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MANAGING ENERGY AND RESOURCE EFFICIENT CITIES (MEREK):

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Linda M. Gondim

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## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this report is to provide the Conservation Foundation with a critical assessment of the project: "Managing Energy and Resource Efficient Cities" (MERECE). The first part presents a brief description of the International Conference on MERECE held in Coimbra, Portugal, on October 19-26, 1987. Some critical comments about the results of the conference are included, as well as a summarized account of the views expressed by the Brazilian delegation on the prospects of adopting MERECE in Brazil.

The second part reviews the major features of MERECE, based both on information gathered at the Conference and on the available literature. Rather than providing a comprehensive account, the review focuses on aspects considered relevant for the appraisal of MERECE's applicability to small and medium-sized cities of Brazil.

This appraisal is carried out in the third part, using as main criteria MERECE's potential capacity to meet demands for new solutions for urban problems. In order to identify these demands, an overview of recent patterns of urbanization in Brazil is presented, as well as a critical account of the planning experience of the last three decades. Emerging models of planning and urban management, developed as alternatives to the prevailing technocratic, centralized, and sectoral approaches are also analyzed. MERECE's strengths and weaknesses are then reviewed in the light of the main requirements of these models: popular participation, decentralization, integration, and appropriate technologies.

Conclusions and recommendations are presented in the fourth and last part of the report, which includes suggestions concerning how to make the changes necessary to render MERECE more appropriate to the realities of Brazilian city planning.

## 1. THE MEREC CONFERENCE

### 1.1. Objectives, participants, and activities

The International Conference on Managing Energy and Resource Efficient Cities (MEREC) was promoted by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Coordination Commission of the Central Region of Portugal (CCRC), with the support of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Luso-American Foundation for Development. Its main purpose was to offer opportunities for an exchange of experiences among MEREC countries, U.S. experts, and representatives of countries that could utilize the MEREC process. The Conference also sought to explore means to expand MEREC to such countries.

Besides the host country and the other two MEREC countries (Thailand and the Philippines), six countries sent representatives to the Conference: Brazil, Bolivia, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, and the People's Republic of China. The Brazilian delegation was made up of the following persons (in addition to the representative of the Conservation Foundation, the author of this report): ALAOR DE ALMEIDA CASTRO, Deputy Secretary of the Secretaria Especial do Meio-Ambiente (SEMA - special secretariat for environmental protection), an agency of the Ministério da Habitação, Urbanismo e Meio-Ambiente (MHUM - ministry of housing, urban planning and environment); CLEULER DE BARRROS LOYOLA, director of the Instituto Brasileiro de Administração Municipal (IBAM - Brazilian institute of municipal administration), a private agency located in Rio de Janeiro, and VICTOR ZVEIBIL, coordinator of IBAM's training program; JOAO CARLOS D'ELIA, mayor of the city of Penapólis (São Paulo) and ROSANGELA VECCHIA, member of the staff of the Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas de Administração Municipal (CEPAM - center for studies and research on municipal administration) and

assistant to the mayor of Penápolis; MAURICIO ANDRES RIBEIRO, head of the division for Culture, Technology and the Environment of the João Pinheiro Foundation, an agency of the Minas Gerais state government.

The Program of the Conference included presentations of the MEREC process and its workings in the Philippines, Portugal, and Thailand; site visits to MEREC projects in Guarda, Portugal; one session for the presentation of alternative technologies for water and sewage systems, management of solid waste, and building materials; two sessions devoted to presentations by the delegations from each country invited on its situation regarding local planning, management of scarce resources, and prospects for adopting MEREC.

Most of the time of the Conference, however, was used to provide detailed descriptions of MEREC's principles and technicalities and specific data on the workings of MEREC in the demonstration cities. Since the general principles of MEREC are concise and simple, and the information presented about each specific MEREC project is available in the literature, the Conference became rather repetitive. In addition, there was very little time assigned for questions by the audience (usually, no more than ten to fifteen minutes at the end of each session). This made the Conference less productive than it could have been, from the standpoint of its own objectives. In fact, participants were not provided with opportunities to acquire a critical perspective of MEREC, to the extent that most of the time was devoted to explaining how the project works, or to praising its results. Little attention was paid to either actual or potential sources of difficulties in the application of the MEREC approach (such as how to attain popular participation in the MEREC process -- an issue to which I shall return later).

## 1.2. The views of the Brazilian delegation

From two meetings and several informal talks with the members of the Brazilian delegation, it became evident that they consider the general principles behind MEREC useful as guides for urban planning, but they think that as a method and structure for action, MEREC should be modified to fit better the political reality of Brazilian cities. It should be mentioned that the head of IBAM and the representative of the Fundação João Pinheiro expressed interest in adopting MEREC with the support of USAID. The mayor of Penápolis and his assistant, who already introduced a dynamic participatory process of planning in that city, think that to formally adhere to a MEREC process at the end of the mayor's term would be both useless and politically inappropriate.

Despite these differences, there is a consensus on the need to proceed with the discussion on MEREC. All members of the Brazilian delegation have agreed on the suggestion of SEMA's representative to have a follow-up meeting in Rio de Janeiro to study the possibilities of opening such discussion to other persons and institutions involved in urban planning and management of the urban environment in Brazil.\*

Meanwhile, I have had opportunities to exchange the ideas presented in this report with the representatives of SEMA, IBAM, João Pinheiro Foundation, and the city of Penápolis, either through personal contacts, telephone calls, or correspondence. All of them received copies of the preliminary version of this report, and if the Conservation Foundation authorizes it again, they will have access to this final version.

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\* This meeting was first scheduled for December 14, but it had to be cancelled due to a strike of airline employees. We hope it will be possible to have it by the second week of January, 1988.

## 2. THE MEREC PROJECT

### 2.1. Background

The project: "Managing Energy and Resource Efficient Cities" (MEREC) was launched by the U.S. Agency for International Development in late 1981. As its name indicates, MEREC aims at planning for the efficient management of energy and scarce resources, in order to improve the quality of urban life. Moreover, as shall be seen later, MEREC brings a new approach to solve urban problems, designed specifically for small and medium-sized cities of developing countries.

Although MEREC was conceived by USAID experts as a response to the urban crisis associated with rapid population growth and predatory use of natural resources in developing countries, its current format was developed mainly during the pioneer experience carried out in the city of Tacloban (a little over 100,000 inhabitants) in the Philippines, from 1981 to 1987. Later, in 1983, it was extended to the cities of Phuket (130,000 inhabitants) in Thailand, and Guarda (40,000 inhabitants) in Portugal.

Apparently, the choice of these countries was rather ad hoc, based on the willingness of local AID missions to accept the overwork that would come from their participation in a new, experimental project.\* Selection of the demonstration cities, however, was guided by a set of criteria which all the three cities mentioned were able to meet, notwithstanding their different economic, administrative, and geographic characteristics. These criteria are worth mentioning, since they shed some light on the very principles of the project (to be discussed in the next section).

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\* Information provided by a U.S. expert involved in the conception and implementation of MEREC.

1. Local support for a MEREC project, expressed by
  - readiness of local leadership, including the mayor, to give time and high priority to MEREC activity,
  - interest in improving the local planning and management processes, and
  - concern for energy and resource efficiency.
  
2. Technical, administrative, and financial feasibility of a MEREC project, in that
  - there is a reasonably well-developed municipal administration,
  - basic information requirements regarding resources and urban sectors can be met, and
  - sufficient financial and personnel resources will be available for the MEREC effort.
  
3. Need and usefulness of a MEREC project, in terms of the
  - urgency of local need for greater resource efficiency,
  - likelihood that MEREC will reinforce other ongoing local development activity, and
  - potential for replication in other cities of the country (Bendavid-Val, 1987:2).

Today, MEREC has been expanded to seven additional cities in the Central Region of Portugal, and it has been adapted to be applied to rural administrative areas of Thailand. Furthermore, USAID expects that MEREC will be adopted in other developing countries, such as those invited to attend the International MEREC Conference.

In order to assess the applicability of a MEREC-type of program to Brazil, it is necessary to review the basic principles and administrative and financial aspects of the MEREC programs currently sponsored by USAID. To be sure, this is not the place to analyze such features in detail, since there already exists enough written material with this aim (Bendavid-Val, 1987, cites 15 such sources). Here, I shall limit the review to aspects relevant for the assessment of MEREC's strengths and shortcomings as a planning process potentially useful as an alternative to solve urban problems in small and medium-sized cities of Brazil.

## 2.2. The MEREC process: overview\*

The MEREC process involves three phases: Startup, Planning, and Implementation. During the first phase, participants get together to analyze MEREC's basic guidelines and to adapt them to the national administrative context and the local socio-economic and administrative realities. In addition, the operational structure of the program is defined: participant agencies are appointed, a full-time coordinator is chosen, and a Steering Committee (usually headed by the mayor) and Sectoral Working Groups are set up; potential sources of funding and technical expertise are identified. Finally, it is during the Startup Phase that the first ideas about resource problems and potentials are exchanged,

The main objective of the Planning Phase is to identify resources of major concern -- i.e., "those local resources concerning which the city is facing major problems or that have significant untapped potentials" (Bendavid-Val, 1987:31) -- and devise strategies to manage them more efficiently. In order to perform the latter task, Resource Situation Reports are prepared, based on data already available on the problems and opportunities associated with each resource, and on projects and plans already existing for their use. These reports also identify the urban sectors in charge of the management of each resource of concern (e.g., water and electricity supply, waste management, land use, construction, and transportation).

A key intellectual device of the MEREC process is the Strategy Matrix, which relates each urban sector (listed reading down the row headings) with each resource of concern (listed reading across column headings). (For reasons not mentioned, the method calls for the identification of a maximum

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\* This and the following sections rely heavily on Bendavid-Val (1987).

of six sectors and six resources of concern.) The boxes in the matrix are used to present the objectives established for each sector with respect to each resource.

The matrix format is also used to summarize the MERECE Action Plan, which is prepared at the end of the Planning Phase. This consists of a package of projects with the following characteristics:

- have a direct relationship with the MERECE strategy;
- be demonstrably cost-effective;
- be technologically sound and of appropriate scale;
- be manageable by families, firms, community groups, or local agencies;
- be capable of being developed further by the private sector or encouraging private sector growth;
- be capable of becoming self-sustaining;
- be capable of contributing to the local knowledge base' (Bendavid-Val, 1987:39).

Examples of MERECE projects are energy-efficient demonstration houses; land use plans and traffic and transportation plans; improvements in the management of water distribution systems; construction of biogas plants; development of methods for rainwater storage; and measures for better management of solid waste (adoption of new kinds of waste containers, use of pushcarts for waste collection, design of a new sanitary landfill).

Detailed planning for the 10 to 20 projects selected starts in the Planning Phase and continues during the Implementation/Continuation Phase. During the latter, projects are implemented and results are monitored, evaluated, and publicized.

Overall, the MERECE process takes approximately three years: Startup lasts up to three months, Planning usually requires six to nine months, and Implementation takes the remaining 27 months. However, this time frame is not rigid: the Planning Phase may extend beyond the six-month period for projects with higher research needs, whereas Implementation time varies according to the types of projects chosen.

### 2.3. Administrative and financial aspects

In the case of the three demonstration cities, the central government of each country signed a formal agreement with USAID, which provided some "seed money" for planning and implementing activities (an average of US\$ 250,000 for each city), as well as supervision and technical assistance. Overall project management was assigned to the Office of Natural Resources and Economic Development of TVA, which was considered qualified for the job due to its 50-year experience in resource management in small towns in the U.S. and its staff of experts in a wide range of urban and natural resource management fields.

Specifically, TVA's responsibilities included: to visit each MEREC city every three months, provide advice on how to conduct the Startup, Planning, and Implementation phases, refine project design, submit progress reports to USAID, assist with administrative arrangements between the city and AID and help it to prepare workplans and budgets. In addition, TVA arranged for visits of specialists in areas such as electrical engineering, transportation, land use planning, water and sewage systems, and solid waste management, whenever this kind of critical expertise was not available locally. (Technical assistance was also provided by the host country universities and private consultants.) Finally, TVA has maintained an Information System on MEREC -- available to any city interested in improving the management of energy and scarce resources -- and has promoted exchange of experiences among the MEREC demonstration cities.

The actual administrative structure of the MEREC project in the Philippines, Portugal, and Thailand varied widely, in response to the peculiarities of each national and local political-administrative context. Since local governments seem to have more autonomy in the Philippines than

in Portugal or Thailand, the main responsibility for MEREC in that country fell on the municipal government of Tacloban. In the case of Portugal, it was a regional agency -- the Central Region Coordinating Commission (CCRC) - subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior, that actually managed the project. In Thailand, the agency principally responsible for MEREC was the provincial government.

Note also that while CCRC provided the bulk of technical expertise to Guarda (Portugal), in Phuket (Thailand) MEREC relied heavily on the Prince of Songkla University. The situation of Tacloban (Philippines) in that regard is not clear; presumably, in its case there was comparatively more recourse to TVA's expertise.

In the three demonstration cities, local governments were closely involved in the MEREC process, participating along with representatives of central, provincial, and regional agencies in the Steering Committees and the Sectoral Working Groups. They also provided office space, personnel, equipment, and funds.

#### 2.4. Basic principles

A key element of the philosophy behind the MEREC process is that of identifying inefficient uses of available resources, rather than focusing on urban problems derived from the lack of resources. Although it is acknowledged that there are insufficiencies and problems not related to resource mismanagement, the MEREC approach urges the local administrations to concentrate their efforts to solve urban problems by using more efficiently resources that are already available.

This has important implications for the scope, scale, and economy of the planning process, as well as for the feasibility of the solutions

proposed. To begin with, focusing on resource management as a means to promote urban development renders urban planning more concrete and feasible than is the case of conventional planning processes, which are usually based on a comprehensive view of city structures. The latter processes, by their very nature, have no commitment to implementation, since they may identify problems whose solutions are beyond the capacity of local governments. Furthermore, conventional approaches to local planning usually do not include in their scope implementation and monitoring of specific projects.

It is important to note that improving the management of available resources, within the MEREC framework, can only work as a strategy to promote urban development in the case of cities of a modest size (somewhat above or below the 40,000 - 100,000 inhabitant range). This is so because the focus on better use of existing resources implies an option for relatively modest measures and small-scale projects, which can only have significant and lasting results in small and medium-sized cities. In other words, since their structures are not as complex and consolidated as those of large cities, it is possible to improve considerably their transportation systems, waste management methods, water and sewage services, building designs, land-use patterns, and so on, through incremental changes.

Another important element of the MEREC approach is reliance on the local level of administration. It is believed that better resource management can be achieved if a major role in the process is given to city governments, since "historical evidence is that decentralization can hasten development" (Bendavid-Val, 1987-92).

Given the fact that decentralization efforts in developing countries have amounted to little more than rhetoric, as the mentioned author recognizes, it is surprising that those who conceived and implemented MEREC

have not provided more elaborate justifications for the need to have local governments as the key parties responsible for the program. In addition, it is not clear which specific factors made it possible to overcome the tendency toward centralization in the three MEREK cities -- in other words, it is not explained why, in all three cases, provincial, regional, and national agencies did support decentralization.

The need for coordination among different levels of government and among programs for different urban sectors is another administrative feature stressed by MEREK. Historically, relations among agencies at different levels of government and even among local operating agencies in charge of different sectors of city management have been a source of difficulties for planning everywhere. Yet, in the three MEREK cities "all levels of government, as well as others, worked together successfully, if not entirely without moments of friction" (Bendavid-Val, 1987:92).

Again, no account is provided of how this remarkable accomplishment was achieved. Presumably, in the cases considered MEREK helped to convince decision-makers to adopt decentralization and coordination on the grounds of their technical merits as strategies for the efficient management of energy and resources. I shall return to this point in the following section.

#### 2.5. The MEREK project: strengths and weaknesses

A first aspect that makes MEREK an attractive approach as a method for solving urban problems in developing countries is its reliance on readily available, low-cost, small-scale solutions, making use of available resources. This commitment to feasible solutions, together with the incorporation of implementation as an intrinsic part of the process becomes more relevant when one considers that much of the planning effort carried

out in Brazil either relied on grandiose public works -- usually, with negative impacts on the environment -- or has resulted in little more than fat documents to fill the shelves of planning agencies or academic libraries.

A second strength of MEREC lies in the conception of urban problems as problems of energy and scarce resource management. On one hand, this approach allows planners to find measures for environmental protection that can be more effective and better integrated than those provided by conventional methods of urban planning, which are usually limited to land use control via regulations. On the other hand, the emphasis on energy and scarce resource management makes planning more feasible and relevant at the local level, since water and electricity supply, solid waste collection and disposal, treatment of human and industrial waste, food supply, shortage of fuel for transportation, and inefficient land uses, are problems that affect directly the daily lives of city dwellers, and whose solution, up to a certain scale, is within the reach of local governments.

Yet this strength is in itself also a shortcoming, to the extent that it approaches urban planning from a too narrow point of view. For mismanagement of natural resources is but one source of problems; another major source lies in the economic structures of developing countries which cause serious problems both for the use of natural resources and/or the development of human resources. This becomes evident in the relationship between unemployment and low income, on one hand, and poor housing and insufficient access to urban resources (as indicated by the low levels of sanitation and lack of basic services such as health, education, and recreation facilities in poor neighborhoods).

Such structural problems are consistently ignored by the MEREC approach, which relies too heavily on piecemeal technical solutions even for problems that have a strong social and political component. The building of energy-efficient demonstration houses is a good example of this, to the extent that the project only takes into consideration the need to improve design, but does not mention how the energy-efficient houses can be made accessible to the bulk of the low-income population. Likewise, projects such as experimental urban farming do not take into consideration that changing land use in the direction of resource-efficient patterns must overcome powerful economic interests of real estate groups that benefit from speculation with idle urban land.

Another related shortcoming of the MEREC approach is its technocratic bias. Such a bias is indicated, in the first place, by the underplaying of political obstacles to the adoption of low-cost, energy and resource-efficient solutions, as illustrated above. Apparently, those who conceived and applied MEREC believe that the merit of technical solutions is sufficient to make them accepted even by those whose interests are contrary to such solutions. Thus, when asked by a member of the Brazilian delegation how municipal governments assigned priority to projects, given the pressures of different interest groups supporting different projects, a TVA expert answered that the MEREC approach permits the identification of the costs and benefits of each project, and that the best projects are always agreed upon, while the worst ones are always rejected. If this indeed the case, MEREC demonstration cities are the paradise of planning experts, whereas they have very little room for politicians.

The lack of attention to local politics also becomes evident in the way MEREC conceives "participation". Both the literature and the discussions

during the MEREC conference indicate that the only actors considered relevant in the MEREC process, from the standpoint of decision-making, were public agency officials, technical experts, and "the private sector." The issue of how to incorporate in decision-making those actual or potential beneficiaries of the MEREC solutions, as well as those whose interests may be affected by such solutions, was always avoided. This is a point of concern, since this kind of participation is considered a means to render planning more equitable as well as more efficient, especially in the context of recent Brazilian experience in redemocratization, as shall be seen later.

However, the fact that MEREC does not tackle the entire scope of urban problems does not make it useless as a planning tool. In other words, the shortcomings pointed out here do not eliminate the advantages of MEREC, but rather circumscribe them. For MEREC is but one necessary means to promote urban development, although it is far from being sufficient. It is true that MEREC does not explicitly claim to provide the solution for all small and medium-sized city problems, but to the extent that it is presented and analyzed out of the context of other planning experiences, and little is mentioned about possible limits and failures, it gives the impression of pretending to be much more than it actually is.

MEREC is not a panacea for the urban crisis reaching small and medium-sized cities in developing countries; it is rather an approach to be used in a planning process that also should incorporate socio-economic and political aspects of the urban reality.

### 3. PROSPECTS FOR A MEREC-TYPE PROGRAM IN BRAZIL

#### 3.1. Criteria for assessment

Given the strengths and weaknesses of MEREC presented in the previous section, what is the applicability and value of a MEREC-type program in Brazil? To answer this question I will use, with modifications, the criteria that guided the selection of MEREC cities by USAID (see Section 2.1.).

To begin with, there seems to be, at least potentially, a number of small and medium-sized cities in Brazil that could obtain the technical, administrative, and financial resources necessary to make feasible a MEREC-type of project, thus meeting the second criterion established by USAID. This assumption is based on the fact that Brazil has almost twenty years of experience in urban and regional planning, and the country's level of development places it among the 8 largest economies in the world. Of course, to determine this actual feasibility would require a case-by-case analysis, which is beyond the scope of this report.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that mobilizing technical, administrative, and financial resources depends largely on the political will of decision-makers, which brings us to the first USAID criterion -- support for a MEREC project. This, in turn, depends, at least to a certain extent, on the need and usefulness of a MEREC project -- the third criterion. Thus, it seems reasonable to choose as basis for assessing MEREC's prospects in Brazil its potential capacity to meet demands for new solutions for urban problems, since this is a good indicator of its need, usefulness, and capacity to steer support by planners and decision-makers.

### 3.2. Urgency of need for greater resource efficiency in Brazilian cities

In terms of the actual living conditions of Brazilian cities, the need for adopting a planning process devoted to improving management of energy and scarce resources at the local level is undisputable. Although the rate of growth of the urban population has decreased during the 1950-1980 period, it has remained very high (4.83 percent for the 1970-1980 decade\*). As such rates are applied on populations increasingly larger, the absolute number of people added to the cities' population is astonishing: in the Southeast region, the number of people living in cities with over 20,000 inhabitants jumped from almost 7 million to over 36 million in 30 years! (Faria, 1983:125-7) In all regions, growth rates of cities with population over 20,000 was over 5 percent between 1950 and 1980, and the total number of such cities jumped from 96 to 482 in the same period (Faria, 1983:126). Today, the majority of the Brazilian population is urban.\*\*

Even when the Brazilian economy showed impressive growth rates,\*\*\* most of the population suffered from insufficient income and lack of steady jobs. The pattern of development pursued relied on capital-intensive technologies and in the growth of the durable-consumer goods industry, which favored income concentration. In the rural areas, government incentives promoted the substitution of export crops and cattle ranching for food crops, causing unemployment and thus out-migration to the cities. In the latter, the pace

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\* Figures for the previous decades were: 6.31 percent for 1950-1960, and 5.77 percent for 1960-1970 (Faria, 1983:128).

\*\* According to Brazil's official definition of urban population -- people living in any settlement that is seat of a municipality or its subdivisions (districts) -- the figure is close to 70 percent. However, if only localities with population over 20,000 are considered urban, this figure decreases to a little over 50 percent (Katzman, 1986:179).

\*\*\* Averaging 10 percent over the 1968-1974 period (Dickenson, 1978:21).

and model of industrialization was not adequate to meet the expanding demand for jobs. As Faria (1983) recalls, industrial activities are much more concentrated in the large cities of the Southeast than is the case of urban population, whose growth have occurred in all regions, as already mentioned.

Rapid industrialization and urbanization, associated with poverty and unemployment, have produced cities characterized by high levels of environmental pollution, poor sanitation, and precarious housing and transportation services. Malnutrition, as well as high infant mortality and illiteracy rates -- to cite but a few indicators of social well-being -- although lower than in rural areas, have not been significantly reduced even in cities of the industrialized Southeast. In fact, the book São Paulo 1975: Crescimento e Miséria (Camargo et al., 1976) shows that the pattern of capitalist growth followed has produced much misery and worsened living conditions even in Brazil's richest city.

Yet, poverty is not a feature of metropolitan areas and large cities only. In fact, data of 1974 show that whereas 13 percent of the population in metropolitan areas are below the poverty line, the figure for non-metropolitan areas is double that (Faria, 1983:158).<sup>\*</sup> The same author notices that on one hand, the concentration of poor people in larger and more dense areas may worsen living conditions, to the extent that services such as housing, sanitation, and transportation are subjected to diseconomies of agglomeration. On the other hand, the dispersal of low-income population in small and medium-sized cities may also make it more difficult to provide services such as health and education, which require a certain scale of population to be viable (Faria, 1983:159). Regardless of

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<sup>\*</sup> In rural areas the proportion of the population below the poverty line is 44 percent (Faria, 1983:158).

city size, patterns of settlement such as disorderly occupation of hills and swampy areas, or low-density peripheral subdivisions, can make provision of urban services and facilities more costly and difficult, especially if conventional modern technologies are adopted.

Due to concentration of revenues in the federal and state governments, municipal governments -- which are legally responsible for controlling land use and providing services to the urban population -- have lacked resources and technical and administrative capability to maintain and expand the infrastructure and the delivery of public services at levels compatible with the demographic growth. Patterns of settlement, both in small and larger cities, are basically determined by private developers, guided by sectoral investments in housing and transportation carried out by the state without any concern for the spatial consequences of these actions (Monte-Mór, 1980; Bernardes, 1986).

### 3.3. Demand for improving local planning and management processes

#### 3.3.1. The failure of technocratic planning

In the late 1960s, the federal government started planned interventions to solve urban problems, but despite the simultaneous creation of urban planning agencies, such interventions had a strong sectoral bias. While the latter agencies defined a national urban policy that called for decentralization, the government actually concentrated investments in the metropolitan areas of the Southeast (Andrade, 1976; Gondim, 1986; Monte-Mór, 1980).

The major responsibility for the solution of urban problems was assigned to a huge, centralized bureaucracy created in 1964, the National

Housing Bank (BNH), which also became responsible for sanitation and partially for urban transportation. Later, other agencies were created such as the National Agency for Urban Transportation (EBTU) at the federal level, the state companies of sanitation, and the state subway companies (metrô) of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

During the 1970s, urban public policies in Brazil can be characterized by a sectoral approach as well as the priority conferred to high cost, large scale solutions, decided on the basis of financial viability and other "technical" criteria. As a matter of fact, historically, Brazilian public administration has had a tendency to give priority to visible public works rather than to the quality of services supplied: thus, schools are built, but may remain closed for lack of teachers; streets are paved, but no sewerage is provided. Despite its emphasis on efficiency, the policies implemented by the military governments did not change this pattern.

Both housing, sanitation, and transportation programs followed rather conventional and rigid models. Thus, BNH's approach to housing relied mostly on the provision of finished units, that, although located in far-off complexes, were costly enough to become inaccessible to the very poor. These housing programs had also an authoritarian nature, being sometimes designed to house squatters or people expropriated from their houses to clear space for public works. The sanitation program, implemented by state companies with funds controlled by BNH, gave priority to expensive, conventional sewage and water systems. Perhaps because sewerage solutions are more expensive, the program concentrated 71 percent of its resources in water supply in the 1968-81 period, although sewage problems were worse (Fabriani & Pereira, 1987:14). In addition, it excluded local governments from decision-making, which made it more difficult to adapt land use

regulations to investments in sanitation (Fabriani & Pereira, 1987:23). As for transportation, large amounts of funds were spent to build highways, bridges, and viaducts benefitting mostly automobile owners -- i.e., the upper class -- or subway systems not accessible to the bulk of the population living in the metropolitan peripheries.

As already mentioned, the growth of state intervention in the cities coincided with the creation of several planning agencies at the federal, state, and local level. A major effort to promote urban planning was conducted by a federal agency created along with BRH, the Serviço Federal de Habitação e Urbanismo (SERFHAU - federal agency for housing and urban planning). From 1969 to 1973, the latter financed the preparation by private consultants of comprehensive plans for 357 municipalities, with very poor results (Andrade, 1976; Francisconi & Souza, 1976; Monte-Mór, 1980). According to Monte-Mór (1980), this failure was due mostly to the contradiction between SERFHAU's emphasis on local planning, on one hand, and the centralization in the federal government of resources and major decisions concerning the urban system, on the other hand.

Andrade (1976) points out the physical bias of the plans sponsored by SERFHAU as another factor that explains their lack of appeal to municipal governments. In this planning methodology, cities were reduced to a mere physical site to be divided among different uses and activities, without considering the collective actions and systems of activities which shape the space (Andrade, 1976:142).

During the Geisel government, starting in 1973, the federal government decided to approach urban planning from a global perspective, creating the Comissão Nacional de Regiões Metropolitanas e Política Urbana (CNPU), defining metropolitan regions, and establishing agencies at the state level

to plan for land use and provision of common services in those regions. However, neither CNPU or these other state planning agencies had power to effect control over urban growth, orderly patterns of land use, or efficient provision of urban services. Not only did they not control the huge funds allocated to housing and other sectors, but were not even consulted on decisions made by BNH as well as the state subway and sanitation companies. This situation did not change after CNPU was moved in 1979 from the Ministry of Planning to the Ministry of the Interior, being renamed Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Urbano (CNDU) (Bernardes, 1986).

### 3.3.2. The "abertura" and the search for new models for planning practice

The mid-1970s witnessed the onset of the current economic crisis, which brought back rising rates of inflation coupled with decreasing rates of economic growth. This severely eroded the credibility of the efficiency ideology, which the military governments had used to justify their authoritarian methods of decision-making. In addition, lack of cohesion within the military made it too costly, politically speaking, to resort to repression as the main strategy to deal with the opposition party and the growing popular movements. A new strategy to obtain at least some legitimacy for the regime became necessary, given the strengthening of the opposition, which had actually won congressional elections held in 1974. The "distensão" and later the "abertura", i.e., the gradual return to civilian rule and the partial restoration of civil liberties -- seems to have been this strategy.

The mid-1970s was also the time when people started to organize themselves both in the workplace and in the community. At first workers and

urban dwellers had to resort mostly to unorganized forms of protest such as the riots in railroad stations that occurred in mid-1974 and in the following year, in Rio and São Paulo, to protest against frequent delays and unsafe conditions of the trains. Since 1979, the labor movement has emerged as an autonomous political force, especially in the Southeast. At the same time, throughout the entire country low-income neighborhood organizations in favelas, peripheral loteamentos, and poor and middle-class neighborhoods have become increasingly active in struggling for better services, taking advantage of the liberalization of the regime (Cardoso, 1983).

This new political climate had repercussions in the government's approaches to planning and urban policies. To start with, "participação" replaced "efficiency" as the catchword for decision-makers, and it became legitimate to acknowledge a role for politicians and the people in the planning process. Whereas in many cases this amounted to little more than rhetoric, popular mobilization did conquer and maintain a space for low-income groups in the political arena. That means that decision-makers could no longer afford to systematically ignore the demands of those groups. An evidence of this is the creation by governors and mayors elected in 1982, 1985, or 1986, of committees in state and local operating or planning agencies (such as Comissões de Transporte and Conselhos de Desenvolvimento Urbano e Meio-Ambiente), in which representatives of popular organizations have a seat. Another evidence can be found in the changing conceptions of urban planning, which shall be analyzed later.

Despite the vitality of the popular movements, they are far from being a definite political force at the national political level, where decisions concerning structural problems of cities are actually made. As several students of these movements have pointed out, they suffer from lack of

continuity, localism, and incapacity to attain mass participation for sustainable periods of time. In addition, they are also vulnerable to patronage schemes and internal divisions furthered by political parties (Affonso, 1987; Cardoso, 1983). These issues must be dealt with in order to make viable popular participation in planning.

The fragility of the popular movements perhaps explains why the pattern of concentration of investments in upper-income neighborhoods has not been reversed, nor has there occurred any dramatic improvement in the quality and quantity of services provided to the bulk of the urban population. Since a real democracy has not yet been established,\* the incorporation of politics as well as popular participation into planning often takes the form of patronage, with decision-makers using public resources to maintain or expand personal power or to promote private interests. Centralization of resources in the federal government has remained, despite the struggle for a fiscal reform, and both the last military president (João Figueiredo, 1979-85) and the first civilian (José Sarney, 1985-?) have distributed funds to state and local agencies and appointed public officials on a partisan basis.

In this context, little urban planning, at least of the medium and long run type, has been promoted by the federal government. One of the few major urban planning programs carried out by the federal government in the period was the Projeto Cidades de Porte Médio (medium-sized cities program, MSC) started in 1979 and terminated in 1986. This program had as its main goal to strengthen the economic and social infrastructure of medium-sized cities so as to make them alternative loci of development, thus promoting

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\* The current president was chosen according to the rules established by the military government; labor laws restricting the right to strike and the autonomy of the labor movement are still in force, as well as eventual censorship. Moreover, the military still retain an informal but effective veto power over major political decisions.

decentralization. Specifically, the programs aimed at "financing development of urban infrastructure, the creation of employment and income, and improvement of managerial and financial capacities of urban administration" (May, 1980).

It is beyond the scope of this report to assess whether, or to what extent, the project actually accomplished its goals in the eight cities or urban agglomerations which benefitted from investments financed with a World Bank loan (35 percent of project costs).<sup>\*</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning, however, that the scale and the methodology of the MSC program indicate that it shared many of the characteristics of a conventional planning approach which has proved inadequate to solve Brazil's grave urban problems.<sup>\*\*</sup> To be sure, the MSC program had an explicit socio-economic concern in the approach to urban problems, but it failed to integrate the specific projects developed in the three areas of investment -- urban infrastructure, employment and income, and municipal administration -- in a broader strategy for economic development. This is true to the extent that MSC was basically comprised of intra-urban projects whose impact on the population's direct or indirect income and level of employment was minimum:

Its concrete investment proposals were directed more towards the city, little to the municipality and, exceptionally, to the micro-region. On the other hand, actions aiming toward improving income levels were somewhat limited, whether in the generation of jobs (direct income increase), or in the reduction of the costs associated with subsistence (indirect income increase). Actions

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<sup>\*</sup> These were: Natal, Campina Grande, and the Petrolina/Juazeiro agglomeration in the Northeast; Juiz de Fora, Montes Claros, and the agglomeration of Vitoria/Vila Velha/Cariacica in the Southeast; Pelotas and the agglomeration of Florianópolis/Biguaçu/São José/Palhoça in the South. In 1982 three more were included: São José do Rio Preto in the South; Campo Grande, in the Central-West, and the agglomeration Teresina/Timon, in the Northeast.

<sup>\*\*</sup> The following assessment is based on MDU (1987).

aimed toward augmenting food supply processes, with a consequent reduction in their cost, received little priority in the majority of the cities reached by the project (MDU, 1987:62).

According to the above-mentioned source, investment in urban infrastructure (mainly in sanitation) represented 70 percent of the program's total investments. Given the precarious living conditions in Brazilian cities, this priority could not be questioned in principle. Yet it is unfortunate that the average accomplishment of targets was around 50 percent (MDU, 1987:63). One of the reasons pointed out for this poor performance was the overestimation of the works to be done, both in terms of the number and scale of projects, and the sophisticated technical requirements set by the sectoral federal agencies in charge of supervising them (especially BNH) (MDU, 1987, passim).

In general, the interference of many agencies of the federal government, and the complicated structure set up to oversee and implement the project\* can also be pinned-up as another source of inefficiency. An example of this is the high average time that passed between the date when diagnosis, definition of strategy, and other studies were initiated, and the date when the formal agreement was signed among the federal, state, and local governments: 22 months! (MDU, 1987:8).

In general, centralization has not been overcome even in these times of "transição democrática". At the same time, the national urban planning agency has remained scarcely endowed with resources and power to promote integration of sectoral urban policies -- a situation that has not changed with the creation, in 1985, of the Ministério do Desenvolvimento Urbano e Meio-Ambiente (MDU - Ministry of Urban Development and Environment). With

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\* May (1980) provides a more detailed discussion of this structure.

the extinction of BNH in November of 1986, its staff, resources and financial and operational responsibilities regarding housing were transferred to the Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF - the federal savings bank), an agency of the Ministério da Fazenda (the federal treasury). Oddly enough, the financial responsibility for the national system of sanitation was transferred to the Conselho Monetário Nacional (national monetary council) (Fabriani & Pereira, 1987). Initially, MDU received the responsibility for formulating housing and sanitation policies without participating in their execution, but this situation was changed more recently, in October, 1987, when the Ministry was renamed Ministério de Habitação, Urbanismo e Meio-Ambiente (Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning, and Environmental Protection), to which the CEF was subordinated.

Overall, recent changes affecting the agencies in charge of formulating and executing urban policies have been the result of ad-hoc decisions motivated by the partisan interests that control power from Brasília. As the editorial of the newsletter of the Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Planejamento Urbano e Regional (ANPUR - national association of graduate studies and research in urban and regional planning) asserts,

The dispute by the urban and regional planning agencies seems today to indicate not the relevance of the questions involved in this area of action, but simply the fact that they have become empty, innocuous and, consequently, have become spaces to be occupied in response to arrangements and agreements that do not bear any relation to the terribly grave urban and regional problems that the country faces (ANPUR, 1987:1).

The destitution of planning at the federal level, the failure of sectoral programs to meet the population's needs, and the pressures from popular urban movements for immediate solutions have led planners and decision-makers to question the prevailing models of planning and urban

policies. The technocratic, centralized mode of planning, which has never found strong supporters in the Brazilian literature devoted to housing or planning seems to have been abandoned even by those who practiced it -- perhaps for lack of alternatives -- in the 1970s (Gondim, 1986). Likewise, the prevailing models for provision of housing, transportation, and sanitation have been called into question (Affonso, 1987; Fabriani & Pereira, 1987; MDU, 1986).

The recognition that those affected by government decisions have a right to participate in decision-making, regardless their level of "technical competence", has been a recurrent theme in planners' meetings, especially since the mid-1970s (see, for example, Serran, 1976). Since the late 1970s, a growing number of professionals have provided technical advice to popular movements, either through the Catholic Church, private voluntary organizations such as the Federação de Orgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional (FASE - federation of social assistance and educational organizations), or professional associations (Gohn, 1987). Planners working for government agencies have also engaged in this kind of work when these agencies have participatory planning projects (Affonso, 1987).

Private and public agencies such as IBAM in Rio, João Pinheiro Foundation in Minas Gerais, and CEPAM in São Paulo have provided technical assistance to local governments to implement planning processes that incorporate popular participation. Whereas I do not have enough data to comment on the experiences led by IBAM and the João Pinheiro Foundation, CEPAM's work during the Franco Montoro administration (1982-1986) apparently yielded fruitful results. The methodology applied, developed by a consultant in collaboration with CEPAM and local staff, has been presented in a book (Dowbor, 1987) and some of its practical results were exposed in

the MEREK conference by the mayor of Penápolis. Unfortunately, however, the current state administration has withdrawn support for the project.

Another case that deserves to be singled-out is that of Recife, a metropolitan northeastern city whose mayor has relied on a process of systematic consultation and disclosure of information regarding all programs affecting neighborhoods.\*

To be sure, these cases still constitute an exception. Moreover, there is no certainty regarding how to achieve sustained, democratic participation, once decision-makers really committed to it leave office. It is worth remembering that neighborhood associations are subjected to patronage schemes and control by authoritarian leaders, plagued with political sectarianism or partisan divisions, and often incapable to mobilize the majority of their constituencies. The acknowledgement of these difficulties, however, have become rather an incentive for planners and decision-makers to look for new methodologies and approaches to make participation in planning more feasible.

### 3.3.3. Current trends in Brazilian urban planning

Overall, there seems to be, among those who work with the urban environment, a growing interest in studies aiming at a better theoretical understanding of political, cultural, and socio-economic processes on which new conceptions of planning -- including management of natural resources --

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\* The program is named "A prefeitura vai aos bairros" (the mayor's office goes to the neighborhoods).

can be based.\* There is also a strong concern to link such studies with practical problems, using the knowledge obtained from the daily experiences of the urban population in its struggle for survival.\*\*

Cities and their neighborhoods are regarded as the locus of genuine participation, to the extent that only at the local level is it possible to achieve direct control over decisions due to the proximity between decision-makers and the population (Fabriani & Pereira, 1987:23). Decentralization is also considered a means to further innovation, since it makes difficult the adoption of symmetric models, so common in the history of public administration in Brazil. An additional stimulus to creativity comes from the very scarcity of resources available at the local level:

(...) the needs (in terms of services) are greater than the availabilities (in terms of resources), thus emphasizing the need for a realistic program that conforms with local needs. It is in this context that alternative municipal experiences have emerged: strategies are being adopted that do not require the type and quantity of material inputs demanded by traditional technology, and that have as prime innovation their formulation through social mechanisms developed in the local communities themselves (Doria, 1987, n.p.).

The search for alternative technologies that provide low-cost, small-scale solutions to urban problems is another trend of planning in Brazil.

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\* Significantly, one of the sessions of a meeting promoted this year by the MHUM-SEMA and the Federal University (II National Seminar on University and the Environment, Belém, Pará, October 16-19) was dedicated to discussing the epistemological basis of the environmental question. In addition, in the latest annual meeting of ANPUR (Teresópolis, RJ, November 23-26, 1987) several speakers recommended that more theoretical studies about the urban problems be done.

\*\* This issue, which was also emphasized in the meeting University and the Environment, was the theme of a seminar sponsored by the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo (FAUUSP - college of architecture and urban planning of the University of São Paulo) in August 1982, entitled "Everyday life, popular culture, and urban planning" (see Szmrecsanyi, 1985).

In the first place, as already mentioned, there are not enough resources to make conventional solutions, which are usually time consuming and rely on sophisticated technology, accessible to the majority of urban dwellers. Besides, the operation of large-scale projects is usually incompatible with decentralized decision-making, and may not even be the most efficient solution. Dowbor (1987:36) provides a good example of this:

SABESP [the electricity agency for the state of São Paulo] implants the same technological "package" in large or small municipalities, because it develops its plan of overall rationality -- reduced cost through standardization of equipment, for example -- for the entire state, and seeks ease of management in general terms. At the level of the small or medium-sized municipality, it is natural that such solutions simply do not take into account particular conditions, thus increasing costs. At the local level it might appear more rational, economically speaking, to construct a small hydroelectric dam, with the establishment of a local system to irrigate underutilized lands, than a regional solution that concerns itself only with the reduction in unit costs of production of energy units or with the possibility to pass contracts to the large national construction firms.

Another example of the search for new models can be found in the area of sanitation. While an institutional alternative to the centralized, large-scale national sanitation plan sponsored by BNH has been proposed by the Associação dos Serviços Municipais de Água e Esgoto (ASSEMAE - association of municipal agencies for water supply and sewerage) (Fabriani & Pereira, 1987), the option for large-scale, expensive, and sophisticated technologies such as central systems of sewerage has been criticized:

The septic tank offers treatment equal to or better than central systems, uses less energy, pollutes less, renews aquifers and, when correctly constructed and maintained, works effectively for 25 to 50 years.... In some cases, repair, substitution, or construction of septic tanks was about 50 percent cheaper than construction of conventional sewerage systems (SEMA, 1984).

Housing is another area that has witnessed radical changes in the approach to problems. Compulsory relocation of squatter settlers to housing complexes is no longer the dominant policy, and during the 1980s governments of Rio and Ceará, among others, have sponsored major programs of urbanization of favelas. Neighborhood associations have as one of their main roles that of promoting gradual improvements in the sanitation conditions, and providing public services and facilities, counting on community participation and the technical advice of planners and other professionals.

Another evidence of the importance of the movement for alternative technologies is the nationwide program set up in 1985 by CEPAM to record and disseminate innovations originating in municipalities. The program is named Rede de Comunicação de Experiências Municipais (RECEM - network of municipal experiences) and so far has information about over 1,000 experiences throughout Brazil, in the areas of building materials, popular housing construction, environmental protection, sanitation, environmental education, transportation, roads, urban regulations, and others (Doria, 1987). IBAM also has a program with similar objectives, but lesser scope (around 300 cases recorded).\*

Along with popular participation, decentralization, and alternative technologies, integration is a major feature pursued by planners in their search for new methodologies for urban problem solving. In practice, popular participation in decision-making is in itself an incentive to integration, because it requires planners to deal with urban problems in the way they appear in the everyday life of citizens, i.e., in related ways, rather than separated along the lines of bureaucratic turfs. Moreover,

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\* Personal communication.

given the crucial importance of socio-economic problems such as unemployment, low income, food supply, access to land, etc., it is likely that the population itself will require that planning go beyond the physical aspects of the urban environment.

In turn, the conception that planning must go beyond piecemeal solutions for problems requires that no urban sector be approached in isolation from the others, but rather in terms of the needs of the urban population and the available resources. If people's needs and resources are the criteria for guiding decision-making, then it becomes inevitable to deal with environmental protection from a dynamic perspective, i.e., one of management of the urban environment, rather than simple preservation of soils, forests, and wildlife. In this perspective, sanitation becomes a component of environmental preservation, and must thus include not only water and sewage treatment, but also garbage collection and disposal, control of water and air pollution, flood control, etc.

#### 3.4. How MEREC would fit in the current trends of urban planning in Brazil

Can a MEREC-type project meet the demands for participatory, decentralized, integrated, technically sound solutions for urban problems, analyzed in the previous sections? As already seen, in its original conception, MEREC brings about a commitment to immediate, low-cost, and small-scale solutions that fits well the policies and resources of local governments that have rejected traditional planning approaches. In addition, MEREC's emphasis on planning at the local level is coherent with the call for decentralization, so strong in Brazil today. Finally, the project's method for relating resources and urban sectors may be a very useful device to achieve the long-sought goal of integration, while the

approach to environmental problems in terms of management can greatly contribute to establish a new model for provision of housing, transportation, and sanitation services.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the key issue of how to incorporate popular participation into planning has been ignored by MEREC, both in the literature and in the practical experiences carried out so far. One could argue that this "aspect" could be handled by adapting MEREC to the Brazilian reality, say, by incorporating representatives of neighborhood groups in the Steering Committee. This argument, however, misses the point that what is sought is not a mere acceptance, by the population, of a planning process whose method and scope has already been decided.

Regarding the method, there is a risk that MEREC, if sponsored by a federal, regional, or state agency, becomes a package imposed on local governments, which would have to follow the same three phases, with the same timing and according to guidelines set from above. This would run contrary to the current movement against symmetric solutions, but would fit the still prevailing lack of power and resources that make municipalities the weakest partner in any dealings with other levels of government.

As for the scope of MEREC, it shares the same shortcomings of earlier Brazilian experiences of planning, as already mentioned: the conception of urban planning as limited to the management of natural resources and physical structures, practically ignoring the socio-economic dimensions of the cities.\* One can thus apply to MEREC the same criticism levelled by

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\* Although MEREC's methodology calls for the identification of "economic development resources", these are regarded basically as natural resources, infrastructure, and facilities. Significantly, MEREC's Field Manual cites as examples of these resources "mineral deposits, recreation and heritage areas, waterways, transportation fuel, industrial land, fisheries, and raw materials for local production" (USAID, n.d., p. 3).

Andrade (1976:142-3) about the plans prepared under the auspices of SERFHAU for small and medium-sized cities in Brazil:

With respect to the social structure, class relations, and the differential appropriation of space by the diverse strata, it was either supposed that these would be rearranged on the basis of physical solutions, or they were simply ignored. Why not invert the order of priorities and variables chosen for intervention? Why not plan on the basis of social and economic factors: employment, workforce training, creative utilization of social technology? Why not take advantage of the spontaneous social mechanisms for utilization of space and for the solution of housing problems, and of associations in general?

Due to this physical bias and the technocratic bias mentioned in section 3., MEREC, as it now stands, would bring no methodological contribution to the basic political dilemmas faced by local planning in Brazil. This is a very serious shortcoming, for even if planning is addressed only to conventional urban sectors, there are likely to occur conflicts around different uses of resources, such as using land for agriculture or for urban development, and the spatial and social allocation of investments (which neighborhoods and which social groups are going to benefit from the low-cost, small-scale projects proposed, since resources are usually not sufficient to contemplate the entire population?). Behind such conflicts there are often structural problems such as unequal access to land ownership and income distribution, which must at least be taken into consideration if planning is to be more than a technocratic exercise.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous analysis indicates that MEREC, as it now stands, does not meet the key demands for new models for local planning, identified in Brazil today. Nevertheless, as previously noted, there are certain methodological

features of MEREC that could yield good results if combined with a participatory, really integrated, and non-technocratic approach to planning: namely, the commitment to implementation of small-scale, low-cost solutions; reliance on the local level of government; and the approach to urban problems as a matter of inappropriate use of resources (which should be expanded to include not only natural resources but human resources as well).

The discussion of MEREC in the context of the recent Brazilian planning experience would be a necessary step to reach a decision about which changes should -- and could -- be made in MEREC to make it more appropriate to the current reality of Brazil's small- and medium-sized cities. Such a discussion would also create opportunities to divulge and criticize other planning methodologies such as that created by CEPAM and the municipal government of Recife.

A good start in that direction could be a panel comparing the principles and workings of MEREC with other experiences of local planning in Brazil, organized by the Ministério da Habitação, Urbanismo e Meio-Ambiente,\* with the participation of agencies and institutions such as CEPAM, IBAM, Fundação João Pinheiro, and ANPUR, as well as planners and decision-makers who have been directly involved in alternative planning processes. Proceedings of this national meeting could be used as a basis for regional or state seminars more specifically designed for local governments. It is assumed that at this point there would be elements to develop more concrete propositions for the adoption of the planning methodologies discussed, and that a smaller format would yield more productive discussions.

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\* SEMA's representative to the MEREC conference has already expressed interest in obtaining support from the urban planning division of the MHUM and from SEMA itself for a meeting of this kind.

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Involvement of the Tennessee Valley Authority in commencing a MEREC-style program in Brazil should be limited to presentation of an overview of MEREC's principles and experiences in the suggested national meeting. Unless this agency shows more concern with the political aspects of planning, it is likely to have very little to contribute to the changes necessary to develop a MEREC-type of program that could work in Brazil's small- and medium-sized cities.

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