

Access to sanitation in workplaces: how does it look when the office is the street?

By Fernanda Deister Moreira

Tutors: Dr. Sonaly Rezende and Dr. Leo Heller

Programa de Pós Graduação em Saneamento, Meio Ambiente e Recursos Hídricos,
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Thematic Area: Right to the cities, Built Environment

Public toilets are fundamental urban facilities to guarantee the right to sanitation in public spaces and, more generally, the right to inclusive and sustainable cities. The lack of adequate sanitation solutions in public spaces ends up reinforcing inequalities and leaving some groups more neglected than others, namely: women and girls, people with disabilities, transgender people, homeless people and informal street workers (Heller, 2019).

In order to ensure that these facilities comply with the need of everyone in public spaces, according to human rights standards, five assumptions must be followed: i) availability, that is, solutions with adequate quantity according to local demand; ii) accessibility, so that solutions are accessible to all on a continuous basis; iii) affordability, so that charging for access does not limit the use of people due to their financial conditions; iv) quality and safety, so that there is no unacceptable harm to the user's health; v) dignity, acceptability and privacy, to ensure that the demand of all users is met without constraint (Heller, 2019).

So far, few studies were identified in the literature bringing the perspective of the human right to sanitation in public spaces. Concerning studies in Brazil, Silva (2017) assessed the situation of people living in homelessness in Belo Horizonte and their access to water and sanitation. The study of Moreira (2021) addressed the normative elements of human rights in the analysis of the management of public

toilets on Pampulha Lake Shore, in Belo Horizonte, a study that raises the need for greater depth in the experience of street workers in relation to access to sanitation.

Workers who perform their activities on the streets might face health problems due to the lack of sanitary solutions and having to take time away from work, which can cause economic loss, as many of them work as self-employed (Heller, 2019). Some studies carried out in Brazil highlight the importance of the availability of public toilets for street workers. Street vendors in Uruguaiana St., an important commercial center in the city of Rio de Janeiro, pointed out the lack of public toilets as their main challenge (Moreira, 2008). Two studies reported the need for street vendors to rely on the solidarity of colleagues to look at their belongings while moving to use the toilet (Costa, 2007; Ayala, 2015). In São Paulo, 32% of the 360 workers from the city center interviewed told that they used the public toilet up to twice a day, with the majority staying outside the home for more than 11 hours (Ilanamura, 2006).

Meher and Gatole (2020) conducted a study with street vendors in India and found that 44% of the 50 respondents had symptoms of urinary tract diseases related to the lack of public toilets, especially among women. Impacts on women can be even greater, when public toilets are missing, considering their biological needs such as in situations of menstruation and pregnancy (Greed, 2016).

Considering this context, we support the idea of interrelationship and interdependence between the right to the city, the labour's rights and the right to sanitation for informal workers on the street. Therefore, in this work, the routine of street vendors in the central region of the city of Juiz de Fora was observed and public toilets infrastructures identified. The pre- observation stage happened from January to February 2022. It was identified 23 points in the city center where the street vendors gather although four are the main points: Riachuelo Square, Batista de Oliveira Street, Halfeld Street and Marechal Street. They sell different products, from food to clothes. Just in Riachuelo Square there were two chemical toilets and one small toilet which the vendors have the key. Another one on-street public toilet was identified, however it was closed for remodeling. Other options identified were a private toilet where people pay R\$2,50 for a single use or restaurants or stores alternatives but it depends on the owner to permit the use.

Key words: Public toilets. Sanitation. Sustainability. Public Health.

Referencias:

- Ayala, S. O. (2015). Banheiros públicos: acesso por trabalhadores e moradores de rua; estudo exploratório em Porto Alegre. (Final Course Work) Curso Porto Alegre.
- Costa, A. M. D. S. (2007). “É um trabalho muito puxado”: significados e práticas associados ao trabalho do vendedor ambulante e suas implicações para a saúde—um olhar etnográfico.
- Greed, C. (2016). Taking women’s bodily functions into account in urban planning and policy: public toilets and menstruation. *TPR: Town Planning Review*, 87(5).
- Heller, L. (2019) Human Rights to water and sanitation in spheres of life beyond the household with an emphasis on public spaces. Human Rights Council, UN.
- Iamamura, R. B. R. (2006). Higiene pessoal fora da residência: os sanitários públicos na área central da cidade de São Paulo.
- Meher, S.R., Ghatole, P.S. (2020) A study of common health problems and utilization of healthcare facilities among self-employed street vendors of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. *Int J Community Med Public Health*, 7, 2782-9
- Moreira, A. (2008) O mercado popular da rua uruguaiana: uma ambiência para o comércio informal. Anais do II Colóquio Internacional sobre comércio e cidade: uma relação de origen. São Paulo.
- Moreira, F.D. (2021) Por uma política pública a partir do público da política: um estudo sobre banheiros na Orla da Lagoa da Pampulha sob a perspectiva dos direitos humanos. (Master Thesis) Belo Horizonte.
- Silva, P. N. (2017). *Direitos humanos e vulnerabilidade social: o acesso à água e ao esgotamento sanitário de pessoas em situação de rua* (Doctoral dissertation), Belo Horizonte.