dignity. (p. 06)

According to Santinha (2014, w/p, social disparities in the intervention territories should be the priority focus of social work aimed at equality, equity and the promotion of human rights, also applying the notion of spatial justice. He stated that:

[...] the quest for justice implies understanding the dialectic relationship between not only the economic and social conditions of different groups, but also the geography of injustice, and it is therefore not possible to understand the question of equity without considering how services, opportunities and institutional power itself are geographically distributed.

In his reflections on 'the idea of justice', the economist Amartya Sen (2011, p. 12-13) points out that in seeking 'perfect justice', one disregards "the way people live, and not merely the nature of the institutions that surround them [because] the focus on real life in the evaluation of justice has many implications for the nature and scope of the idea of justice", that is, in terms of freedoms and rights, applied here to reflections on the territories where the services proposed by public policies are established. He also states (2011, p. 15) that "democracy has to be judged not only by the institutions that exist formally, but also by different voices, from different parts of the population, to the extent that they can actually be heard".

In the challenging panorama of this ‘geography of injustice’ on the ‘floor of diversities’, seeking dignity and social justice, developing a collaborative, horizontal and interdisciplinary work with the teams, in a space open to many voices, aiming at actions that strengthen the community bond in a broad perspective — family and community — is one of the focal points of the programme of social support for the elderly (Torres, 2017).

The aging population is considered today as a great achievement and, at the same time, as an enormous challenge for developing countries, such as Brazil, particularly in the field of public policies for the elderly — a scenario that shows itself to be more worrying in the peri-urban spaces that we call ‘territories of fragility’ — especially in the field of Social Support, where multiple deprivations — basic sanitation, housing, accessibility, education and health — overlap, together with the breakdown of family and community ties, and an increase in violence, with a negative impact on the longevity of populations, whether in terms of their physical or social well-being. According to Fazon, Siqueira & Teixeira (2019) social protection — reduction of fragilities, losses, privations, damages and offenses to personal and family integrity — should have as its starting point the analysis of territory, with a view to planning projects, programs and services, in addition to the effective elaboration of public policies that promote rights.

From this perspective, the enormous challenge of applying these principles in the city of São Paulo is evident, due to its complexity, diversity and different types of social inequalities — evidenced in the detailed mapping of the 96 regions of the city of São Paulo with coverage of social services — these being its most relevant challenges and issues<sup>10</sup>.

The same document found, in its analysis, a discrepancy between what is proposed in its norms and daily practices, with emphasis on the numerous technical and operational problems of the services, inherent to the complexity of the metropolis, besides the existence of a certain ‘crystallization’ of concepts and actions that hinder the achievement and attainment of the proposed objectives, these data were also corroborated by the professionals in training.

The Centre for the Coexistence of the Elderly (NCI) — one of the services of the Social Assistance Secretariat (SAS) programs directed at the elderly population — defines itself as a space of attention and conviviality essentially aimed at a population aged 60 or over, in a situation of vulnerability and social exclusion. The program has as its priority: the development of activities that contribute to the process of healthy aging; autonomy and sociability in the strengthening of family bonds (as the translation of affections); community coexistence and prevention

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10. Cf. Decennial Plan of Social Assistance of the City of São Paulo — 2016-2026.

of situations of social exclusion, through socio-educational activities planned according to the characteristics, interests and needs of this age group, especially considering the scenario of territorial and social fragilities.

This service has partnerships with associations, foundations and non-governmental organizations, which form the Social Protection Network for the Elderly of the Municipal Secretariat of Assistance and Social Development of the Municipality of São Paulo – SMADS, with 92 units, in 50 of the 96 districts, which serve about 15 thousand elderly, and has a growing demand.

Extending the scope of public policies to different population groups, Fazon, Siqueira & Teixeira (2019, p. 184) stress that they should “facilitate organization and social participation by providing services, as well as offering assistance and support to citizens in situations of risk and greater vulnerability. Within this field, the concept of social security is defined “as an integrated set of actions of initiative of the public authorities and society aimed at ensuring the rights related to health, welfare and social assistance” (Federal Constitution of 1988, art. 194).

Among the actions foreseen in social policy is the identification of social vulnerabilities in order to ensure an adequate response to the needs of citizens and families — the basic nucleus of social reproduction — and the consequent reduction/elimination of these, since it is the social vulnerabilities that weaken citizens and families, leading them to exclusion.

### **3. Narratives – Times, Spaces, Diversities, Identities**

Space must be considered as a totality, following the example of the very society which gives it life [...] space must be considered as a set of functions and forms which present themselves through past and present processes [...] space is defined as a set of forms representing social relations of the past and the present and a structure represented by social relations which manifest themselves through processes and functions. (Santos, 1978, p. 122)

The above text provides the motto to think of spaces as topography of identities, in territories of inequalities and injustices, from the socio-historical and anthropological perspective. In the manifestation of the development process of the city, we can apprehend times and identities that are continuously recomposed, always in the process of negotiation — a dynamic becoming — in the narratives of the city that, as a living organism, grows, develops and deteriorates, in an unequal, disorderly, unplanned, abandoned expansion, constituting territories of fragilities and identities that are shattered and recomposed — of the city and its inhabitants, configuring the geography of injustice.

The so-called ‘noble districts’, with mansions and gardens — some of them classified by the Institute of Historical Heritage — have also deteriorated, leaving many houses abandoned and for sale but without a market due to the financial crisis of the country — abandonment and decline of market values also associated with an increase in violence and a (real) sense of danger. Although forbidden by law, many of these properties undergo alterations to their original features and are used as commercial buildings.

This is one of the many examples of the dynamics of the identity topography of the city and of individuals — dynamics of degradation and recomposition — whose historic centre, one of its ‘postcards’, with beautiful old buildings, currently the object of irregular occupation or serving as commercial, illegal, or shared housing — the tenements — where families live in a room, without minimum conditions of safety and hygiene. In these rundown places renting is not cheap, due to easy access to public transport and other services, as well as unskilled jobs.

Some buildings have been restored, displaying beautiful façades and interiors, but the restoration movements for the housing market have been very timid. Thus, the historic centre displays remnants of an old and deteriorated beauty, because with the changes, which have occurred over the years, businesses and commerce have moved to different regions of the city — setting up ‘new centres’. The historic centre has lost, as have its residents, these functions, histories and identities, and has not yet found the impetus for new perspectives of dynamic occupation, with housing and services.

Today we see the ‘verticalization of luxury’, with sophisticated apartments, with generous floor space and leisure areas, with strong private security, where some try to shield themselves from the problems of this great metropolis, which is unrealistic. As Bentes (2011, p. 336) states, “São Paulo is a megacity that is split between rich and poor — included and excluded, connected and disconnected — with its differentiated basic structure forming a mosaic, which marks the constant contrasts existing in the city.”

This perspective is reinforced in the reports of the student professionals who show the face of exclusion, inequality, violence and vulnerabilities of the city and peri-urban spaces, since a large part of the NCIs are found in peripheral neighbourhoods, but narratives of the struggles for requalification of these regions, with potential for the creation of housing, infrastructure, services and employment also arise. As Scarlto & Alves states (2018, p. 170):

What we called peripheries in the 1970s, today, after much struggle by social movements, are now consolidated and local-peripheral centralities are managed in them, allowing their inhabitants access, in addition to infrastructure, to goods and services [...] What can

be considered an achievement of local society has its contradictory side: with infrastructural and social improvements, the prices of urban land increase and a portion of the population that lived in these localities can no longer stay there, migrating through the city and metropolitan region, forming other precarious peripheries, being again the spearhead of urban expansion.

With the expansion of the city new and different factors emerge that contribute to the complexity and dynamics of the 'territorial and social movement' that professionals face in the application of appropriate public policies in changing territories. In the case of the NCIs, we can consider that they welcome and offer opportunities for conviviality, create references, affirm the feeling of belonging, promote access to social rights in the scope of their action, recomposing and strengthening the identity of these communities and promoting transformative actions in the territories, as narrated by the professionals, also designated as social workers, since regardless of their area of training, their action is focused on the social field. On the other hand, they constitute a locus catalyst and a channel for the expression of needs and social issues that refer to the broader sphere of access to different resources and services, which is equivalent to appropriating one's own city in movement and change, transcending the district territory.

The field narratives confirm the interpretation of the territory as a topographic and morphological configuration, a place where citizenship, in the stories of shared struggles, and participating and claiming rights to a dignified life — housing, sanitation, education, access to health services, leisure — is exercised. In terms of day-to-day relationships, it is also the place of identity affirmation and solidarity among peers. It is in the recognition of the 'plots of life' that public policies must act, not only from a welfare perspective, but with a vision of the future envisioning a space in permanent change that suffers more strongly from economic and political fluctuations/instability.

It is important to mention that in Brazil, historically, inequality — political, economic, social, racial, regional and cultural — considered structural at all levels has always prevailed, with few moments in which the people have had hope by making little progress in this area. Equality for all seems difficult to achieve today, but relative equality, in constant movement, is possible through the achievement of more rights by the least favoured social groups, by means of comprehensive public policies and the guarantee of rights, the minimum necessary for a dignified life.

Today, the country is once again going through a time of economic and social instability, with an increase in the already alarming economic inequalities due to recession and difficulties in accessing the labour market, combined with political and ideological changes and confrontations that generate violence, with a negative

impact, among others, on social assistance programmes, which may affect access to social goods in the short and medium term, goods whose access was already considered consolidated (PNAD, 3rd quarter, 2019)<sup>[11]</sup>.

The recent Map of Inequality (2019)<sup>[12]</sup> reveals a broad picture of inequality that goes beyond the imbalance in the distribution of wealth, covering also inequalities on the basis of gender and race, as well as highlighting regional inequalities and, consequently, the disparities that exist between the different regions of the city. It thus reveals that “inequalities have an impact on society as a whole, as they generate crime and (social and symbolic) violence indices; on the types and remuneration of work; on the level of stress and diseases affecting the population — signs of an unbalanced society with low levels of social welfare”.

In this context attention is drawn to the average age of the people who died in 2018 (the baseline date of the survey): Moema — upper middle-class neighbourhood — the average age at death is 80.57; in Cidade Tiradentes — a peripheral and deprived neighbourhood — the age is 57.31, i.e., more than twenty years of difference between these two districts in the same city. The context indicates the major importance of public policies as a point of support and reference for a significant part of the population of São Paulo, in overcoming differences, and achieving a better quality of life for all (Côrte & Lopes, 2019).

In the city of São Paulo, changes in Social Assistance programmes are currently undergoing cuts in resources, which may lead to the discontinuity of support programmes for the most vulnerable, promoting an increase in inequality indices. This is not the first time this has happened, and civil society must be alert and act, manifesting itself against cases of social loss, more susceptible to ‘political moods’.

The Polish sociologist Zigmunt Baumann (1925-2017), whose works always leave us reflecting after being read, warns (from 2013), transposing us to a global scenario of which we are a part and which we recognize as current:

The explosive mixture of growing social inequality and the increasing volume of human suffering relegated to the condition of “collaterality” (marginality, exteriority, “removeability”, of not being a le-

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11. National Continuous Household Sample Survey (PNAD) — conducted in 2012, throughout the national territory, aims to follow quarterly fluctuations and the evolution, in the short, medium and long-term, of the work force, and other necessary information for the study of the socioeconomic development of the country. Accessible at: <<https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/trabalho/17270-pnad-continua.html?=&t=o-que-e>>.

12. The Map of Inequality is a project of Nossa São Paulo Network — a nonpartisan civil society organization — which since 2012 has been collecting data, shared with all public institutions and civil society, with a view to combating inequality, promoting human rights, participation and social control, and transparency and respect for the environment. Accessible at: <<https://www.nossasaopaulo.org.br/2019/11/05/mapa-da-desigualdade-2019-e-lancado-em-sao-paulo/>>.

gitimate part of the political agenda) has all the signs to potentially become the most disastrous problem that humanity will be forced to confront, manage and solve in the present century. (p. 16)

#### 4. Narratives of territories of inequality and injustice

The condition of author is that of the person who, in narrating his experiences, becomes aware of these different roles, inherited, constructed, improvised, in the scenarios of life [...] the narrator takes on the role of author responsible for the continuity of his history and of his actions in the world. The condition of a social agent is that of one who acts, not in order to exercise preconceived roles, but according to a reflected and self (trans) formative action. (Passeggi & Cunha, 2014, p. 55)

The above text indicates the relevance of the dialogical proposal in the process of continuous training, idealized as a possibility of offering narrative spaces, propitious to the listening of the group of social workers, in the ethnological perspective of the small-scale field study — with the immersion of the researcher in everyday reality — through participant observation and dialogue with the other, seeking to know the social phenomena mediated by the explanations extracted from the cultural ‘environment’ in which the actors are immersed. In this perspective we rely on the principles of cultural anthropology — urban ethnology or ethnology of others — considering the needs shared by all human beings, regardless of their characteristics, and which may have as their object of study the social phenomena that need to be analysed through cultural factors (Augé & Colleyn, 2012).

The selection, analysis and presentation of the narrative contents of the professionals, throughout the training process, presented here as referring to the reality of their daily work, follows the orientation proposed by Bardin (2002, p. 43) which indicates that the meanings of the speeches, whose contents are expressed by the spoken and written word should be found, revealing what is of interest to those involved in the study.

The analysis of content works the word [...] the practice carried out by identifiable emitters. Returning to the metaphor of the game of chess used by Saussure [...] content analysis tries to understand the players or environment of the game at a given moment, with the contribution of the observable parts.

The narratives obtained either through observation by the researchers or through training — expressed by the words of the professional workers as trainees — indicate the ‘playing field’ allowing us to identify mixed zones of vulnerability and fragility, in the different regions of the city, including its central area and its

historical centre, something that can be observed daily by those who live and pass through the city.

This approach sought to overcome ‘types of knowledge’, established and pre-determined, in the understanding of the problems and challenges of daily work, expressed in insecurities, challenges and opportunities, fragilities and skills, related to the environment, in the search for possible paths. The movement of shared reflection in narrative space — reinforced by theoretical support — favoured the individual and collective construction of the professional subject of knowledge.

In this article, we cannot present the long and numerous reports in full, therefore we extract from them the main points, paying attention to the great volume of data, trying to reveal what in fact occurs in the daily life of these professionals, contemplating in this article the most relevant topics and the results obtained.

The dialogic projects of exchanges of “know-hows” provide narrative spaces that indicate paths of discovery to be traversed together — by professional trainees and mediating teachers — based on questions that generate the reflection of all stakeholders. This perspective implies sharing, partnership and interdisciplinary and intersubjective interaction. It is a challenge that requires clarity of objectives, time for meeting and reflection in the search for actions that generate integration and understanding.

This set of knowledge must be thought of as relations and interfaces, characteristics of interdisciplinarity, which are reflected in Social Assistance and in Social Gerontology and, in this perspective, suggest the development of a new perspective and thoughts about the various meanings and dimensions of reality, as indicated in the document that guides the Permanent Education of the Single System of Social Assistance (SUAS, 2013, p. 17), which combines with the pedagogical proposal of the courses of continuous training in the gerontological area, which states that:

[...] the interdisciplinarity allows the broadening of the focus of the professional vision, favoring a greater approximation of the professional teams to all of the situations experienced by users and beneficiaries of the System, being able, for this very reason, to contribute to the formulation of answers to the questions, demands, problems and difficulties that emerge from work processes and professional practices.

Thus, the proposals for activities in the first phase of the study — Reflective Meetings — approached the interdisciplinary theoretical bases in the area of aging, focusing on the reference bibliography in this matter, for content alignment. This theoretical process was always mediated by moments of reflection, based on the problems brought by the professionals and/or that arose throughout the re-

search and that motivated questions raised by the team of mediating teachers. This phase was followed by individual, written and shared reports — through which the different personal and professional perspectives of the social worker in action were revealed; the doubts and inconsistencies of the theoretical knowledge about the aging process and even of the theoretical bases, indicating also a biased view; the difficulties in promoting effective action in intersectoral networks; the gap between the legal requirements and their application to reality, and/or their lack of knowledge, often linked to communication and ineffective action between supervisors and teams of NCIs, among other issues.

The Propositional Workshops, the second stage of the project, took the contributions of the material produced and registered in the first stage outlining the construction of the work plans of the NCIs, aimed at enhancing their socio-educational practices. At this stage, the use of the SWOT model provided new and important reflections on the territories, and on the challenges and opportunities of professional action. The term SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, and represents a scale where it is possible to compare the internal and external factors of each company, service, or product and thus focus on what needs to be improved or modified. This instrument has been adapted to the service scenario where social workers operate.

In this model of analysis, the forces are “positive internal aspects” that provide good performance, taking as an example the NCI team experienced in the service provided to the elderly with varying degrees of vulnerability. Weaknesses are “negative internal aspects” that lead to a ‘loss’ of service, taking as an example the reduced team with serious failures in qualification; failures in intersectoral partnerships; and lack of interlocution between the professionals involved, especially NCIs and CRAS<sup>13</sup>.

Positive external factors are opportunities that do not depend directly on the Service, but that add value to it, such as the growing aging and active population, seen as social capital. Threats are factors that are not directly under the control of the Service but can impact it negatively, such as lack of resources; radical changes in public policies and external interference, such as diversion of funds for other purposes. We indicate here only 5 topics from the extensive list of internal factors — strength (positive) and weaknesses (negative) — presented by professionals.

The following were considered as Internal Forces (positive) — Pride in being a Social Assistance professional; Respect in caring for the elderly, rendering viable their potentials, from a rights-based perspective; Recognition of the learning process with the elderly; NCIs as a space for building an affective family and

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13. CRAS – Social Assistance Reference Center.

overcoming depression and grief; space for fostering interest in new learning and improvement.

**Internal Weaknesses (negative)** — Insufficient knowledge of the guiding documents of PNAS<sup>[14]</sup> and of gerontological conceptions and specific legislation for the elderly; Lack of dialogue with colleagues with functions in other sectoral policies, making joint actions impossible in cases of high complexity; Tense relations between representatives of CRAS and professionals of the Services; Lack of space in the agenda of the professionals of the NCIs to share the issues experienced in their practice and planning; Misconception that the professional should provide self-esteem, self-confidence and autonomy to his/her users, making it impossible to build a space for dialogue and collective construction in the proposals for intervention with the elderly.

**External Factors — Opportunities (positive)** — Articulation between services (assistance, health, education, culture) in activities; Promotion of regional elderly leaderships (political and social); Organization and encouragement of participation in neighborhood associations, protection and management of the environment; Promotion and management of community circles of mutual aid; Valuing local culture as a potential for strengthening community and intergenerational bonds; Institutional partnerships for the development of projects to generate wealth and/or space in the labor market.

**External Factors — Threats (negative)** — Extension of intervention territory, allied to environmental degradation in the region and accessibility problems (region/service); Growing impoverishment of the elderly population — unemployment; housing shortages; institutional and family violence; Non-equitable distribution of support (BPC); Regions dominated by drug trafficking generating insecurity and violence; Absence of NCIs in large and highly vulnerable regions.

After this exercise, a photographic survey of the territory where the NCIs are located was carried out by the trained professionals; this material was later shared and analysed as a group; it should be noted that some professionals brought drawings that faithfully reflected the realities observed. This activity provided another narrative space, exposing new fragilities, especially in ‘trafficking territories’, such as: walking in uniform for identification and protection; asking the ‘boss’ for authorization for strangers to enter the community; driving only in ‘authorised’ vehicles, with the windows down and hands within view; hiring assistants from the community itself, avoiding the circulation of ‘strangers’; in addition to ‘special’ protection for the NCI when the grandmother/daughter of the ‘boss’ was at the location, among other problems, namely environmental degradation.

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14. PNAS – National Policy of Social Assistance.

Throughout the process, two relevant interrelated problems stand out — the challenges of full implementation and enforcement of specific laws — technical ordinances and norms, which guide public policies — arising both from the system's own bureaucracy, and those linked to territorial fragility due to the problem of violence. In a metropolis like São Paulo, the daily lives of welfare workers, as well as the majority of the population, are marked by lack of time; discomfort at various levels; the demand for immediate responses; the constant haste in personal and professional life, among other problems. Considering that the 'acceleration of life' closes the possibility of having time to stop, think, look, listen more slowly, observe details, suspend tension and haste, the aim was that the training meetings could provide a time to "cultivate attention and delicacy, open eyes and ears [...] talk about what happens to us [...] listen to others, cultivate the art of meeting, be very quiet, have patience and give ourselves time and space" (Larrosa, 2015, p. 25).

The exercise of relearning and re-training, individually and collectively, is not easy, but we have seen that it has become concrete in the movement of individual and collective reflection and sensitive listening, considering that learning and teaching with and from interdisciplinarity and intersubjectivity is a process that connects, through reflection, experiences, analysis of cases/ problems, among other possibilities that have emerged from the integration meetings and expressed also in the final evaluations by the professionals being trained.

Throughout the process, the movement of reflection and listening, together with the theoretical bases and analysis of the 'playing field' favoured the individual and collective construction of the professionals, which materialized in the Final Seminar<sup>15</sup>, held at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), where the banners of the projects of each NCI involved were presented, disclosed to all participants, in an event open to the public, which allowed the dissemination of this project of public policy and valorisation of the social worker that focuses on the subject who ages in the city of São Paulo, in territories with multiple fragilities.

Since the first action — mapping the territories of action — integrative-narrative procedures were used that offered the necessary data for the characterization of the service, and the particularities of each region, giving voice and registering the impressions, feelings and demands of the NCIs' workers, the basis for the intended training, in the perspective of Social Gerontology. The social worker is now considered, throughout the process, the narrator who reveals, in the first person, the internal voice of the group in which he lives and acts, indicating the challenges

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15. <<https://www.portaldoenvelhecimento.com.br/importancia-dos-ncis-para-se-longeviver-em-sao-paulo/>>.

of the application of public policies in the field of action — Who speaks? Where does he speak from? Who does he speak to? Who is listening?

At this point we highlight that before training the professionals, we wanted to listen to the NCIs' workers in order to undertake a diagnosis of their field of action. This preliminary stage was carried out through the elaboration of an observation roadmap and baseline questionnaire used in 31 NCIs (out of 96 existing at the time) from different regions of the municipality of São Paulo, carried out by the team of researchers who then trained the professionals, which allowed us to capture the reality of the territories of action, taking into account their characteristics and multiple demands, according to the principles already defined in ethnological research.

In the first moment of fieldwork, the researchers created working groups, in pairs and trios, to analyse the real challenges faced by the social workers of our metropolis — from their travels — bus, metro, taxi, and even on foot to areas of difficult access, many 'forbidden' by drug trafficking, where access is only possible with the necessary 'licence'. We have also seen the suffering and fragility experienced by the people of the periphery; the challenges of social work and also its great achievements and the extreme needs in geographical areas of fragility, injustice and exclusion.

The data collected at this stage, which were expanded and confirmed in the capacity building process, indicated that most of the NCIs (74.2%) had been created in the last 17 years, and it is relevant to consider that 32.3% of the units have been implemented in the last 7 years, with significant expansion of the network in the period after the enactment of the Elderly Statute in 2003. Most of the services (64.5%) operated full time, 8 hours (25.8%) or 12 hours (38.7%), but after an interview with social workers a contradiction was evidenced — units located in areas of greater vulnerability operate part-time, and others located in areas of lesser vulnerability operate full time.

Social workers indicated the need to extend the periods of operation in these areas, to better serve the most socially vulnerable elderly, and warned that in the more central areas of the city, with better physical infrastructure and a higher socioeconomic level, many elderly people served did not meet the criteria proposed by this public policy. They report, however, that in these cases the demand is linked to the feeling of loneliness of the elderly, which many consider a greater fragility, justifying their care.

Regarding the financing of NCIs' activities — many originating from non-governmental organizations such as Catholic parishes or spiritist and evangelical associations — it was reported that the largest source of resources is in the existing protocols with the Municipal Social Assistance Secretariat (SMADS) and that 35% are consideration of the registered organizations, concerning events and

campaigns (19.4%) and donations from individuals or companies (16.1%) as an additional source of financing.

The professionals reported as the greatest difficulty the mapping of BPC<sup>16</sup> beneficiaries — in order to encourage them to participate in the activities offered — due to the fact that the personal information of the possible beneficiaries is often outdated, making contact more difficult or impossible, to which is added the refusal of the elderly to receive the professionals for fear of losing the referred benefit. To these constraints must be added the impediments to approaching ‘demarcated’ and inaccessible territories — problems that are also impediments for the elderly themselves to circulate and attend the NCIs.

This confirms the crossing of two data that indicate the difficulties in the full implementation of this, and other, public policies — the bureaucracy of the system — that also appears in other instances in the articulation of different services; and the violence and difficulties of access to territories — that in a perverse way create barriers to the movement of people — public agents and population in general, and more clearly to the elderly — clearly demarcating the ‘geography of injustice’.

## **5. By way of conclusion: challenges for professionals and public policies in the area of aging**

We point out that throughout the training process many challenges were faced, and some adjustments were made due to the needs that arose in its unfolding, a circumstance that we consider natural in view of a methodology that proposes the joint construction of know-how, aiming at practices that are increasingly adequate to meet the demands of the service. We observed, from the beginning, a certain resistance to the general proposal of training on the part of many professionals undergoing training (but circumvented throughout the project), still stuck to bureaucratic systems in the teaching-learning process, in which the teacher teaches, and the students learn, in a vertical relationship of sovereignty in which one knows more than the other.

In the context of the process carried out, reported here, and following the proposed methodology, the relationship between professional trainees and teacher-mediators sought to be horizontal, interweaving the knowledge and skills of the two groups. Reflecting on the reality of rapid aging, and its impact on existing social policies, reviewing ‘crystallised’ knowledge, provoking reflections, if not new, innovative was the strategy, and the teachers were the mediators of this collective work.

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16. BPC refers to the basic monthly income of 1 minimum wage, which is intended for elderly people (aged 65 and over) and for people with disabilities with no means of providing their own maintenance or having it provided by their family.

Throughout the process of continuing education, the challenges, and relevance of the Service became evident, many of which coincide with those already indicated in the Decennial Plan of Social Assistance of the City of São Paulo 2016-2026.

1. The social relevance of NCIs – *Núcleos de Convivência de Idosos* (Centers for the Coexistence of Elderly People) as services that are part of a social support network for the population over 60 years of age, with the challenge of promoting a sense of belonging and social coexistence as opposed to segregation and isolation, represent opportunities for the expression of personal, family and community needs and demands, access to information regarding social rights, cultural and socio-affective exchanges between generations, and the enjoyment of benefits arising from a diverse set of social, cultural, recreational, leisure and entertainment activities. The aim of the Service is to meet, in general, the postulate of the territorial insertion of public services, observing the indices of vulnerability and social risk taking into account several factors, namely intergenerational, inter-gender, wealth, ethnic-racial and socio-territorial.
2. Another challenge is the need to invest in the continuous training of workers, in order to overcome theoretical-methodological and technical-operational gaps and weaknesses in the management and operation of units for elderly people, highlighting the need for effective supervision in the monitoring of actions. In addition, the reproduction of welfare models in relation to the elderly and the lack of greater awareness of civic participation have become evident.
3. The absence of a culture of planning and evaluation of the actions was identified in the dynamics of events and activities of interest, since these were not in accordance with the provisions of the National Policy of Social Assistance in the scope of basic social support and the Statute of the Elderly, and without the clear and consistent demonstration of results that express the breadth and depth of the social reach of the services, with the results sometimes limited only to quantitative targets — neglecting qualitative ones — and to some administrative procedures, although necessary, determined by the protocols with the municipal management.
4. The existence of polarities in the roles exercised by professionals: many excessively bureaucratic; others with a strong degree of involvement, without the balance necessary for the proper functioning of the service.

5. The precarity of higher education was expressed both in the understanding of the tasks and in the written and oral expression of the professionals, observed especially in the process of carrying out the banners presented at the final Seminar.

The training project highlighted, on the one hand, the difficulties in the management and operation of a service of absolute social relevance — the Centers for the Coexistence of Elderly People — for the metropolitan capital, and, on the other hand, demonstrated the potential of a public policy effectively directed towards the quality of life, dignity and citizenship, according to democratic values.

In the face of this challenging reality, we hope, working in an adverse scenario, that this will be another ‘time of turbulence’, which we can resist and overcome, seeking to achieve important goals for the promotion of an honest, democratic life, with a reduction of the cruel ‘collateral damage’, with equity and equal rights for all ages.

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