

ID 1709 | INSURGENT CITIZENSHIP AND ITS UNFOLDINGS IN THE OCUPÉ

O COCÓ INITIATIVE

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1 INSURGENT CITIZENSHIP

The understanding of citizenship runs through the centuries and changes as civilizations change. Greeks and Romans of antiquity already questioned the relationship between State and Nation (Miraftab, 2012), shaping the bases for a structuring of what is now understood as Social Contract. This concept, created at the end of the seventeenth century, emerged in the period of transition from the medieval regime to the modern democratic regime, from the replacement of social control exercised by feudal kings and lords, by a society in which its citizens abdicate their individual freedoms in exchange for representation and equal treatment before the law. These new relations of the individual with society presuppose that the State grants and guarantees rights from the consensus of the Nation that makes it legitimate, in contrast, affiliated citizens agree with a set of duties and obligations (Miraftab, 2012).

The modern concept of citizenship encompasses the rights, expectations, and responsibilities associated with belonging to a political community framed by the Nation-State (Miraftab, 2012). The State is not able to guarantee the minimum rights to citizens in an unequal way, therefore, a differentiated treatment between citizens is perceived. The pressure on the part of the population that is more dependent on services and public policies provokes questions and increases the perception about the condition of citizens living on the margins of society, who are deprived of fundamental rights, such as housing, transport, education and health. This imbalance in the representation of different social groups makes evident the crisis in the modern model of citizenship.

To reinforce this point of view, Castells (2013) emphasizes that society is formed by power relations and those who have it build institutions according to their interests. It is only through counterpower that the excluded actors challenge the norm installed in the institutions of society with the intention of questioning their values. This claim contributes to the construction of a new model of citizenship, which Holston (2008) named as an insurgent citizenship based on the citizen as an active agent that creates new ways of achieving their rights that go against the practices of differentiated citizenship. Holston (2008) uses the term "differentiated" to describe Brazilian citizenship, in which citizens, even though they identify themselves as belonging to the same nation are not able to materialize their rights given current power relations. A process of manipulating the legal system is clearly expressed in the phrase "for friends, everything; for enemies, the law".

In this context, the potential of urban planning as a tool of spatial planning of the State that directly affects the daily life of society is highlighted. Planning can be and is considered a mediator between the needs and demands of the various agents in contemporary cities. Souza (2013) highlights several typologies of traditional urban planning that have some characteristics in common, such as technocracy, the distance from reality and popular pseudo-participation. Thus, we understand that social participation strategies are innovative instruments in the face of the traditional planning methodology, insofar as it is admitted that the State serves diverse interests and elaborates a specific space for collective interests. However, these environments are rigid and limit popular participation to one-on-one consultations, making the previously established Social Contract fragile since many citizens do not have their rights guaranteed. Recognizing the limits of participation in the decision-making, it is necessary direct actions by citizens. Recognizing this limitation, Miraftab (2012) introduces the concepts of invited spaces and invented spaces. In this way the invented spaces become an unforeseen mechanism to reinforce the State's responsibility to comply with the Social Contract. The inefficiency of the invited spaces, represented by participatory planning, demonstrates that a parcel of society is not considered in decision-making process of city. It promotes the emergence of a new model of urban planning, which Miraftab (2012) named as urban insurgent planning. It highlights the following characteristics:

- Direct action undertaken by a marginalized group as opposed to an established order that does not favor collectivity;
- Creation of an autonomous and non-institutional space for discussion;
- Claims of specific interests and values that were not met by the state and by the hegemonic powers.

This new extent of urban planning has emerged in several countries in recent years through manifestations, occupations of public spaces and other forms of expression of the discontent of the population with the current order. Among the main examples are the occupation of Tahir Square in Tunisia and Occupy Wall Street in New York, the first being the pioneer and the trigger for the other demonstrations, and the second being the most representative in terms of questioning the neoliberal regime adopted by one of the greatest economic powers in the world. Understanding the influence of this worldwide movement, our objective here is to analyze an insurgent action that occurred in the Brazilian context from the point of view of its main characteristics, identifying the actors involved and the main current norm challenged, and its impact on institutions that have the power of decision. To this end, the Ocupe o Cocó movement was chosen because it was a manifestation that occurred simultaneously to the “Jornadas de Junho” in 2013 in Brazil. It constituted a camping on the place where some trees were cut within a protected area to give place to a road overpass. The camping was a measure of protection and visibility of the impact of the road work. The participants of this direct action of protest aimed at defending the community by demanding the protection of diffuse rights to environment and urban mobility. Initially a theoretical discussion about the construction of insurgent citizenship in Brazil will be made, using two movements as landmarks: (1) urban social movements of the re-democratization period that succeeded in the institutionalization of their demands through the approval of the federal bill name Estatuto da Cidade em 2001; and (2) the “Passe Livre” movement, whose influence exploded in June 2013 in a series of street protest in all major Brazilian cities that became known as “Jornadas de Junho”. Next, we turn to the scale of the city of Fortaleza and the history that involves the Movimento Ocupe o Cocó in Fortaleza and its unfolding years after the end of the occupation is presented. Finally, an analysis is made based on the theoretical concepts initially presented in the attempt to perceive the reach of the movement and its impact on the norms and public institutions in force.

1.1 INSURGENT CITIZENSHIP IN BRAZIL

The construction of Brazilian society is defined by several waves of insurgencies interrupted during periods of suspension of the democratic regime. According to Sader (1988 apud Barroso, 2013) during the period of the military dictatorship, between 1964 and 1985, the housing social movements were gradually extinguished and those left over were subordinated to the government under a clientelist and patrimonialist relationship.

In the mid-1970s, some movements supported by the Catholic Church began to reorganize throughout Brazil, Da Paz (1993 apud Barroso, 2013) highlighted the União dos Movimentos de Moradia de São Paulo e do Interior (Union of Housing Movements of São Paulo and Interior, UMM-SP) as one of the country's main social movements in this period. The UMM-SP defended the struggle for housing and for serviced land and worked through land occupations and public buildings, manifestations, marches and negotiations with the government. In addition, the internal organization of the UMM-SP was characterized by merging traditional instruments of mobilization of the population with instruments of direct participation, besides having fixed and renewable leaderships recognized in plenary sessions and enjoying regional autonomy guided by general principles.

In 1987 and 1988, the number of land occupations for housing purposes increased considerably, and at that time the Movimento Nacional de Reforma Urbana (National Urban Reform Movement, MNRU) was founded with the aim of bringing together movements and entities to discuss and include the issue of elaboration of the new Federal Constitution. Based on this articulation, the chapter on Urban Policy inserted in the Constitution of 1988 was elaborated and, later, the Estatuto da Cidade (Statute of the City) was enacted (Barroso, 2013).

The Estatuto da Cidade provides new mechanisms of popular participation for public power, so in the 2000s an effort was made on the part of the State to create institutional environments capable of promoting dialogue with the population, among them conferences, councils and public audiences.

From 2005 to 2015 Brazil has experienced a period of economic growth, accompanied by a real increase in the minimum wage, higher employment rates and policies for housing financing particularly through the Minha Casa, Minha Vida (My House, My Life) Program (Freitas & Pequeno, 2015). This scenario of improvement in access to means of consumption and the rise of a political group linked to the grassroots movements of Urban Reform caused many social movements to settle in institutional spaces (Maricato, 2014). In addition, the institutional channels of popular participation are dominated by groups linked to the real estate market or to the public power, so in many situations these spaces of discussion have become inefficient.

These processes of accommodation and institutionalization of housing movements in Brazil were accompanied by political, social and economic transformations at the international level, which brought about a new format for the social movements that claim the Right to the City. From the second decade of the twenty-first century a series of protests around the world with a strong popular adherence occurred, such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Although varied, there were common patterns to this new generation of movements, such as dissatisfaction with the world economic crisis and the crisis of representative democracy. In general, the protesters claimed greater participation in political decisions than voting (Castells, 2013). Most of these actions were followed by physical occupation of a public space or building in order to increase the visibility of the movement and create new spaces of dialogue analogous to the concept of invented spaces.

In Brazil, the climax of this international conjuncture occurred in June 2013, a period known as the Jornadas de Junho (June Days). If compared with the movements pre- Estatuto da Cidade, it is observed that both have insurgent characteristics. However, the most recent mobilizations have no clear claim, since their struggle is broader: they fought for a fairer city in several aspects, such as mobility, housing and the environment. Another difference is the organizational structure, the most recent movements do not have easily identifiable leaders and are organized in a horizontal way, without direct influence of political parties, which are often deemed undesirable (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015). Other characteristics of these new movements are the dense and complex social diversity of the participants and the use of social media to amplify their mobilization (Alves, 2012).

The trigger for Brazilian new wave of protests in 2013 was the increase in public transportation tariffs in São Paulo. O "Movimento Passe Livre" organized, consecutive marches with a traffic blockade of cars on Avenida Paulista, which echoed throughout the country through social networks, and influenced protests in 388 cities in Brazil, among them Fortaleza (Estadão, 2013).

2 INSURGENCES IN FORTALEZA: OCUPE O COCÓ

Fortaleza is one of the densest metropolises in Brazil, with around 77 hab/ha (IBGE, 2010), and has a history of disorderly urban growth, marked by spatial and social fragmentation. This process culminated in a growing problem involving the environmental issue, as well as the consolidation of a clear social inequality pattern, which is often evident within the geographic territory of the city.

The Fortaleza Environmental Inventory (Inventário Ambiental de Fortaleza), published in 2011, quantified about 786 hectares of free green areas, parks and plazas, representing only 2.35% of the total area of the city (Moscoso, Lavor, 2011). In 2007, Fortaleza had 3m² of green area per inhabitant, while the minimum recommended by the World Health Organization is 12m² (Rocha, Lima, 2009). Nevertheless this theme historically occupies only a secondary place in the agenda of the public managers of the city.

The existence of areas with landscape and recreational potential has always been a demand of the organized movements of neighborhoods and representative entities. Nottingham (2006, apud Costa, 2014) makes a historical recovery and points out that the environmental movement of Fortaleza arose around 1976 with the creation of the Sociedade Cearense de Defesa da Cultura e do Meio Ambiente (Ceará Society for Defense of Culture and Environment, Socema) that had as guidelines the preservation of the Cocó River, and later gave rise to the Fórum da Sociedade Civil Cearense sobre Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento (Forum of the Civil Cearense Society on Environment and Development). In addition, Costa (2014) lists 18 other entities related to the struggle for green areas of the city in the period 1972 and 2012.

The sequence of events described below aims to characterize the process of negotiating the delimitation of the Cocó Park, between State and civil society, highlighting the main developments and the insurgent character of this action. The information came from two main sources, (1) a 2015 academic piece about the episode (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015) and (2) a video published by “FrenteCocó”¹. It was also complemented by document analysis and participant observation on diverse¹ episodes by the authors.



Figure 1 - Aerial view of the green area extension. Photo taken by Fernando Travessoni, accessed at: <http://diariodonordeste.verdesmares.com.br/cadernos/cidade/parque-do-coco-deve-ser-oficializado-com-1-050-ha-1.1531156>.

As a direct consequence of worldwide and national protests, the same strategy of occupation of public spaces mentioned before was observed in Fortaleza. The most representative movement denominated “Occupy the Cocó” consisted in a reaction to highway project that compromised a stretch of green area of the greater park of the city, the Park of Cocó. Although there is no official delimitation that protects this area, it is undeniable its environmental value, since it is home to one of the main rivers of the city, the Cocó River, and has two conservation units already demarcated in its vicinity, the Natural Municipal Park of Sabiaguaba’s Dunes (Parque Natural Municipal das Dunas da Sabiaguaba) and the Sabiaguaba Environmental Protection Area (Área de Proteção Ambiental da Sabiaguaba).

Besides the environmental impacts, the construction of the highway overpass has also provoked controversy around the theme of urban mobility. As part of the TRANSFOR (Fortaleza Urban Transport Program), developed by the City of Fortaleza, which aimed at the implementation of exclusive bus lines and requalification of roads, a project of a viaduct complex was elaborated that caused the deforestation of a stretch of the green space. This project was intended to relieve the intersection of Engenheiro Santana Júnior and Antônio Sales avenues and made no mention of preservation or use of the Park in activities of low environmental impact, nor did it favor non-motorized modes of travel, such as pedestrian and bikes², his priority was the execution of the viaduct as a great public work (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015). The project was elaborated in 2003 when an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA/RIMA) was elaborated and approved by state agencies. Yet, 10 year later the work that was being constructed was significantly different from the design proposal of the Impact assessment, and this was one of the main reasons for the several embargos on the work (EIA/RIMA is out of date - O Povo, 2013). It is worth mentioning that the EIA/RIMA elaboration body consists of an invited space of participation of civil society on the decision making process of the city, as it is seen as an instrument for the democratization of information. However, what is perceived is that both the EIA/RIMA of the 2003 project and the 2013 did not foster a participatory process through discussions with the population, but were conducted only to abide to a provision regarded as a bureaucratic legal requirement. As soon as the news of the project was broadcast by the mainstream media, there was resistance to the proposal accompanied by the creation of the hashtag #viadutonão (no viaduct) in social networks by groups that were against the investment. Public hearings were taken by the municipal power (ou state?) in order to initiate a dialogue with the population. Despite the questionings, the City Hall advanced with the works and overthrew 74 trees. On June 16, 2013, the work was stopped by

¹ The Frente Cocó calls itself "Front of social movements for the regulation of the Cocó Park". Available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/FrenteCoco/about/?ref=page_internal. Accessed on: November 30, 2016.

² According to Law 12.587/2012, which establishes the guidelines for National Urban Mobility Policy, urban mobility systems should treat pedestrians, non-motorized vehicles and public transport as priorities in order to promote universal accessibility.

the Public Patrimony Department, which alleged that the land was Federal Government property, and city hall had no permit to use that land. At that moment, demonstrators setup camp in the deforested area (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015). The camper have said that the occupation was the only form of preventing another tree-cutting episode, as the first was undertaken during the night in order to avoid protests (Pinheiro, 2014).

The articulation and dissemination of activities was consolidated by social networks, a strategy that added more support to the occupation, both from other social movements and from isolated individuals. Pinheiro, (2014) says that although all participants of Ocupe o Cocó had in common the goal of defending the Park, people were very different in their conceptions of social model. It had people of various ages, sexual orientations, creeds, ethnicities, races, from the various areas of knowledge that went from the popular to the academic. On the other hand, there were opposing reactions to the protests, which were positioned in favor of the viaducts through the hashtag #viadutosim (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015). Openly elitist, the counter movement arose in response to the questioning of the privileges of the elite in the face of collective yearnings. These two movements are representatives of the two citizens who live in the country, the insurgent and the differentiated. For Holston (2008) the confrontation between them creates an inherently unstable and dangerous space of citizenship in contemporary Brazil.

In parallel to the occupation, on July 17, a contest of ideas occurred to suggest alternatives to the City Hall project and reinforce the technical arguments against the construction of the viaducts. A total of 10 proposals were elaborated that had principles regarding environmental maintenance and preservation, pedestrian, cyclist and public transport prioritization. The proposals were presented in the occupation and also to the City Hall, who claimed the alternative proposals were not feasible because they were not concrete proposals (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015).



Figure 2 - First page of the file with the ten proposals. File at: https://issuu.com/cacauufc/docs/caderno____concurso_de_alternativa.



Figure 3 - Call to open meeting about the viaduct project, organized by the population itself. Accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DireitosUrbanosFortal/>

Another articulation front of the population that strengthens the character of the OccupyCocó insurgency beyond the occupation itself was the creation of an online platform called DireitosUrbanos Fortaleza (Fortaleza Urban Rights), which aimed to discuss urban issues in search of a fairer city and democracy. This initiative can be considered an invented space as it aims to fill a gap about a space for discussion and from it radiates various actions and proposals formulated by civil society. At dawn on Aug. 7, after xx days of camping, the city guard invaded the camp in an action without legal and truculent authorization, using non-lethal weapons, expelled the occupants. The Shock Battalion and the Military Police Cavalry were ordered to avoid any attempt to reoccupy. Days later, demonstrators won the right to re-occupy in justice, and this time the occupation was done in an artistic and symbolic way. After a court decision, the works were released and protesters continued to press for the delimitation of the Park by other communication channels (Brasil and Cavalcanti, 2015). Once again, the insurgency actions extrapolate the occupation period and take place in other places in a more lasting way.



Figure 4 - Presentation of the ten proposals, at the camp. Photo taken by Hector Rocha, 2013.



Figure 5 - Example of alternative proposal to the viaduct. Image created by José Otávio, accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DireitosUrbanosFortal/>.



Figure 6 - Artistic intervention at the camp. Photo accessed at: <https://i.embed.ly/1/display/resize?key=1e6a1a1efdb011df84894040444cdc60&url=http%3A%2F%2Fblogs.dia.rionordeste.com.br%2Ffolharediarios%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2013%2F08%2Fnatinho-RODRIGUE0005-C%25C3%25B3pia.jpg&width=810>



Figure 7 - Protestants x Policemen. Photo accessed at: <http://www.pstu.org.br/fortaleza-nota-do-pstu-em-defesa-do-parque-do-coco/>.

A important development of Ocupe o Cocó movement was the creation of the CocóForum , on January 20, 2015, as an initiative of the Federal Public Ministry. This is a multidisciplinary¹ discussion space made up of scientists, researchers, technicians, lawyers, members of municipal and state public authorities and representatives of civil construction (Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, Ceará State Attorney's Office, 2015).

After a series of debates, the Forum presented a proposal that was constituted in a Unit of Conservation of Integral Protection of 1,435 hectares that was delivered to the State Government on August 26, 2015. The governor created through Decree No. 31,741 of 2015, a multidisciplinary group among state, municipal and federal agencies that met behind closed doors and organized the physical demarcation of the park, still in 2015 (Frente Cocó, 2016). In April 2016, this group linked to the government issued a new proposal for the delimitation of the park called Official Proposal. The Cocó Forum in possession of the Official Proposal organized a counter-proposal enumerating divergences of the Official Proposal. The Official Proposal, differing from the Cocó Forum Proposal, delimited an area of 1,050 hectares, that is, there was a reduction of almost 400 hectares outside the protection area of the Cocó Park. The justification for the exclusion of this area was the scarcity of public resources for expropriations. Aqui cabe a figura com a official proposal e a counter proposal.

¹ The Cocó Forum was created with the objective of adding efforts for the implementation and, above all, preservation of the Cocó Ecological Park, the Federal Public Ministry in Ceará (MPF/CE) proposed, in a public manifesto published on January 20, 2015, the implantation of a permanent forum for the implementation of the Cocó Ecological Park, the so-called "Cocó Forum. Through weekly meetings, the forum brings together about 20 entities with the objective of supporting the Government of the State of Ceará in the decision-making process that has as its objective the establishment of a model of environmental management capable of providing the ecosystems that make up the Cocó region with effective and definitive protection, integrating these areas with the environmental, cultural, social and economic patrimony of the city of Fortaleza and the state of Ceará". (Retrieved from <http://www.prce.mpf.mp.br/conteudo/forum-coco/forum-coco>)

In search of a configuration that harmonized the governmental, forum and community demands, the Cocó Forum made a second counter-proposal suggesting that several areas be included again in the Park. As an alternative to the high cost of expropriations, the Government suggested combining Ecological Interest Area and Environmental Protection Area (ZPA), which would maintain ownership of the land for the owner, but would prevent deforestation (Cocó Front, 2016). Due to the lack of an official commitment of the City of Fortaleza that is made visible by the absence of the Secretary of Urbanism and Environment in the public hearing held on the Cocó Park, the tendency is that ZPAs will not be created after the regulation of the Park (Cocó Front, 2016).

The struggle to delimit and establish a Conservation Unit in the Cocó Park has been going on for more than 30 years, but only with the occupation made against the construction of the viaducts, the agenda has surfaced as an urgency of Fortaleza.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Urban policies of both Government of the State of Ceará and the Municipality of Fortaleza, have clearly not been able to meet diffuse collective interests, such as the guarantee of urban mobility and environmental preservation. In this sense we can affirm that there was a breaking of the Social Contract. State actions on the territory primarily serve the demands of social groups with greater power and political influence, such as the civil construction industry and middle-class car owners. Faced with this context, disadvantaged groups are insurgent through practices considered illegal, such as occupation of the green area and obstruction of the progress of public works. These actions provoked a change in the way of managing the territory, being incorporated or neutralized by the urban public policies.

We can consider the Occupy Cocó initiative as an instance of insurgent planning practice, the encampment and the contest of ideas are direct actions carried out by part of the population that has their right to the environment urban mobility threatened. This same group opposed an established order that does not favor the collectivity, that is, it opposes the construction of a viaduct complex that threatens a portion of the green area important to the city. In addition, this action was able to create autonomous spaces of discussion, the first of them inside the camp, and later in the social networks. The main agenda of these created spaces of participation becomes the delimitation of the Cocó Park, a specific agenda that was not attended by the hegemonic powers and by the State.

The Occupy Cocó provoked other developments in the urban planning of the city that prove the power of this type of action, such as resumption of the discussion about delimitation of the Cocó Park, forgotten by many years. Although the road work was executed as originally planned, the protests forced an increase in the dialogue of marginalized groups with the City Hall. After the protests, other urban conflicts were also mediated through direct action such as the re-design of Praça Portugal, which was announced in 2015, has undergone several changes in an attempt to meet demands of civil society; and the painting of the Ana Bilhar Street cycle lane, organized by the collective Massa Crítica, which was later incorporated by official bicycle lane system.



Figure 8 - Viaducts in operation after construction. Photo accessed at: http://tribunadoceara.uol.com.br/noticias/cotidiano-2/manifestantes-relembrem-momentos-de-luta-dois-anos-apos-ocupacao-do-coco/attachment/dsc_8396/.

Although relevant, it is important to emphasize that this movement was led by organized groups that do not represent the active peripheral militancy in the city, especially with regard to the problem of homelessness. With a population that possesses strong political capital, the contested interventions were inserted in an economically privileged area of the city, fact that granted greater media visibility to the movement. The Occupy Cocó represents a specific group of the urban society, which are not predominant in the history of insurgent movements in Brazil, but which are not predominant in the insurgent movements observed in Brazil. Therefore, we can affirm that Occupy Cocó contributed in the development of an insurgent citizenship that is consolidated through the popular control of the alterations of public spaces proposed by the State.

The struggle of the Occupy Cocó protesters was not only against the trees - cutting and the preservation of the park, but for the fundamental right to actively participate in decisions about the city. The strong mobilization demonstrates the questioning power of the population of Fortaleza, refused projects that do not dialogue with the collective demands. The eighty-four days of occupation ended violently, amidst bombs, raids and wounded, but left a deep mark on the mobilization consciousness of those who accompanied the movement. Ramon Cavalcante, one of the occupants, gave us the following statement about the Ocupa o Cocó experience:

In the year that we learned to set a limit, even if it was for twenty cents, we decided to fight for almost 80 trees. But it was not just the 80 trees, of course, there were so many others and it was to establish a limit for this city project that, systematically, destroyed the Cocó. And it was an incredible dispute, however much the press, the government, and the elite, in general, tried to discredit the movement, the trees, the occupiers. The creation of alternative proposals, the deliberations for the (still not conquered) demarcation of the Park. It was a huge learning about the right to the city, about collective construction, institutional dispute, fight and police cowardice. There were two violent evacuations conducted by the municipal guard. And a defeat, because the viaducts were built, the trees were overturned. But it was a defeat, delayed, conquering day by day and an enormous strengthening of struggle, achievements in the people that we meet again in several other disputes, in Alto da Paz, Vila das Artes, Vila Vicentina, wherever.

The Occupy Cocó can be considered as insurgent urban planning instance because it is a direct action of occupation that demands a quality urban space, a greater attention for the urban mobility in the scope of the pedestrians, cyclists and collective transport and questions the modus operandi of urban public policies that privilege specific groups to the detriment of the community.

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ID 1725 | PARTICIPATORY PLANNING: THE ROLE OF NGOS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD REGENERATION IN RIGA

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ABSTRACT: In the last decades urban regeneration has become an important part of urban policy. Availability of financial opportunities were the engine of change in the approach to the revitalization of many urban sites. At the same time even if the number of projects concerning development of new infrastructure, both social and technical, increased, they didn't always lead to the improvement of the quality of life. The participatory approach involves the wide range of stakeholders in the common process of planning. One of the ways of cooperation at the level of neighborhoods, is a work with active neighborhood residents, not only regularly informing them about the ongoing projects, but also to enable them to express their views and vision. Neighbourhood organizations are the mobilized section of a human group (the neighbourhood) which is underpinned by a local support network. The nature of these bonds of solidarity is a factor that determines the potential of local organizations for action and for their inclusion in any kind of democratic process. Riga, the capital of Latvia, has 58 neighborhoods, and more than ten of them have their own neighborhood associations and activist groups in social sites that are actively and constructively defend their neighborhood citizens. The paper examines the main fields of public activity and identifies the main challenges in cooperation process between different stakeholders involved in urban regeneration.