

Tenements in downtown São Paulo: an analysis in light of census data

Cortiços do centro de São Paulo:
análise à luz dos dados censitários

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Abstract

This article addresses the issue of tenements in downtown São Paulo, a historical problem that, although dating back to the origins of working-class housing in the city, persists as a form of dwelling in the central area. The analysis, based on data from the 2010 and 2022 Population Censuses, focuses on the current dynamics of tenements, highlighting the persistence of tenement areas in regions – such as Brás, Luz, Glicério, Bexiga, and Barra Funda – where historically recognized popular territories already existed. It can be observed that the massive activity of the residential real estate market in the city center, especially since 2013, is related to the reduction of tenements in areas where the market is most active – mainly in República, Consolação, Barra Funda, and Mooca.

Keywords: tenements; social housing, tenement areas; Downtown; São Paulo.

Resumo

Este artigo aborda a problemática dos cortiços no centro de São Paulo, questão histórica que, embora remonte às origens da moradia popular da classe trabalhadora na cidade, ainda persiste como modalidade habitacional na área central. A análise, fundamentada nos dados do Censo Demográfico de 2010 e 2022, investiga a dinâmica atual dos cortiços, constatando a persistência de áreas encortiçadas em regiões onde tradicionalmente já existiam – como Brás, Luz, Glicério, Bexiga e Barra Funda – territórios populares historicamente reconhecidos. Verifica-se que a atuação massiva do mercado imobiliário residencial no centro, sobretudo a partir de 2013, traz relação com a redução dos cortiços em regiões onde o mercado está mais presente – principalmente República, Consolação, Barra Funda e Mooca.

Palavras-chave: cortiços; moradia popular; áreas encortiçadas; Centro; São Paulo.



Introduction

Tenement, “*cabeça de porco*”,¹ pension, village, back house, rooming house. Tenements have been part of the history of the city of São Paulo for more than a century, and continue to be present in the lives of many families over the generations. In degraded and “falling apart” properties, they represent the condition of the oldest popular housing in the city, being an important alternative for the low-income population, especially the working class, at the beginning of the century, in the central areas of the city. The following news, published in 1906, already signals the existence of tenements in São Paulo, since then thus revealing the total lack of habitability of these dwellings.

Tuberculosis harvests its victims: insufficient air and light, the day-to-day sharing with numerous people in very small, poorly ventilated, humid and low environments, the production of chlorosis, anemia, etc. (This) people are reduced to crowding ten or twelve people into one or two rooms because scarce earnings and rising rents do not allow them the means to enlarge themselves a little. (In poor neighborhoods) where all the army of those who work and produce is collected at night, collective housing and tenements have become true human pigeon lofts, where one lives in a promiscuity of people and sexes... (Jornal Fanfulla, 23/3/1906 apud Kowarick and Ant, 1994, p. 73)

Even today, the existence of tenements remains strong in the city's recent history, supported by the growing demand of those who, due to low income and/or the impossibility of meeting the bureaucratic requirements of the formal rental market, still seek a housing solution in this model. The current tenements are characterized by precarious and unhealthy conditions, with problems such as overcrowding,

lack of ventilation and lighting, use of a single room for various functions, high fire risks, and high rental value. Research has already shown that the average area of dwelling in tenements is 12 m², where about 3 people live.² They are operated under informal leasing arrangements, through verbal and unofficial contracts, often mediated by intermediaries, in which the security of tenure is non-existent.

The definition of a tenement is complex, as the characterization of this type of housing involves a variety of situations. The plurality of architectural types of buildings, usage, forms of management, and organization of its residents makes it difficult to forge a concept that encompasses all manifestations of the phenomenon. These are typologies that vary among huge old houses subdivided into cubicles; backyard tenements with horizontal units; Isolated basements linked to single-family dwellings above; constructions attached to houses; and even apartments in downtown areas, inhabited by several families in the condition of involuntary cohabitation (Kowarick and Ant, 1994).

The work prepared by the São Paulo Municipal Secretariat of Planning, Budget, and Management (Sempla) (São Paulo, 1986) addresses this diversity based on the architectural type of the property and its relationship to its original use, classifying them as “designed” or “adapted”. Adapted properties are those initially intended for a single family, commercial or industrial activities, or any other function other than tenement housing, but which, due to the deterioration of the neighborhood and/or the property, have been subdivided internally into rooms for rental purposes. “Designed” refers to buildings intended for collective rent, with several rooms in the same lot, and may or may not have single-family dwellings. For both types, sanitary equipment, laundry tub, and common areas

are predominantly for collective use, living conditions are precarious, and housing is always subject to rent payments.

Despite the diversity of typologies, the official definition used in São Paulo is Lei Moura [Moura Act] (Act n. 10.928/1991), adopted in numerous studies, which defines a tenement as the unit used as collective housing, presenting, in whole or in part, the following characteristics: a) consisting of one or more buildings built on an urban lot; b) subdivided into several rooms rented, sublet or assigned for any reason; c) with overcrowding of people in the same environment; d) common use of unbuilt spaces, toilets, etc.; e) poor circulation and infrastructure in general. The Moura Act represents an important milestone in the recognition of tenements as a form of housing and in the need to establish parameters for surveying, inspecting, monitoring, and developing public policies aimed at their residents.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to present an updated analysis of the tenements in downtown São Paulo, based on data from the Demographic Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) recently made available, complemented with data from the Census of Tenements and Associated Dwellings in Downtown São Paulo, São Paulo City Hall and the Brazilian Patrimony Studies Company (Embraesp). We sought to analyze the continuities and updates in reflections on the theme over time, highlighting the dimensions that remain, but also new issues that the data point to, highlighting convergences between the results of different surveys on tenements in the city of São Paulo.

The analysis presented in this article is centered in the context of the central area of the city of São Paulo, limited here to the city's thirteen central districts, located in the sub-districts of Sé (districts of Bela Vista, Bom Retiro, Cambuci, Consolação, Liberdade, República,

Santa Cecília and Sé), Mooca (Belém, Brás, Mooca and Pari), and Lapa (Barra Funda district),³ covering approximately 5,190 acres and with a resident population of 650,000 (IBGE, 2022).

This research does not aim to cover issues related to interventions in tenements, public policies, or regulations,⁴ and this problem affecting the city as a whole. Rather, it seeks to contribute mainly to the understanding of the current dynamics of the territorialization of tenements, shedding light on the context of intense disputes in the central region of São Paulo. By analyzing the trends and characteristics present in the tenement issue based on census data, we seek to offer input for future discussions and development of public policies aimed at providing and guaranteeing decent housing for the population living in these areas. This analysis is part of the research carried out at the Production of Housing and the City from the National Institute of Science and Technology (INCT), based at the Faculty of Architecture, Urbanism, and Design - University of São Paulo (FAU-USP), specifically in the line of research 2.2 "Public housing in central areas of Brazilian metropolises: conditions, programs and policies".

Thus, this article is structured in two sections, in addition to this introduction. The first section provides context on the issue of tenements in the city center; it begins by characterizing the precarious nature of this type of housing, considering previous research, and adding to the debate on the invisibility and the difficulties of measuring the phenomenon. The second section presents the analysis of data from the 2022 Population Census, comparing it with historical data from the 2010 Census and the Census of Tenements survey carried out by the City Hall, in addition to a territorial analysis of the location of tenements amid the residential real estate developments in the region. Georeferenced analysis shows that the

massive activity of the residential real estate market in the central area, especially since 2013, has resulted in a territorial reconfiguration that is related to the reduction of tenements in central regions where the highest concentration of residential real estate developments is found.

Tenements in the central area: precariousness and invisibility

The city of São Paulo expresses profound socio-spatial inequality. While most jobs, services, public facilities, and public transportation are concentrated in central areas, the majority of the population lives in peripheral areas and commutes for hours every day to get to work. The concentration of urban land is at the heart of this issue, with what Maricato (2008) defines as “the land knot” prevailing. It was not for lack of planning and laws that cities moved towards what we have today, evolving in the opposite direction of the democratization of access to land.

Above all, the dispute over access to land provided with infrastructure is a dispute over location within the city (Villaça, 2012), one of the main causes of the problem of unequal urban structure in Brazil, characterized by the retention of private property in the hands of a few. According to Villaça (ibid.), it is “land-location” that best explains the urban inequality and socio-spatial segregation so characteristic of Brazilian urban centers.

Low-income workers in the city of São Paulo choose to live downtown to avoid spending a significant part of their income on transportation and part of their time on daily commutes. Thus, they end up finding in the tenements an economically viable housing option. In Kohara's (2013) research, 84% of tenements residents in the Luz neighborhood

claimed that the advantages of living in the city center actually stem from the proximity to public services (transportation, health, and education), private services (supermarkets, pharmacies, banks, churches), not having to use transportation to carry out such activities, and easier access to jobs – 72% of residents walked home and to work. However, the reason for the greatest dissatisfaction in living downtown is the high amounts paid for the rent and the precarious living conditions.

According to Pasternak and Bógus (2006), the location of housing downtown has direct implications for the income of heads of households. The study points out that in the central ring of the city,⁵ where tenements are concentrated, there are greater opportunities for employment and services for unskilled people. These factors contribute to a higher average income for those living in collective housing downtown. The research also highlights that, compared to peripheral areas, the average income downtown, even for the uneducated, increased between 1991 and 2000.

In order to live in the center and enjoy these locational advantages, workers end up being exploited by owners who charge exorbitant rents for precarious living conditions. Because they do not meet the requirements of the formal market, they end up being hostages of this type of housing. According to a survey by Kohara (1999), the average rent in tenements was R\$191.00,⁶ for a private area of 11.9 m² and a total area of 14.5 m², which works out at R\$13.17 per square meter. This amount is significantly higher than the rent for single-family homes in the same neighborhood (R\$7.40/m²) and even in middle-class neighborhoods (R\$10.07/m²). Despite the terrible living conditions, tenement housing is the most expensive rent per square meter in the city of São Paulo.

The high proportion of family income spent on rent, together with the poor conditions of the housing, has serious consequences for residents in different aspects of their lives. From the perspective of children's educational development, the performance of children living in tenements is about four times worse than that of students living in single-family homes, with higher failure rates and, consequently, higher dropout rates (Kohara, 2009).

The precarious conditions found in tenements can be seen in the comparative survey of housing situations compiled from research studies, presented in the table below. Although these studies were conducted in specific areas and using specific methodologies, they allow us to verify the extreme conditions of uninhabitable and unsanitary conditions, reaching the extreme of situations such as 22 people using a single toilet; only 10% of the rooms having windows; and an area of 3 m² per person in the dwelling. The use of toilets, laundry tubs, and the lack of free spaces generate many tensions among residents.

Tenements have always been stigmatized as places associated with disease and unsanitary conditions, ever since the health and hygiene discourses of the late 19th century. As these properties have been poorly adapted to accommodate a greater number of rooms (households), they are unsanitary places with high concentrations of people and countless risks. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has cruelly exposed a high mortality rate, aggravating the already difficult health situation in these spaces. The districts of Pari, Belém, Brás, and Santa Cecilia had rates above 100 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, while the city average was 59 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in the first months of 2020.⁷

It is well known that the problem of tenements is evident from the moment you walk through the gate. When you see the door of an old, huge house or single-family house from the street, the interior of the property may have been transformed into a tenement with more than ten rooms used by families as dwellings. While the presence of the favela is a striking part of the urban landscape, the tenement has little visibility.

Table 1 – Aspects of tenement housing

	Sebes 1975	Fabes Sé 1983	Sempla 1986	Kohara 1999	CDHU 2002	Kohara 2013
Average area of dwellings in m ²	10,85	11,49	12,10	11,90	–	12,30
Number of people per room	3,60	3,71	2,60	2,90	–	3,10
Area per person in the dwelling (m ² /hab)	3,10	3,10	4,65	4,10	–	4,00
Number of households per property	10,40	18,20	14,30	9,80	–	9,90
People per toilet	–	22,74	12,3	8,3	*	14,00
Single-room dwelling	–	91,8%	–	78%	76,2%	71%
Windows in the used rooms	–	10,20%	43,7%	33,9%	18,7%	21%

Source: diagnosis on the tenements phenomenon in the city of São Paulo – Sebes/HabiSão Paulo (1975). Study on the population of the regional area Sé – Fabes. São Paulo (1983). Tenements in São Paulo: front and back – Sempla (1983). Kohara (1999), CDHU (2002), and Kohara (2013).

* Ninety percent of households use collective toilets and laundry tubs.

Even though the highest concentration of tenement properties is in the city's central neighborhoods, it is a barely visible reality, as it does not constitute a landscape, but rather hides among the buildings that marked the city's development. (Piccini and Kohara, 1999, p. 10)

Most of the tenement dwellers are ashamed to say where they live, as the derogatory meaning of the term "tenement" remains in common parlance. The word itself is not used by them; they prefer terms such as "pension," "collective housing," or "rooming house," and only use the word "tenement" when referring to dwellings whose precariousness and disorganization are extreme, in a pejorative way. Also, the intermediaries themselves do not allow access to the sites and also do not accept the identification of those spaces as tenements, which further complicates their characterization and dimensioning.

Research involving the quantification of tenements in the city has countless methodological caveats, making it hard to use, as accurate measurement with the same methodology has not been achieved due to divergences in the perimeters and approaches adopted. Public research is also quite specific, with different methodologies and irregular periods, which means that this reality has little visibility. The surveys carried out so far have specific aims, which makes it impossible to build a historical series to analyze its development. However, it is possible to identify some common issues that permeate the main studies on the subject, updating and reaffirming the urgency of addressing the problem.

In 1983, Sempla conducted a survey that estimated 2.58 million people living in tenements, equivalent to 29.3% of the city's population at the time,⁸ already pointing to the

districts of Bela Vista and Liberdade as having the highest concentration of tenements (Rolnik et al., 1990)

In 1994, the Institute of Economic Research Foundation (Fipe) conducted a sample survey that identified 595,110 residents living in 23,688 tenements in 20 subdistricts. In this survey, families with an average of 3.3 people were found. Of the total number of households, 60.6% had been living at the surveyed address for up to one year. The previous housing of 60.4% of them was also in a tenement, and 34.1% had previously lived in a single-family residence, 2.2% in favelas, and 3.3% in other types of housing.

In 2000/2001, the Tenement Operation Program (PAC – Programa de Atuação em Cortiços) of the Development Company Housing and Urban State of São Paulo (CDHU) carried out property inventories as part of the diagnostic phase. The PAC survey is one of the most comprehensive studies on tenements in the expanded city center, covering areas in the districts of Sé and Mooca.⁹ It surveyed 1,648 tenements with 38,403 residents. PAC built social housing in some areas where there were tenements and provided tenement residents with letters of credit.

The 2009 Municipal Housing Plan of São Paulo identified 80,389 households living in tenements, 11,086 of which were in the central region and 69,303 in the rest of the city, using data from Habisp and the Seade Foundation. In 2016, the Municipal Housing Plan (PMH) used data from the 2009 PMH, maintaining the number of households located in tenements at 80,399.

The IBGE Population Censuses did not include data on tenements until 2010. Estimates for the purpose of studying the topic, carried out by Pasternak and Bógus (2006) between 1970

and 2000, associated the variables “rented” by occupancy status and the variable “single room”¹⁰ for the study in the city of São Paulo.

In 1970, 5.60% of rented households had only one room; this percentage rose to 8.48% in 1980 and fell to 3.81% in 1991. In 2000, this reduction was even stronger, with single-room rental homes accounting for 1.29% of all rental homes. However, they are more prevalent in the central and inner rings, where they account for more than 3% of rental units. (Ibid., p. 64)

In short, tenement housing is a serious housing issue that requires knowledge of the physical, land, legal, and social aspects to develop appropriate and sustainable public policies. It also shows us the importance of ensuring social housing in central areas, places that have consolidated infrastructure and a concentration of jobs and services.

Tenements in 2010 and 2022 Population Censuses

Recently, in 2010, the IBGE, considering this issue to be urgent, introduced the definition of what it calls “Housing in rooming houses, tenements, or *cabeça de porco*” as a variable

of “type of domicile,” defined as a multifamily housing unit, that is, with several different families, presenting the following characteristics: (a) shared use of plumbing and sanitary facilities (bathroom, kitchen, laundry tub, etc.); (b) use of the same space for various functions (sleeping, cooking, eating, working, etc.); and (c) several dwellings (private homes) built on urban lots or with subdivisions of dwellings in the same building, usually rented, sublet, or assigned without a formal lease agreement.

Data from the 2010 Census indicates that there are 295,218 tenement-type dwellings in the country, representing 0.5% of all dwellings, equivalent to 850,648 people. In the municipality of São Paulo, there are 42,924 dwellings, with tenements representing 1.2% of all. In the central districts of the municipality, there are 7,813 dwellings of this type, representing 18% of the total in the city.

In 2022, the results of the census universe on the general characteristics of dwellings and residents indicate that there are 205,835 dwellings in Brazil classified as “rooming houses or tenements,” which is a decrease compared to 2010, representing 494,000 people (0.2% of the population). São Paulo is the number one city in the ranking, followed by Rio de Janeiro, Goiânia, Brasília, Belo Horizonte, and São Luís. São Paulo has 31,873 tenements, with the central districts accounting for 21% of this total (6,694).

Table 2 – Permanent private dwellings and dwellings of type “Housing in rooming houses, tenements, or *cabeça de porco*”, São Paulo and central districts

	Permanent private dwellings			Dwellings of the type “Housing in rooming houses, tenements, or <i>cabeça de porco</i> ”		
	2010	2022	Variation %	2010	2022	Variation %
City of São Paulo	3.574.286	4.996.529	39,79	42.924	31.873	-25,75
Central Districts	240.333	365.015	51,88	7.813	6.694	-14,32

Source: the authors, based on IBGE (2010) and (2022).

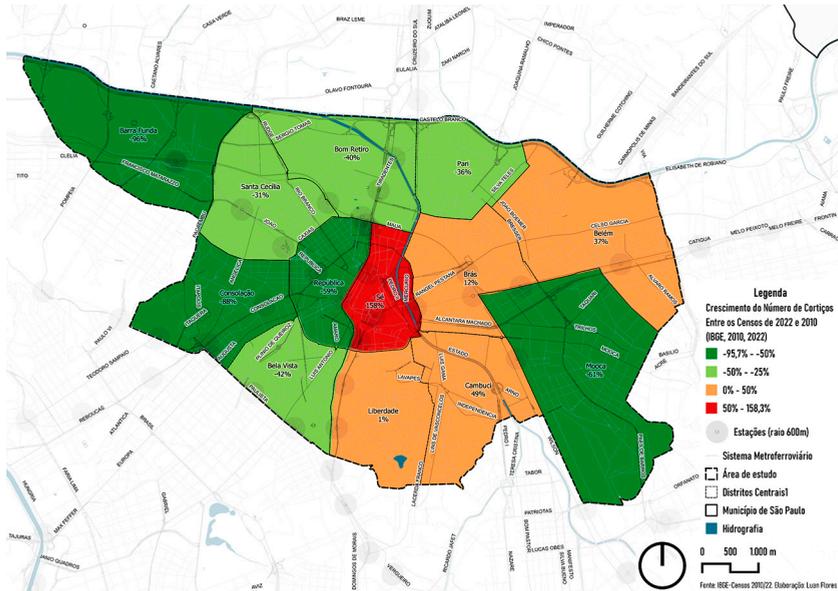
It can be observed that between 2010 and 2022, the number of dwellings in the city of São Paulo grew, and the increase in the number of dwellings in the central districts showed marked growth, with a higher rate of change in the center compared to the city as a whole. Comparatively, on the one hand, there was a decrease in tenements both in the city and in downtown São Paulo during this period, with a greater rate of decline in the rest of the city than in the central area, indicating that this type of housing is still quite significant in this region. On the other hand, the decrease signals the dynamics of expulsion of the low-income population to other regions of the city, especially to the outskirts of the metropolis.

The analysis of the phenomenon based on a reading of the districts allows us to see that, in the center, the districts of Brás, Liberdade, and Santa Cecília have the highest concentration of tenements, both in 2010 and in 2022. There was a more pronounced

increase in the Sé district and in the districts east of the center (Brás, Belém, Cambuci, Liberdade), except for the Mooca district, which lost tenements during this period. The districts north and west of the city center (Pari, Bom Retiro, Santa Cecília, Consolação, República, Bela Vista) saw a decrease in tenements between 2010 and 2022, as illustrated in Map 1.

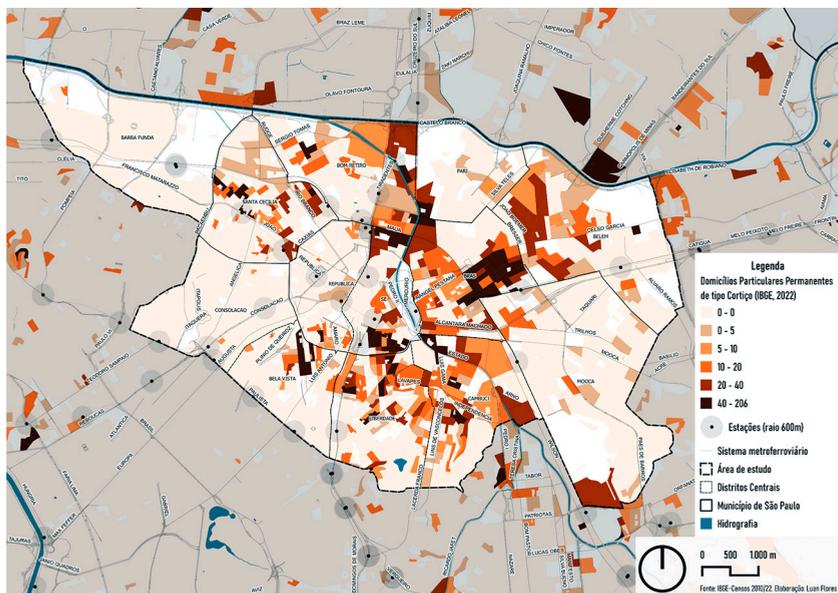
Reading by district boundaries is appropriate for a broader analysis of growth or decline trends. For a more accurate understanding of historical processes and dynamics and conflicts, disaggregation by census tract is used, available for 2022 data. The analysis is supplemented by spatial data produced from the Census of Tenements and Similar Buildings in the Central Region of São Paulo, conducted by the São Paulo City Hall and published in 2022, which maps tenements in the central region.

Map 1 – Variation in the presence of housing types such as “rooming houses, tenements, or cabeça de porco,” São Paulo and Central Districts



Source: IBGE (2010) and (2022). Preparation: Luan Flores.

Map 2 – Permanent private dwellings of the “tenement” type in the central districts of São Paulo



Source: IBGE (2022). Preparation: Luan Flores.

From a more detailed reading of the census sectors, we can observe marked presences and absences of tenements in the central region. Census data show that the concentration of tenements remain in places where they have historically been more prevalent. Neighborhoods such as Brás, between Celso Garcia Avenue and the railway, an area where the tenements struggle movement emerged strongly in the 1990s; the Luz neighborhood, around Mauá Street and Estado Avenue; in the Glicério region, most strongly in the quadrangle formed by Conselheiro Furtado Street, Tabatinguera Street, Estado Avenue, and the Glicério viaduct; in Bexiga, around Rui Barbosa Street; and in Barra Funda, in the center between Pacaembu Avenue and the railway.

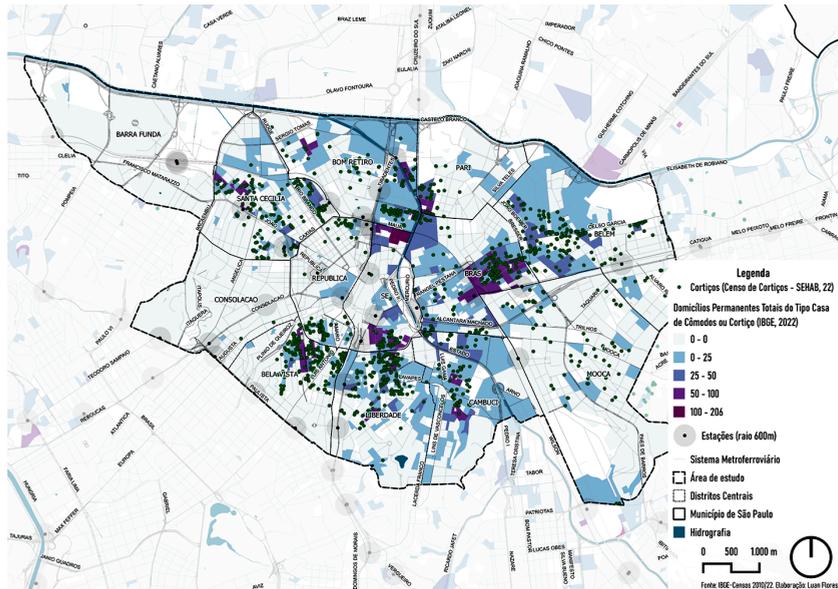
Specifically in the Luz neighborhood, which was the subject of research on two occasions, 13 years apart (Kohara, 1998; Kohara, 2013), of the 92 properties identified as tenements, it was found that 43 had ceased to be used as such in 2011 (new buildings or uses). However, 55 properties that were not used as tenements began to be used for this purpose. Between 1998 and 2011 (the field research period), the number of properties used as tenements in the researched area increased

from 92 to 104, representing an increase of 13%. Regarding families living in tenements, the growth rate was 30%, from 765 families to 995 families. We can see that housing in tenements downtown is a very dynamic, informal rental market and that there is constant competition for urban spaces in the real estate market.

In contrast, there are areas where tenements are absent, such as Consolação, Barra Funda (specifically Água Branca), Mooca, the area east of Belém (now considered part of the Tatuapé neighborhood), and the entire district of Pari. These neighborhoods previously had a high concentration of tenements, but have recently undergone an intensification of commercial activity, with shopping malls and commercial galleries, which has transformed the profile of the region.

The Census of Tenements and Similar Buildings in the Central Region of São Paulo, conducted by the São Paulo City Hall, identified 1,082 tenements and similar buildings in this area, with a significant concentration in the same regions revealed by the IBGE Census – Brás, Luz, Barra Funda, Bexiga, Baixada do Glicério, Liberdade –, with scattered tenements in Mooca not captured by the IBGE Census.

Map 3 – Location of tenements, according to the Census of Tenements and similar buildings in the Central Region of São Paulo (PMSP, 2022), and permanent private dwellings of the tenement type in the central districts of São Paulo – IBGE Census – Census Tracts – 2022



Source: IBGE (2022) e São Paulo (2022). Preparation: Luan Flores.

The São Paulo City Hall Census aimed to identify, map, characterize, and classify the properties located within the expanded perimeter of the now defunct Urban Operation Center,¹¹ which partially and/or totally encompasses the districts of Sé, República, Brás, Santa Cecília, Bela Vista, Liberdade, Cambuci, Pari, and Bom Retiro. This study was not exactly a census in terms of a population census. It was based on a register of tenements already existing in the City Hall and updated through a collaborative map, consolidated by the technical group monitoring the study, formed by members of civil society and public authorities. The research included in-depth interviews with residents and intermediaries, in a universe of 128 tenements surveyed and 650 residents interviewed.

Based on this data, most residents of tenements in downtown São Paulo are black or brown, representing 63.2% of the population. In addition, 66% of residents were born in northeastern states, and of these, 57.7% have lived in the city for more than 10 years.

The number of immigrants is also significant, corresponding to 18% of the residents, most of them from Paraguay, Haiti, and Peru. These data show a strong presence of groups of people from different backgrounds, mostly coming from other regions of Brazil or from abroad, seeking job opportunities in the state capital. In the Luz neighborhood, for example, Kohara (1999) had already shown that there were no identified foreigners in 2013; 15% of families were Bolivian and Paraguayan, a phenomenon that has been intensifying

over the years Empirically, the presence of African and Haitian foreigners is quite visible in the Glicério neighborhood, a place that concentrates facilities for welcoming immigrants and refugees, such as the Nossa Senhora da Paz Parish, run by the Carlista Fathers, the Center for Migration Studies, and the Pastoral Service for Migrants.

For many residents, the tenement becomes a form of “permanent” housing. About 50% of residents had previously lived in another tenement, indicating a population that largely moves from one tenement to another, the “rent itinerants and work wanderers,” according to Kowarick (2009). Research conducted by Kohara (2007) found that at Emef Duque de Caxias, in the Glicério neighborhood, of the addresses registered when the children enrolled at the beginning of the year, about half did not correspond to the same address at the end of the year (48%). Of the 16 children surveyed who had lived in the same tenement for less than a year, 15 had previously lived in another tenement in the central region of the city.

The permanence in precarious housing conditions is significant, with 44.3% of residents living in tenements for more than 10 years and 59.8% for more than 5 years. A significant portion, 52.7%, have lived in between 2 to 4 different tenements over time. The survey also reveals that 27% of heads of households have always lived in tenements since arriving in São Paulo, and 35% have lived in this type of housing for more than 5 years.

In a 1991 pilot study conducted by technicians from Sehab/Habi in the Pari neighborhood, it was already revealed that “27% of heads of households had always lived in tenements since their arrival in São Paulo, and 35% had lived in tenements for more than five years” (Pasternak, 2016, p. 12).

This phenomenon demonstrates the permanence of a large number of families who find tenements to be a constant alternative for housing, albeit precarious and itinerant. Most of these heads of household work in the informal economy, where monthly income is irregular. Due to these variations in income, families often move to lower-cost housing when they face financial difficulties. On the other hand, however, when their income improves, they seek better housing conditions.

However, data from a survey conducted by the São Paulo City Hall during the Covid-19 pandemic shows that the dynamics of homelessness and impoverishment have been significant. Approximately 38.5% of residents lived in regularized residences before moving to the tenements, indicating that many of these people lost formal housing and began to live in more vulnerable conditions.

The choice to live in the central region of the municipality is constant, with 67.5% of residents already living there previously. In addition, 15.4% moved to the center from other regions of the city. Even in the face of poor housing conditions, 89.5% of residents intend to continue living in the central region, signaling a strong identity and connection to this area, despite socioeconomic difficulties.

Residential real estate dynamics downtown

The recent context of intense expansion of the real estate market in downtown São Paulo has made it increasingly impossible for this low-income population to remain in the region. The intense transformation of the uses and types of buildings in the region comes at the expense

production of the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (Castro and Sigolo, 2017 and 2021). In this context, the Sé Subprefecture maintains its 1st position in the ranking, achieved in the previous three-year period, with a total of 10,987 housing units launched. The participation of Operação Urbana Centro (Urban Operation Center) in the Sub-Sé supply also increases to 61%.

Akaishi (2022) identifies four areas of concentration of developments located in market regions to the west, as shown in Map 4: (a) the República and Vila Buarque region, with products launched above R\$350 thousand reais; (b) the axis of Consolação Street towards Paulista Avenue and the Bela Vista region, with developments also above R\$350 thousand reais; (c) the Liberdade and Glicério region, mainly developments up to R\$350 thousand reais between 2016 and 2018; and (d) the Brás region, with products priced up to R\$350 thousand reais. Markets (a) and (b) further west cover areas that function as an extension of the western, southwestern, and southeastern metropolitan vectors, connecting to regions of the municipality with already consolidated markets, such as Lapa, Perdizes, Pinheiros, Jardim Paulista, and Vila Mariana. Market regions (c) and (d), east of the center, are more closely associated with the dynamics of the vectors coming from the east zone and the ABCD region.

In addition, Map 1, showing the rate of change by district, presented above, allows us to identify the high rate of reduction in tenement-type dwellings between 2010 and 2022 in districts such as Barra Funda, Consolação, Mooca, and República, with variation rates of

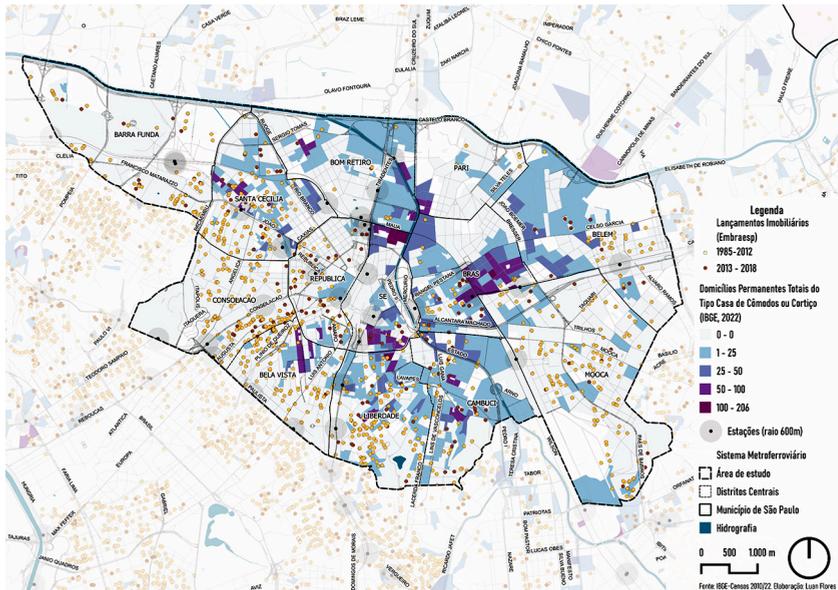
-96%, -88%, -61%, and -59%, respectively. In other words, these are areas that lost tenements during this period.

It is interesting to observe that precisely in these areas, we do not find tenements, which are located in the “negative” areas of these regions, where the real estate market is not active, as can be seen in Map 5. The poor population is increasingly seeking ways to resist and remain in the central area. The concept coined by Kohara (2013) of “tenement areas,” which are those that have vitality, dynamics, and remain tenements, illustrates precisely these pockets of concentrated low-income housing in downtown São Paulo.

What keeps this population resisting? Is there any instrument that guarantees security of tenure for these families? Several studies have already revealed that Special Zones of Social Interest (ZEIS) have not been effective as an instrument capable of guaranteeing access and permanence for the poor population downtown. Nor does Zeis “freeze” land to the point that the real estate market is not interested. On the contrary, recent studies show that private agents have been benefiting from tax and urban planning incentives aimed at the production of social housing to launch products targeted at the high-income public.

It is worth remembering that Zeis were officially incorporated into the Master Plan in 2002, because of a survey carried out by social movements, City Hall technicians, and technical advisors in areas where low-income populations already lived in precarious housing, with a view to ensuring that people could remain in the area.

Map 5 – Permanent private dwellings of the “rooming house or tenement” type *versus* new real estate launches (1985–2018)



Source: IBGE (2022) and Embraesp (2018). Preparation: Luan Flores.

Final considerations: downtown São Paulo at stake

The history of downtown São Paulo is marked by intense disputes between the working classes, who wanted to live close to their jobs, and the elite, who benefited from rising property values and the subsequent transformation of the area into a prestigious neighborhood. The dynamic between these two realities reflects the social inequalities that have always been present in the city.

For low-income workers, tenements offer an important alternative for housing in downtown São Paulo, close to jobs and essential services, but at a high cost, since rents are high and living conditions are poor. These properties

are often unsanitary, overcrowded, and vulnerable to health problems due to a lack of adequate infrastructure.

Despite being in central areas, tenements remain invisible. The lack of effective public policies and the difficulty in quantifying tenements hinders solving the problem, which directly impacts the well-being of residents, such as low school performance among children. The situation requires action by public authorities to ensure decent housing and promote regularization, especially in central areas, where infrastructure and services are more accessible.

Most residents of tenements in downtown São Paulo are black or brown. In addition, there is a significant presence of immigrants, especially from Paraguay, Haiti, and Peru. Immigration has intensified over the years, with neighborhoods

such as Luz receiving more and more foreigners, including Bolivians and Paraguayans. The presence of Africans and Haitians is also notable in the Glicério neighborhood, where there are facilities for immigrants and refugees.

Many residents see the tenement as permanent housing, with about 50% of them having lived in other tenements before, which indicates high turnover and the condition of being “rent itinerants.” The permanence in precarious housing conditions is significant. These residents, mostly heads of households who work in the informal economy, often move from one tenement to another in search of lower prices or better conditions, depending on the variation in their monthly incomes. The survey shows that a large number of families use tenements as a constant housing alternative, despite the precarious conditions, instability, and high rents, but this is due to their location in areas with a high concentration of jobs.

The territorialization of tenements based on recent census data demonstrates the persistence of significant tenement areas in regions where they traditionally existed and remain to this day, such as Brás, Luz, Glicério, Bexiga, and Barra Funda — areas historically recognized as low-income housing areas.

The massive activity in the residential real estate market in the city center, especially since 2013, has resulted in a territorial reconfiguration that is related to the reduction of tenements in central areas where there is the highest concentration of new residential real estate launches — mainly in the regions of República, Consolação, Barra Funda, and Mooca. There is a logic at stake. The residential real estate market has been transforming the territory and dynamics of the city center, with real estate production in the central area of São Paulo and has been exponentially expelling the poor population from the region.

In this sense, studies open perspectives for a better understanding of the processes of social change. In fact, tenement housing is a serious housing issue that requires knowledge of the physical, land, legal, and social aspects in order to develop appropriate and sustainable public policies. It also shows us the importance of ensuring social housing in central areas, places that have consolidated infrastructure and a concentration of jobs and services.

Through the history of surveys conducted on tenements in the city of São Paulo, we can see that the dynamics of tenements are difficult to capture accurately in quantitative, sample, or census-type surveys. In any case, these results are a “snapshot” of the situation at a static moment in time, which, due to the high dynamics and turnover of residents, do not provide durable and accurate data.

It is of paramount importance that sociodemographic research continue to be conducted on a regular basis in order to ensure the monitoring of public policies and social and urban problems. Specifically in urban studies, IBGE censuses have been a key source. However, other qualitative studies should also be taken into account, demonstrating aspects such as the economic, social, and urban costs of the peripheralization of poverty, while the central region concentrates a greater number of jobs, transportation, infrastructure, and public services.

It is necessary to continue conducting research on the subject regularly and using common methodologies, with more accurate surveys of the situation in circumscribed areas where it is possible to explore the issues in greater depth, to support the development of sustainable public policies for the tenements in downtown São Paulo, which above all ensure decent housing for low-income workers in the central areas of the city.

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Notes

- (1) Translator's note: "Cabeça de Porco" (Pig's Head, in literal translation) is a famous tenement that existed in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-19th century, known as the largest in the city, and which gave rise to the popular expression for collective and unsanitary housing. The name comes from the ornament carved in the shape of a pig's head at the entrance to the building, in contrast to the lion statues that adorned the mansions of the elite.
- (2) Survey presented in Kohara (2009).
- (3) This territorial division was used in the Morar no Centro [Living in the Center] Program (2001-2004), of the City Hall of São Paulo.
- (4) About this, see: Kohara (2013), Sampaio (2022), Sanches (2015), Pasternak (2016), among others.
- (5) The authors consider the districts of Bela Vista, Consolação, Liberdade, República, Santa Cecília and Sé to be the central ring.
- (6) The minimum wage was R\$130.00.
- (7) About this, see: Barbosa, Avanci and Kohara (2020).
- (8) It is assessed that this data is overestimated. The growth rate of favelas was applied to tenements, which is not considered appropriate due to different dynamics.
- (9) It was carried out in Pari in December 2000 and in eight other intervention sectors defined by CDHU in the second half of 2001: Barra Funda/Bom Retiro, Bela Vista, Belém, Brás, Cambuci, Liberdade, Mooca, and Santa Cecília, that is, in spatial segments of districts in the Mooca and Sé sub-municipalities.
- (10) According to the authors, as the Census considers rooms to include kitchens and bathrooms, and it is unlikely that anyone would live in a bathroom, it can be assumed that rented single-room dwellings use shared bathrooms, a characteristic typical of tenements in the strict sense.

- (11) Municipal Act n. 12.349/1997, which establishes a program of improvements for the central area of the city, creates incentives and methods for its implementation, and provides other measures.
- (12) Units launched up to R\$350 thousand reais (\$100 thousand dollars).
- (13) The analysis developed by the authors was divided into three-year periods and organized in dialogue with current macroeconomic movements and sectoral dynamics, defining cycles of expansion (2010-2012), slowdown (2013-2015), and contraction (2016-2018) cycles of formal residential supply in the São Paulo Metropolitan Region.

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Luiz Kohara: formal analysis; conceptualization; data curation; investigation; methodology; writing—original draft; writing—review & editing; supervision; validation; visualization.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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