

Reasons to Live in Historic Centers: The Case of Belem (Brazil)**Razões para Morar em Centros Históricos: O Caso de Belém (PA, Brasil)****Marco Aurelio Arbage Lobo**

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Resumo: Muitos centros históricos de cidades brasileiras experimentam a degradação física dos seus prédios e espaços públicos, algo comumente acompanhado do esvaziamento econômico e populacional. O Centro Histórico de Belém (CHB) também tem experimentado um declínio físico, mas, ao contrário de outras cidades, vem mantendo forte dinamismo econômico e moderado crescimento populacional. O objetivo deste trabalho é identificar as principais características socioeconômicas dos moradores que procuram CHB para viver e quais as razões mais fortes para morar no local, informação útil para a definição de uma política habitacional destinada a usar imóveis vazios existentes no local. Utilizaram-se dados do censo de 2010 e de entrevistas com 58 responsáveis por domicílios que alugam ou compraram domicílios no local nos últimos cinco anos, selecionados de forma aleatória sistemática. O teste exato multinomial foi usado como teste de significância estatística. Os resultados indicaram que a maioria dos moradores que procuraram moradia no CHB tem nível de instrução média, são de classe média baixa em termos de rendimentos e são profissionais autônomos. Proximidade de locais de trabalho e de compras diárias foram os dois motivos mais citados para viver no local. A maioria dos entrevistados também demonstrou bom nível de satisfação em viver no CHB.

Palavras-chave: Mercado Imobiliário; Habitação; Centro Histórico.

Abstract: Many historic centers of Brazilian cities undergo a physical degradation process of their buildings and public spaces, which often is accompanied by economic decline and reduction of residents. The Historic Center of Belem (HCB) also experiences a physical decline, but, unlike in other cities, it has maintained strong economic dynamism and moderate population growth. This work aims to identify the main socioeconomic characteristics of residents seeking to live in HCB and what are the main reasons leading them to live there, information that will be useful for the definition of a housing policy for occupation of existing vacant buildings in the area. To develop the work, data was collected from the 2010 population census and from a survey of 58 householders that rented or bought homes there in the past five years. The multinomial exact test was used as test of statistical significance. The results indicated that most of the residents who sought housing in the HCB have average levels of education, live in lower-middle class households and are self-employed. The proximity to workplaces and daily shopping were the two most cited reasons to live on the site. Furthermore, most of the respondents showed high levels of satisfaction about living in the HCB.

Keywords: Real Estate Market; Housing; Historic Center

INTRODUCTION

Historic centers are places where there usually is significant cultural heritage. Besides the presence of a set of buildings and public spaces relevant to the preservation of historical memory, they are symbolic references and represent the cultural identity of the city's residents. In these areas there also often is concentration of shops and administrative and religious buildings. In the past, they were residences for the wealthiest sections of society. To the historic centers converged, and still converge, the most important roads, lines of trams and, later, bus lines and other modes of public transport. Thus, in addition to space more accessible and of great economic, symbolic and architectural value, the center became the biggest concentration of tertiary activities in the city, structuring the Central Business District (CBD).

From the 1960s to the 1970s, depending on the city, the CBDs located in the historic centers of Brazilian large cities began to face traffic jam problems, degradation of the architectural and urban heritage, loss of economic dynamism and depopulation, among others, caused by the strong growth of car use, moving from the high income families to other areas of the city, decentralization of economic activities and diffusion of innovations promoted by the real estate market, which generated architectural typologies and new residential demands not available in the center.

The Historic Center of Belem (HCB) is no exception to this tendency. Its origin dates back to the Portuguese colonial period and it reached its peak at the time of the cycle of exploitation of the plant rubber in the Amazon (the late nineteenth and early twentieth century). Throughout this period, the area has accumulated an important historical, artistic and cultural heritage.

From the 1970s onwards, this heritage showed signs of accelerated physical degradation, expressed in the increasing vacancy and poor condition of many buildings. The legal protection of buildings of cultural and historical interest (municipal, state and federal governments) – called “tombamento” in Brazil – as well as initiatives of architectural and urban regeneration, were not sufficient to prevent that there were 982 households vacant or with occasional use – 16% of 6,149 –, according to the population census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2010. Furthermore, there were 1,203 parcels - 40.8% of 2,948 - on which were located buildings in poor condition (36%) or in ruins (4.8%), according to the data bank of the research called Funcionamento do Mercado Imobiliário nos Centros Históricos das Cidades Brasileiras (Real Estate Market Operation in the Historical Centers of Brazilian Cities) - MICH, which underlies this work.

Throughout this process, high-income families that had lived initially in HCB moved, in a first moment, to neighborhoods located in the surroundings and, later, to the expanded center and gated communities of high-income located on the outskirts of Belem, leaving a significant stock of unoccupied housing. Some of these properties were adapted for shops and other tertiary activities; and the other portion remained with the residential use for middle and lower income classes.

This work is part of the aforementioned MICH research, which is conducted by a network composed of three universities of Brazil and intends to investigate, in its first phase, the historic centers of Belem, Olinda, Recife and Sao Luis, all of them located in large Brazilian cities.

This study aims to identify the socioeconomic profile of the householders who rent or buy residential properties in HCB, the latter in the last five years before the survey date, and to point out the main reasons that made these people choose to live in this area, in a context where, despite high public investments in real estate qualification and public spaces, no relevant public policy to encourage housing was implemented in the area.

The large number of closed dwellings shows the high potential of the area for the implementation of policies to reduce the housing deficit in the city of Belem. Therefore, understanding the profile of the residents who rent properties or acquired homes in the past five years and the reasons that have attracted them to live in the HCB can help to increase the success of these policies. In other words, this is a valuable information for implementing a housing policy to occupy vacant or underutilized properties in HCB.

This paper is structured in five parts. The first is this introduction. The second consists of a brief characterization of Brazilian historic centers in general and of HCB in particular, and its historic evolution. The third outlines the socioeconomic profile of the selected sample. The fourth presents the reasons to live in CHB as reported by the interviewed residents. Finally, in the fifth section, some conclusions are presented.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

To develop the work, a survey was conducted in 2013, based upon the application of a questionnaire to a systematic random sampling of 58 residential addresses, which were selected from the record held by IBGE in 2010, called *Cadastro Nacional de Endereços para Fins Estatísticos* (National Register of Addresses for Statistical Purposes). This sample is part of a larger sample of 362 cases provided by the MICH research, and the selected addresses were those that fall in both situations considered in this paper: 11 units purchased in the five years prior to the survey (this period was adopted to consider only the recent situation of the real estate market in Belem) and 47 households rented in HCB. In addition, data was collected from the Brazilian Population Census (2000/2010). Taking into account that the weight of each observation is 18.577, the sample corresponds to 1,077 households, or 33.1% of the 3,249 households located in the HCB accounted for the Population Census of 2010. In other words, 1/3 of all dwellings fits the two situations mentioned.

The next step was to perform the significance tests for categorical variables that accepted only one answer. The significance level (p-value) of reference was 0.05. As some variables, have more than two categories, the multinomial exact test was used. Another reason for choosing this test is that some of these categories registered lower empirical values than five, in which it is not recommended the use of the two most common tests for nominal variables: the chi-square and G (MCDONALD, 2014). The multinomial exact test, performed by the statistical program R using the EMT package, tested the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the values of the categories in each variable. In multiple responses questions, the test was not used.

Brazilian Historic Centers And The HCB

The CBDs located in historic areas of Brazilian cities has its origin related to the development of economic activities that moved large quantities of goods around ports, railways or highways. The wholesale activity began to attract other activities such as retail trade and industries, as well as workers and access roads, starting, thus, the formation of the center itself.

Once constituted the embryo of the center, large buildings were built there: churches, forts, markets, quarters, palaces of the rulers, etc. The first squares and plazas and the first tram lines, streets and avenues were designed going there. The residences of high-income families were located inside it or nearby. All this heritage, which tells an important part of the history of each city, structured historic centers of great artistic, architectural and symbolic values.

The concentration of tertiary activities and jobs have caused significant part of the urban population to seek the center to live, shop, work or recreate. This large concentration of activities and jobs led to the formation of the CBD, which caused a significant increase in property prices.

However, during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, high-income families changed their residences to new neighborhoods that have wider streets and larger lots than those of the old area. These neighborhoods were established based on principles of the Hygienist Movement and under the impact caused by the Reform of Paris. The allocation of urban light rail lines and other items of urban infrastructure in these new neighborhoods contributed decisively to this. The homes abandoned by the high-income class were occupied by lower-income families or were turned into tenements. In the sequence, many residential areas turned out to be in bad condition.

In commercial parts of historic centers, Villaça (2001) states that, from the 1960s to the 1970s, depending on the city, the increasing congestions of motor vehicles hampered the access of high-income families to the CBD, due to the frequent use of cars in the mobility of these families. This favored the emergence of concentrations of shops and services for high-income customers in other places where vehicle access was easier. The construction of gated communities in outlying areas and the appearance of large shopping malls also contributed in this direction.

Thus, high-income families gradually stopped shopping in the CBD and left the scene. The liberal professionals that provided services to these families - doctors, dentists, lawyers and others - also left the area and went to settle in the new places where high-income families made their purchases. This fact has resulted in a large number of vacant properties. Legal disputes between heirs contributed to aggravate this problem. And underutilized or vacant properties for a long time tend to become degraded.

The growth of Brazilian cities has structured new concentrations of tertiary activities in the outskirts of metropolitan areas, which also began to compete with the CBD (TOURINHO 2006; 2007). Corrêa (1995) calls this tendency as "decentralization". As a consequence, the CBD was no longer the only large concentration of tertiary activities in the city.

As consumers of high income left the CBD, the traders had to specialize in a new consumer profile, the lower class, which are attracted by the cheap price of goods. For these consumers, what matters most is the low price of the goods and not the appearance, architectural features or physical facilities of shops. Therefore, among other reasons, local traders have reduced investments in appearance and conservation of the stores, which led to a physical decline of the buildings.

The physical deterioration tends to worsen, given the difficulties and the high maintenance costs of buildings and the restrictions imposed by the preservation laws of property to the renovation and construction of new buildings.

To sum up, Villaça (2001) emphasizes that the main cause of the popularly called "decay" of Brazilian CBDs is its abandonment by the high-income population, as a resident or client of the local tertiary activities, and the area being taken by the popular classes. He adds that, in this process, the underutilized or vacant buildings lost their real estate value and were left to deteriorate. So, it was the abandonment by elites that caused the buildings to deteriorate, and not the deterioration that caused this abandonment.

The historic process described above also occurred in HCB, which is located in the southwestern corner of the continental area of the city, being delimited by: Guama River, Guajara Bay; Assis de Vasconcelos Avenue; Gama Abreu Street and Almirante Tamandare Avenue (**Figure 1**).

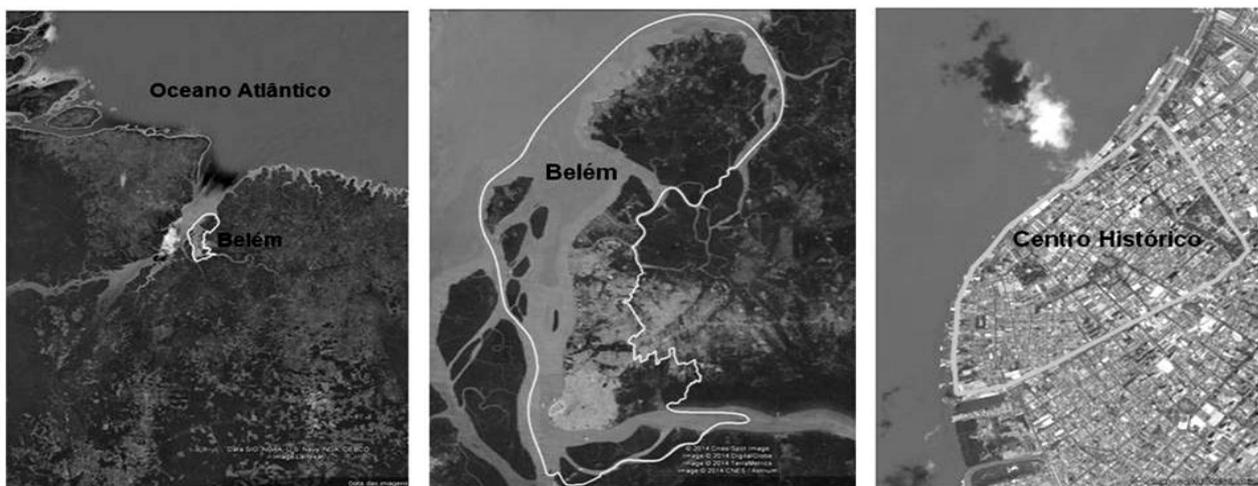


Figure 1: Location of the Historic Center of Belém Sources: Google Earth (2016); MICH research.

The HCB went through the same process of physical decline which passed in other centers of large Brazilian cities. It initially developed a port area with wholesale activities, which expanded due to the growth of retail trade and specialized services, attracting people in search of jobs and homes to the central area. In the 20th century, many traders who settled in the place were foreigners, most of them born in Middle Eastern countries. Also, located there were the residences of high-income families.

In the late nineteenth century, the local economy was driven by the production of rubber plant - exported by the ports close to the CBD. Mesquita (2008) dates the rubber boom period as the introduction of considerable infrastructural improvements such as gas lighting, the paving of streets with imported granite cobblestones, the modernization of the water supply system in addition to the increase in system communication with the telegraph among others, all provided by close business relations with European countries. According to COHAB (2009) the economic dynamism of the economy was also felt in terms of construction of big public buildings. Thus, there was significant increase in the value of urban land in the center and attraction facilities and more sophisticated and specialized services (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2: Historic Center of Belem, early 20th century Source: PARÁ (1998, p. 86; p. 116).

In the 1930s, the construction of vertical buildings began in HCB, initially in the edges and after that in its heart. The construction of these buildings is an evidence of the high demand for the area by professionals and families. The coming of these people to work or live in HCB brought further economic dynamism to the area, but the tall buildings caused damage to the local landscape identity.

However, over time, the HCB has suffered the two physical degradation processes previously mentioned, both in residential and commercial areas (**Figure 3**). In spite of this, one of differences of the HCB in relation to some Brazilian cities is that the local economy has always remained very active, despite the consumer profile change and its physical decline. More recently, the place has attracted foreign merchants again, most of which are Chinese.



Figure 3: Historic Center of Belem, 2013. Source: MICH research.

The concern for the preservation of the built heritage at the site resulted in the creation of protection laws by the Belem Municipality (Organic Law of the Municipality of Belem, 1990, regulated by the Municipal Law n. 7709, 1994) and by the federal government (Ordinance n. 54 of the Ministry of Culture, 2012), the completion of several works of architectural and urban regeneration and the encouragement of activities related to tourism and leisure. The law of 1994 also banned the construction of tall buildings in the area.

In spite of these investments, there is still a large number of vacant properties in the HCB. However, unlike what has happened in various historical centers, surveys of the IBGE Census data show that the local population increased 7.5% in the period 2000 to 2010 (from 10,067 to 10,817 inhabitants). In addition, the number of residences increased even more in the same period (23.5%), from 2,630 to 3,249 units. Ownership of dwellings increased in 249 units (1,680 to 1,929) and rented dwellings in 357 units (820 to 1,177). That data reveals a certain dynamism of HCB's real estate market, especially in the rented housing market. The next section presents the results of the field survey with people who have purchased homes in CHB five years prior to the survey, as well as tenants of residential real estate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data from the MICH survey, **Table 1** presents an estimated socioeconomic profile of home buyers and those who rented households located in HCB.

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of householders, HCB, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants (A)	Sample of Owners (B)	Total (A)+(B)	(%)	p-value	Estim. Freq.
Gender						
Female	24	8	32	55.2	0.5118	594
Male	23	3	26	44.8		483
Type of building						
House	20	4	24	41.4	0.2370	446
Apartment	27	7	34	58.6		632
Other	0	0	0	0.0		–
Place of Birth						
Belem Municipality	24	4	28	48.3	0.0059	520
Other municipality of Pará State	18	3	21	36.2		390
Other state of Brasil	5	4	9	15.5		167
Other country	0	0	0	0.0		–
Civil Status						
Single	16	4	20	34.5	0.1259	371
Married	14	3	17	29.3		316
Relationship not legally recognized	10	3	13	22.4		241
Other	7	1	8	13.8		149
Education						
Illiterate / Incompl middle school*	0	0	0	0.0	–	0
Middle school / Incompl. high school*	5	1	6	10.3	0.0001	111
High school / Incompl. College*	29	1	30	51.7		557
College*	3	7	10	17.2		186
Post-graduate	10	2	12	20.7		223
Work Status						
Formally employed	13	0	13	22.4	0.0000	241
Informally employed	2	0	2	3.4		37
Public employee	1	2	3	5.2		56
Self-employed	22	7	29	50.0		539
Retired	3	1	4	6.9		74
Other	6	1	7	12.1		130
Monthly Average Family Income						
Less than US\$ 300**	1	0	1	1.7	0.0000	19
More than US\$ 300 - US\$ 900**	16	2	18	31.0		334
More than US\$ 900 - US\$ 1.800**	14	3	17	29.3		316
More Than US\$ 1,800 - US\$ 3,000**	7	3	10	17.2		186
More than US\$ 3,000**	9	3	12	20.7		222

Source: MICH research. * Approximate US education level. ** Approximate value in US dollars (2013, July).

The presence of female and male is balanced. Even if the sample registers a higher number of women who are householders, the data cannot reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two genders, because the p-value, 0.5966, is much larger than the reference value adopted in this paper to reject the null hypothesis (0.05 or less). The same occurred in the question about the type of housing: due to the high p-value (0,237), it was not possible to assure, at 95% level of confidence, that house or apartment was the most common type, even though the survey reported the latter as the dominant type (58.6%).

Almost half of the residents were born in Belem (48.3%), and there is relevant presence of residents from other Para State municipalities (36.2%), suggesting that the HCB is a gateway to the hinterland immigrants to the capital, and that this area is an important place of articulation between the urban continent and people living in riverine cities of Amazon. The sample did not select any foreigner, but the Population Census of 2010 recorded the presence of people born in other countries residing in the place for less than ten years, mainly Chinese.

In relation to civil status, the exact multinomial test of significance results, once again, in a large p-value, 0.1633, led to the conclusion that there are no significant differences between the values of the categories. So, the percentage of each category was considered equal for the purpose of statistic inference. This suggests that there is a variety of family types living on site.

The education level of the interviewed householders is mostly intermediate: 51.7% corresponding to US high school (Brazilian middle level of education) or incomplete college, but there is an important presence of college (17.2%) and post-graduate (20.7%) levels. The work status of half of the interviewed is self-employed. The formally employed in private activities accounts for 22.4%. The monthly average family income of 60.3% of the dwellings is between US\$ 300 and US\$ 1,800, which can be considered as being lower middle class in Brazil.

As a general conclusion, there is significant diversity of families who have decided to live in HCB. Most of them are not composed of the poorest and least skilled groups of the population, as in some historic centers of large Brazilian cities, but of lower middle class people. This phenomenon is compatible to the model developed by Griffin and Ford (1980) and Ford (1996) to characterize the spatial organization of large Latin American cities. One of the zones proposed by the model is the so-called "zone of maturity", that represents the old residential areas surrounding the CBD and inhabited by middle class families.

In order to understand the reasons that make people choose places to live, Hermann and Haddad (2005) conceptualize urban amenities as a set of specific characteristics of a location with positive or negative contribution to the satisfaction of individuals. The authors state that the amenities are not restricted to natural features, such as green areas, beaches, climate etc. Also, included in the definition are the benefits and disadvantages generated by man, such as traffic, pollution, entertainment offerings, security etc. Thus, for these authors, the choices of individuals depend, in addition to the preference for a set of material goods, a portion of non-material goods that reflect the quality of life of urban centers.

Understanding urban amenities as sets of specific characteristics of a location, the historic centers of Brazilian cities have common characteristics of concentration of commercial establishments, services and jobs. As Villaça (2001) emphasizes, traditional centers of cities, despite their notorious "decays", remain sources of irradiation of urban spatial organization. Besides large concentrations of shops, offices, services and jobs, these places offer to city's population a significant portion of its historical, artistic and architectural heritage. Such features may be attractive to the people that want to live in historic areas because the residences in these areas have an important locational advantage, which results in little time spent in daily trips to work and the proximity of several commercial, service and entertainment establishments.

According to **Table 2**, 46.6% of the interviewed householders had jobs, 79.3% did their daily shopping and 55.2% held their main public recreational area inside the HCB, which shows a strong spatial relationship of the residents with the area in relation to these three very important aspects of everyday life. This is an important locational advantage in a city like Belem, where there are many traffic jams during peak hours. On the other hand, this spatial relationship is weak with respect to the most used health care facility (only 19% inside HCB), school for the children (33,3%, due to the high p-value), and relative's and friend's houses most visited (39.7% and 34.5%, respectively). It is important to note that there is a large supply of schools and health care facilities, public and private, in the neighboring districts.

Table 2: Places of householders' activities, HCB, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants (A)	Sample of Owners (B)	Total (A)+(B)	(%)	p-value	Estim. Freq.
Work Place						
Inside HCB	20	7	27	46.6	0.0000	502
Outside HCB	18	2	20	34.5		371
Do not work	8	2	10	17.2		186
Unknown/No answer	1	0	1	1.7		–
Daily Shopping						
Inside HCB	38	8	46	79.3	0.0000	854
Outside HCB	9	3	12	20.7		223
Most Used Health Care Facility						
Inside HCB	9	2	11	19.0	0.0000	204
Outside HCB	36	9	45	77.6		836
Unknown/No answer	2	0	2	3.4		–
School for the Children						
Inside HCB	10	2	12	20.7	0.0700	223
Outside HCB	14	3	17	29.3		315
No children	21	5	26	44.8		483
Unknown/No answer	2	1	3	5.2		–
Recreational Area Most Visited						
Inside BHC	26	6	32	55.2	0.0000	594
Outside BHC	19	5	24	41.4		446
Both	2	0	2	3.4		37
Relatives' Houses Most Visited						
Inside HCB	20	3	23	39.7	0.1800	427
Outside HCB	27	8	35	60.3		650
Friends' Houses Most Visited						
Inside HCB	16	4	20	34.5	0.0440	371
Outside BHC	30	7	37	63.8		687
Unknown/No answer	1	0	1	1.7		–

Source: MICH research.

The survey contained an open question, that admitted multiple answers, concerning the main advantages to live in HCB (**Table 3**). Most of the responses highlighted the fact of being near to places of work, study, shopping and services locations.

Table 3: Main advantages to live in HCB, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants (A)	Sample of Owners (B)	Total (A)+(B)	(%)	Estim. Freq.
Proximity of work/study place	21	4	25	27.8	464
Proximity of shopping/services locations	21	4	25	27.8	464
Proximity of relatives' or friends' houses	10	1	11	12.2	204
Always lived on HCB	5	1	6	16.7	111
Other	9	5	14	15.6	260

Source: MICH research.

Another open question with multiple responses, presented for the tenants (the answers of the residence buyers were not included for technical reasons), inquired about the main disadvantages to live in the area (**Table 4**). Poor public safety and fear of violence reached 20% of all 55 answers. Even though this is a general concern of Belem's population, as well as Brazilian population, insecurity in HCB is real: the study carried out by Lobo and Guimarães (2013) shows that there is high incidence of robberies and assaults in commercial areas of the HCB and, less frequently, in residential areas. Taking into account that many residents go to the CBD to work and shop daily, the perception that crime is high on site is not surprising. However, murders and other forms of crime are rare, according to the same study.

Table 4: Main disadvantages to live in HCB, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants	(%)	Estimated Frequency
Poor public safety / violence	11	20.0	204
Building in bad condition	11	20.0	204
Lack of garage or parking	9	16.4	167
Deficiency of public services	7	12.7	130
Bad location	6	10.9	111
Other problems in the building	5	9.1	93
Few recreational public areas	2	3.6	37
Other	4	7.3	74

Source: MICH research.

Buildings in bad condition was another problem often cited (20%) as a disadvantage of HCB. The MICH research found that in 30.2% of 1,214 parcels in which there are residences, the building was in bad conditions (28.3%) or in ruins (1.9%). Despite being of a high value, this percentage is more favorable compared to the percentage of total HCB's parcels in the same condition (40.8%). This means that the residential use tends to have fewer deteriorated properties than other uses, such as commercial (55.9%) and mixed activities (44%), which is another reason to promote a public housing policy in the area: a way to improve the physical condition of the local real estate stock.

In third place, lack of garage or parking was mentioned in 16.4% of the responses, which is a real problem for the families that possess cars or motorcycles.

The survey also asked respondents if the fact of being located in a historic area increases the value of the property (**Table 5**). The vast majority answers "yes" (72.4%), what suggests that many inhabitants of HCB appreciate not only the material advantages, but also the intangible aspects of the place, in accordance to the statements of Hermann and Haddad (2005).

Table 6 shows that the vast majority of respondents is satisfied to live in HCB (72.5%). Only 3.4% disapprove of the fact of living in the place. This means that the existing problems in the area are not able to affect the positive perception that residents have of the place.

Finally, it was asked to the tenants about their desire to change the place of residence (the question was asked only to the tenants because changing of residence place is much easier for those who rents a property than to the owners). Only 21.3% answered "yes", which reveals the positive opinion of the majority of the interviewed householders about living in HCB (**Table 7**).

Table 5: Location in HCB as a factor of property valuation, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants (A)	Sample of Owners (B)	Total (A)+(B)	(%)	p-value	Estim. Freq.
Yes	32	10	42	72.4	0.0000	780
No	8	1	9	15.5		167
Do not know	7	0	7	12.1	–	130

Source: MICH research.

Table 6: Level of satisfaction in living in HCB, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants (A)	Sample of Owners (B)	Total (A)+(B)	(%)	p-value	Estimated Frequency
Very satisfied	11	4	15	25.9	0.0000	279
Satisfied	21	6	27	46.6		501
Neutral	13	1	14	24.1		260
Dissatisfied	2	0	2	3.4		37
Quite dissatisfied	0	0	0	0.0		0

Source: MICH research.

Table 7: Intention to change the place of residence to another city area, 2013

Category	Sample of Tenants	(%)	p-value	Estimated Frequency
Yes	10	21.3	0.0004	186
No	37	78.7		687

Source: MICH research.

CONCLUSIONS

The data presented shows that the Historic Center of Belem, in general, is rated positively by those that rented homes or acquired residential properties in the five years prior to the survey. It suggests that there is a relevant set of urban amenities in the area in comparison to other Belem neighborhoods in the same price range. This conclusion should encourage the implementation of housing public policies in order to use the large number of empty buildings that exists in the place to attract more people to live there.

Even though there is a large variety of families that lives in the area, the main target of these housing policies should be the lower middle class, mainly those that do not possess cars or motorcycles. It is noteworthy that there was already a successful government action - the Justo Chermont Building - who converted an unoccupied vertical building, originally with business rooms, for housing: 66 apartments were offered. Unfortunately, this was only an isolated action, outside the context of a housing policy for the area.

But there are signs that things could become different. In 2007, Para State Housing Company (COHAB) carried out a study in order to support its activities in the provision of housing in CHB. The research concluded that there is market feasibility for the implementation of a policy aimed at the conversion of vacant and underutilized properties in housing units as well as a significant number of families willing to acquire real estate in the area (COHAB, 2009). Another study, conducted by Mercês *et al.* (2015) also identified the existence of supply and potential demand for conversion of empty and underutilized buildings in HCB for residential use in the form of social rent.

Such policies would be an important step not only to reduce the high housing deficit in Belem, but also as a sustainable way to preserve the unique architectural and urban heritage that exists in the HCB.

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