


## BETWEEN OPEN SEWAGE AND WOODEN WALLS: AMARTYA SEN'S THEORY OF CAPACITIES IN THE VIVER MELHOR I AND II RESIDENTIAL IN MANAUS

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### ABSTRACT

The housing deficit and precarious housing are structural challenges in Brazilian cities, especially in the peripheries. In Manaus, the Residenciais Viver Melhor I and II were implemented by the Minha Casa, Minha Vida program to promote housing inclusion and improve the quality of life of the low-income population. However, it is questioned whether these projects promote human development or perpetuate vulnerabilities. Based on Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities, this study analyzes the extent to which these housing projects contribute to the expansion of residents' capacities and freedoms, as conceptualized by Amartya Sen. The research adopts a qualitative approach and deductive method, combining documentary analysis and literature review allowing to understand how housing influences capacities in areas such as health, education, employment, security, sanitation and urban mobility. The article is structured in three parts: initially, we present the Theory of Capacities and its relationship with the right to housing; then, we analyze the implementation of the Residenciais Viver Melhor I and II and the challenges faced by the residents; Finally, we investigate the impacts of these housing policies on the expansion or restriction of individual freedoms. The results indicate that, although formal access to housing has been guaranteed, the absence of an integrated strategy compromises human development, perpetuating inequalities and restrictions on basic services. It is concluded that housing policies aligned with the Theory of Capacities can improve the living conditions of the beneficiaries and contribute to fairer and more inclusive cities.

**Keywords:** Capacities. Amartya Sen. Social Housing. Living Better. Right to the City.

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## INTRODUCTION

Access to adequate housing is a fundamental right and one of the main guidelines for housing policies in Brazil. However, the realization of this right faces significant challenges, especially in the context of large cities, where socio-spatial segregation and precarious housing infrastructure persist. The **Minha Casa, Minha Vida (MCMV) Program** was launched in 2009 as one of the largest federal initiatives to reduce the housing deficit in the country by providing subsidized housing for low-income families. However, studies indicate that many of these dwellings were implemented without an integrated vision of human development, resulting in structural, social, and urban problems that compromise their effectiveness.

The iconic phrase by **Mano Brown** of the **Racionais MC's**, "*I received your ticket, means open sewer kit and wooden wall*" (Racionais MC's, 2002), is more than a verse; it is a poignant criticism of the failures of housing policies that persist to this day. The "**wooden walls**" mentioned in the song *Negro Drama* reflect the precarious reality of housing complexes such as the **Residenciais Viver Melhor I and II**, in Manaus, where the supply of housing does not necessarily translate into an improvement in the quality of life.

The Residencial **Viver Melhor I and II** were conceived within the scope of the **Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program**, aligned with the **Urban Environmental Master Plan of the Municipality of Manaus (Complementary Law No. 2, of 01/16/2014)**, to minimize the housing deficit in the city. However, these residences face severe criticism due to socio-environmental challenges, including **spatial segregation, poor urban mobility, and insufficient essential public services**, such as education, health, and security. In addition, structural problems of the buildings<sup>3</sup> and the irregular occupation of adjacent areas increase the socioeconomic vulnerability of residents, aggravated by the presence of drug trafficking<sup>4</sup> and public insecurity.

Given this scenario, it is essential **to assess whether these housing policies promote human development and expand individual freedoms**. In *Development as Freedom* (2000), **Amartya Sen** argues that true progress is not limited to income growth but must provide for the expansion of individuals' capacities, allowing them to exercise their autonomy and make meaningful choices in their lives. According to Sen (2000, p. 10),

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/am/amazonas/noticia/2025/02/06/reformas-nos-apartamentos-do-viver-melhor-em-manaus-saiba-como-se-cadastrar.ghtml>. Accessed in: mar. 2024

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/am/amazonas/noticia/2024/11/26/policia-apreende-arsenal-com-fuzis-e-drogas-enterradas-em-quintal-de-casa-na-zona-norte-de-manaus.ghtml>. Accessed in: mar. 2024

*"development consists of the elimination of deprivations of liberty that limit people's choices and opportunities to exercise their condition as agents preponderantly."*

The **Theory of Capacities** developed by Sen shifts the focus from the analysis of traditional economic development to the **effective capacity of individuals to convert resources into essential functions**, such as access to health, education, sanitation, and security. Thus, effective housing policies must go beyond physical infrastructure and incorporate strategies that ensure the **well-being, social inclusion, and autonomy of residents**.

Given these reflections, this article seeks to answer the following question:

**To what extent do the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II contribute to the expansion or restriction of the capacities and freedoms of their residents, according to Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities?** To this end, the research investigates the impacts of the housing policies adopted in these complexes, verifying whether they promote the expansion of opportunities and freedoms of residents or, on the contrary, perpetuate limitations and inequalities.

Most studies on housing policies in Brazil emphasize the **structural and economic aspects** of social housing without considering the impacts on **human development and individual freedom**. This study differs by applying the **Theory of Capacities** as a theoretical framework to analyze the effects of housing policies on the lives of residents, offering an interdisciplinary approach that unites **the Right to the City, Development Economics, and Urban Planning**.

The present study aims **to evaluate whether the Residenciais Viver Melhor I and II expanded or restricted the capacities and freedoms of their residents**, based on Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities. To this end, it investigates how different dimensions of daily life — **health, education, mobility, security, employment opportunities, and sanitation** — were impacted by the implementation of the housing program.

This investigation is relevant to the field of **Law**, especially about the **Right to the City**, as it emphasizes fundamental rights and individual freedoms in the context of housing policies. Unlike approaches that analyze only infrastructure and economic viability, this study proposes a **new look at urban legislation**, shifting the focus from the simple supply of housing to the **effective expansion of opportunities and autonomy of individuals**. In addition to contributing to the academic literature, the research provides subsidies for the

improvement of public policies, proposing more effective guidelines for urban planning and social inclusion.

The article is structured as follows: initially, we present the foundations of **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities** and its relationship with the **right to housing**. Then, we analyze the origin and evolution of the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**, highlighting the challenges faced by the residents. Subsequently, we investigated the impacts of these housing policies on the **expansion or restriction of individual freedoms**, considering **health, education, mobility, security, and employment opportunities**. Finally, the **Conclusion** summarizes the findings, contrasting the intentions of the housing program with its practical results and suggesting guidelines for more effective public policies.

#### EXPLORING THE THEORY OF CAPABILITIES: FOUNDATIONS AND APPLICABILITY

The **Theory of Capacities**, developed by **Amartya Sen**, proposes that development should not be measured only by **income growth** but rather by **the expansion of individual and collective freedoms**, allowing each person to have real opportunities to live the life they consider valuable. For Sen, **poverty is not limited to the deprivation of material resources** but extends to the **restriction of essential functions**, such as **access to education, health, security, and social participation**.

This concept is illustrated powerfully in the song "**A Vida é Desafio**" by **Racionais MC's** (2002). In one of their verses, the group expresses: *"I tried to give a quick and easy solution to my problems / Crime / But it's cursed money / The more I earned, the more I spent."*

The verses highlight one of the central dilemmas of the **Theory of Capacities**: **income, by itself, does not guarantee real freedom**. The absence of structural opportunities makes many individuals seek immediate solutions for survival, reinforcing the idea that **poverty is not just a lack of money but the impossibility of accessing meaningful choices in basic resources for their freedom**.

Sen argues that, in addition to income, **social, political, and institutional factors play a crucial role in defining the opportunities available to an individual**. In contexts of vulnerability, such as those faced by the residents of **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**, **the simple supply of housing does not necessarily translate into an improvement in the quality of life if it is not accompanied by a support structure that allows the effective expansion of capacities**.

Thus, understanding the **foundations of the Theory of Capacities** is essential to assess **the extent to which public housing policies really promote human development or only reproduce preexisting inequalities.**

It should be noted that the discussion on development has often been associated with economic growth, but several other dimensions, along with economic growth, also affect the quality of human life. By considering development as an expansion of human freedoms, Capability Theory provides a broader inclusive perspective. This allows us to holistically assess both progress and well-being. This section presents the foundations of this theory and examines how each capacity, as well as functioning, is an important tool for understanding development, along with economic aspects.

In his book *Development as Freedom* (2000), Amartya Sen challenges many of the conventional economic views. Sen offers an entirely new perspective that places all human freedoms and capabilities at the very heart of economic development. *Development as Freedom* (2000) suggests a basic shift in economic objectives; Rather than focusing on the accumulation of wealth, the economy should focus on removing the constraints that limit choices, which further restrict people's opportunities to act as free agents and to be responsible for their own lives.

At the root of Sen's argument is the premise that freedom arises from the development of people's skills. The concept of capabilities, developed in works such as *"Commodities and Capabilities"* (1985) and *"Inequality Reexamined"* (1992), considers capabilities essential to understanding human well-being and development. Capabilities demonstrate a person's real freedoms to pursue goals, which are understood as the varied combinations of states of being, along with doing, that he or she can achieve.

Capabilities, therefore, provide a deeper perspective on the freedom people have to choose different ways of living, rather than economic analysis that focuses on how much income they have. In examining this notion, Sen argues that development needs to be seen as a procedure for expanding human rights, along with an increase in income. He highlights the importance of several functions. Being healthy, having access to all education, and actively participating in all of society are elemental components of human well-being.

Sen notes that while all capacities encompass the totality of available options, the functionings represent their actual achievements, emphasizing freedom of choice as

essential to human well-being. This distinction highlights Sen's analysis, which evaluates people's potential and freedoms rather than just immediate resources or outcomes.

The influence of factors such as available resources - which are how people achieve their functioning - and the social and political context in which individuals are inserted is fundamental in Sen's theory. The relationship between resources, activities, and skills is revealed through individual factors, such as health and education, and social factors, such as institutions and prejudice.

By focusing on the need to create conditions that allow everyone to develop and exercise their full capacities, Capacities Theory is a very effective tool for assessing well-being and promoting social justice. Sen argues that the goal of public policy should be the expansion of human capacities, ensuring the full participation of all in the economic, social, and political domains of life. Thus, Sen's theory offers a way to address inequalities and promote inclusive and freedom-centered development, thus redefining the concept of development.

This freedom is manifested in access to the necessary conditions for them to fully develop and exercise their capacities and their capacity for choice. Sen argues that society and the economy need to provide the conditions for each individual to fully exploit their potential, showing a clear rejection of the traditional view of progress that focuses only on financial growth.

About deprivations of liberty, each form of deprivation can be seen as a frustration of their freedom. Some can be measured by income, others cannot, and an inadequate income ends up being a predisposition to a poor life.

Based on this assumption, **Amartya Sen** analyzes poverty from two interdependent perspectives: **the deprivation of wealth and the deprivation of freedom**. Its focus is on the relationship between both, demonstrating that **it is not possible to measure the poverty of a community only by its income or assets**. For Sen, poverty should be understood, above all, as the **restriction of basic potentialities and real opportunities** and not only as the scarcity of financial resources. In this sense, his approach proposes **a shift from the traditional analysis of poverty**, which generally focuses only on **material means**, to a broader perspective, centered on the **effective freedoms that individuals have to achieve a dignified life**. Thus, more than income itself, it is important to assess **whether people have access to conditions that allow them to develop their capacities and fully exercise their autonomy**.

Amartya Sen's **approach** is part of an **egalitarian liberal** logic, in which freedom is intrinsically linked to the exercise of **individual capacities**. For Sen, **an individual is only truly free when he can fully exercise his capacities**; otherwise, he finds himself in a condition of **restriction and deprivation of freedom**. However, the author adopts a careful stance **in addressing the role of the State in promoting these freedoms**, avoiding an explicit defense of **State intervention as the exclusive means to ensure equity**. His treatment of freedom is close to the conception of **equality**, according to which **individuals should be treated according to their inequalities, guaranteeing each one the necessary means for the development of their capacities**.

In *Inequality Reexamined* (1992), Sen starts from the premise of the **capitalist system**, recognizing that the fight against inequality **does not necessarily seek to reform or replace the current economic model** but rather **to institute effective instruments to make it more inclusive**. His proposal is based on the idea that **increasing individual capacities reduces inequalities and promotes greater social well-being** since it enables more people to have **effective access to opportunities and resources essential for their development**.

Adam Smith stated that *"it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, and the baker that we expect our dinner, but from the regard they have for their interests."* For him, the functioning of the market would depend on **individual interest** and not on the generosity or morality of economic agents. Amartya Sen, however, criticizes this view by highlighting that **the market, by itself, does not ensure that the interests of the poorest are met**, as structural inequalities often **compromise their ability to participate fully in the economy and society**. To correct this limitation, Sen emphasizes the need for institutions that promote social justice, complementing market mechanisms with public policies that expand individual capacities. In this context, he dialogues with the idea of the **"impartial observer"**, a concept inspired by Adam Smith and developed differently by **John Rawls**. While Rawls proposes that the rules of fairness be defined under a **"veil of ignorance"** that ensures fairness, Sen argues that impartiality should be broader and incorporated into public debate, allowing **different perspectives to contribute to a more just and inclusive society**.

Sen, however, expands this reflection by demonstrating that **inequalities not only affect income distribution but also erode social cohesion and compromise the efficient functioning of society**. Moreover, **not all income inequality automatically**

translates into **inequality of well-being, freedom, health, or longevity**. This means that poverty and deprivation should not only be evaluated from the economic aspect but also by **people's effective access to the conditions necessary for a dignified life**.

About **inequalities**, **Amartya Sen** (2000), in chapter 4 of *Development as Freedom*, analyzes the impact of **unemployment** based on a comparison between **Europe and the United States**. According to the author, unemployment is not limited to **income deprivation** but can generate a series of **additional needs**, such as **psychological illnesses, loss of motivation for work, deterioration of professional skills, low self-esteem, and increased morbidity rates**. In addition, prolonged unemployment contributes to **disruptions in family and social relationships, worsening social exclusion, racial tensions, and gender inequalities**.

Sen also points out that the **differences in social and political ethics between the United States and Western Europe** influence how unemployment and poverty are treated in each context. While in the US, there is a **greater acceptance of neglect towards the indigent and impoverished**, in Western Europe, **social support is considered essential to ensure the dignity of individuals**. On the other hand, American society considers the **high unemployment rates common in Europe as unacceptable**, evidencing a structural difference between the two approaches in the relationship between **the labor market, social protection, and individual freedom**.

Also, in chapter 4, **Sen demonstrates that the deprivation of capacities impacts mortality more significantly than income**, bringing as an example the reality of **African Americans in the United States**. The author points out that **the life expectancy of African Americans is considerably lower than that of poor populations in China and Kerala (India)**, demonstrating that **income alone does not guarantee freedom and well-being**. Even with a relatively high income level, African Americans suffer **severe capacity constraints**, which puts them in a condition of **real poverty**, despite apparent economic stability. This example reinforces Sen's central thesis: **development cannot be evaluated only by economic growth, but must consider the effective expansion of individual freedoms and life opportunities**.

Another relevant point in the comparison between the **United States and Europe** is the difference in **access to health**. In the US, there is **little government commitment to ensuring basic health care for the entire population**, while in **Europe, medical coverage is considered a fundamental right**. These differences reflect different views on



inequality, especially when analyzed from the perspective of Sen's **Theory of Capacities**, which understands inequality not only as an **income disparity** but as a **restriction on access to essential basic capabilities**.

In the context of **income poverty**, Sen compares **India and sub-Saharan Africa**, demonstrating that although both regions have **similar levels of literacy and infant mortality**, life expectancy in **India** was approximately **60 years in 1991**, while in **sub-Saharan Africa**, it did not exceed **52 years**. **Paradoxically**, **malnutrition rates in India were even higher than those in sub-Saharan Africa**, suggesting that **structural differences in access to health care and the implementation of public policies have a direct impact on longevity and living conditions**.

With this comparison, Sen demonstrates that **poverty cannot be evaluated only by income or traditional development indicators**, as there are **specific structural deficiencies that directly affect the basic capacities of populations**. These contrasts highlight **marked flaws in several public policies and highlight crucial issues that demand immediate attention from policymakers**, reinforcing the need for more integrated and effective approaches to combat inequality.

Reflecting on the application of **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capabilities to the housing context**, this section highlights **the complexity involved in transforming residential spaces into environments that truly promote human freedoms**. The analysis reinforces that **the simple construction of housing is not enough to guarantee the well-being of residents**, and a more holistic approach is essential, aimed at **promoting the integral development of individual and collective capacities**. Sen's theory suggests that, in addition to the provision of housing, it is essential **to invest in policies that expand social participation, access to essential services, security, and urban mobility**, mitigating the **dynamics of segregation and social exclusion** often associated with large-scale housing projects.

In concluding this section, we emphasize the importance of **deepening this reflection** based on a more concrete analysis of the challenges faced by the residents of **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**. The next section will focus on **assessing the socio-economic and structural obstacles of this housing development**, examining how **factors such as poor infrastructure, absence of adequate public services, and urban mobility difficulties directly impact residents' capacities and freedoms**. In doing so, we seek not only to enhance understanding of the challenges in implementing effective

housing policies but also to underline **the need for strategies that align urban planning and social justice, resonating with the core tenets of the Theory of Capabilities.**

## **RESIDENCIAL VIVER MELHOR I AND II: STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS ON THE EXPANSION OF RESIDENTS' CAPACITIES**

Before being expressly recognized as a **fundamental social right** through **Constitutional Amendment No. 26/2000**, which included **housing in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution of 1988**, this right was already **implicitly guaranteed** in other constitutional norms (Sarlet, 2008). However, **the right to housing is not restricted to the simple possession of a physical space** but encompasses **the necessary conditions to ensure a dignified and meaningful life**. In this sense, it is intrinsically related to the **principle of the dignity of the human person**, as its essential core **is not limited to the shelter itself but to the promotion of an environment that favors the well-being, security, and full development of individuals** (Sarlet, 2003).

Appropriate housing needs to be seen as an aspect that increases the chances of realizing human freedom rather than simply a material good. Its value lies in the structure that provides essential shelter and in the benefits it enables in terms of health, safety, and social engagement (UN, 1991). A more comprehensive approach is needed to guarantee each of these rights. Access to essential services and opportunities for personal and social development is critical for it to be effective.

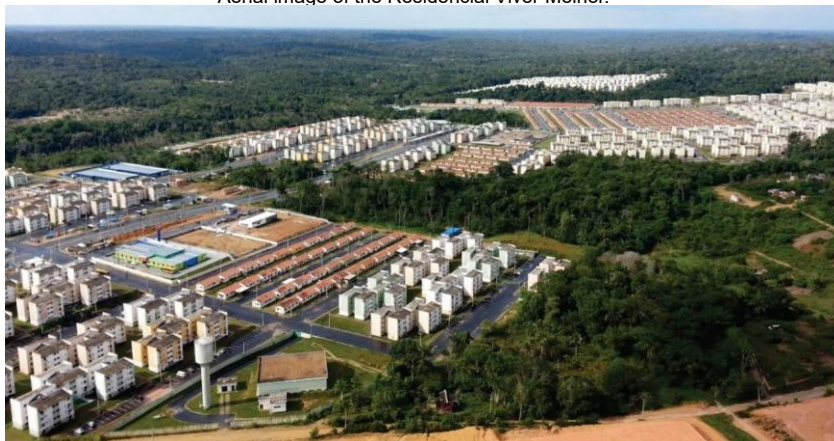
In the legal field, both national regulations and international treaties **recognize and protect the right to decent housing**, attributing to the State the responsibility of **promoting the necessary conditions for its realization** (Brasil, 2013). However, **the mere existence of a normative framework does not ensure, by itself, the overcoming of concrete housing challenges**. The **scarcity of adequate housing** persists in several regions, showing that **the formal recognition of the right does not automatically translate into its practical guarantee**, especially for **the most vulnerable populations**, who continue to face socioeconomic and institutional barriers to access decent housing conditions.

This reality resonates with the message of the song "**Vida Loka Parte 1**" (2002). The verse: *"Sometimes I think that every black person like me / Just wants a plot of land in the woods, just his own."* expresses **the desire for their housing, free from oppression and the difficulties imposed by the urban reality**, reflecting the historical exclusion of

the black and peripheral population in Brazil. This idea **reinforces the conception that housing should not be seen only as a material good but as a fundamental right to guarantee dignity, freedom, and well-being.** Thus, **housing is not limited to the construction of houses but involves conditions that allow individuals to expand their capacities and build lives that they consider valuable.**

The implementation of Residencial **Viver Melhor** is part of this context, as part of the **Minha Casa, Minha Vida** program, created to **reduce the housing deficit and offer affordable housing for low-income families.** However, **the realization of this right faced challenges that go beyond the simple construction of housing units.** This section analyzes the **trajectory of the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II, examining the difficulties faced by residents, such as socioeconomic restrictions, inadequate infrastructure, precarious public services and security problems.** In addition, **the socio-environmental impacts and the difficulties of urban integration** are discussed, which highlight the **limitations of housing policies when there is no planning that considers human development and social justice.**

Aerial image of the Residencial Viver Melhor.



Located in Manaus, the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II housing complexes emerged through the Sustainable Amazon Plan (PAS) of 2008, which created guidelines for sustainability and to improve the living conditions of the local population through the balance between development and environmental preservation. The **Growth Acceleration**

**Program (PAC)** was responsible for the development of this plan, integrating it into the **Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program (PMCMV)** within the social and urban infrastructure axis. This initiative was developed in alignment with the **demands of the Sustainable Amazon Plan (PAS)**, meeting the specific housing and structural needs of the northern region of the country.

The PMCMV focuses primarily on the construction, acquisition, and renovation of housing units for low-income families. In addition, Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) administers this program, which offers several considerable subsidies along with the Residential Lease Fund (FAR).

Started in **2009**, with the launch of the **Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program (PMCMV)** by the **Federal Government**, the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** was made possible from the adhesion of the **Government of the State of Amazonas**, formalized in **2010** through **Contract Term No. 0218.854-32/2008/MCIDADES/CAIXA-PAC II**.

Between **2010 and 2011**, the area of the State of Amazonas was donated to the **Residential Lease Fund (FAR)**, according to **Decree No. 31,603, of August 31, 2011**. From there, **Direcional Engenharia** started the works, financed by the **FAR**. The **Residencial Viver Melhor I** was inaugurated on **11/08/2012**, with **3,511 housing units**, followed by the **Residencial Viver Melhor II**, delivered on **12/18/2013**, with **5,384 units** (SUHAB, 2016).

The project was developed in **two phases**. In the **first stage**, **R\$ 190.5 million were invested**, of which **R\$ 41.3 million was from the State Government** and **R\$ 149.2 million from the Federal Government**, resulting in the delivery of **3,511 units**. The **second phase**, completed on **12/18/2013**, required an investment of **R\$ 307.9 million**, of which **R\$ 40.7 million came from the State Government**, in addition to the **donation of land as a counterpart**.

The **Superintendence of Housing of Amazonas (SUHAB)** was responsible for **selecting the families eligible** for the **Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program**, using its **database** and adopting **strict criteria**, such as **length of residence in Manaus**, **lack of previous housing benefits**, and **presence of chronic degenerative diseases among family members**. After this stage, the **demand was forwarded to Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF)**, which carried out the **draw of the beneficiaries**, starting the process of occupying the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**.

Satellite Photo and Map of the Location of Residencial Viver Melhor.



The **Residencial Viver Melhor**, located in the **Lago Azul neighborhood in Manaus**, was built to meet the housing demand of the **low-income population**, totaling **8,895 housing units** as follows:

**Residencial Viver Melhor I: 5,040 families covered, with 3,511 housing units (489 single-storey and 439 houses), delivered on 11/08/2012.**  
**Residencial Viver Melhor II: 6,825 families covered, with 5,384 housing units (894 single-storey and 648 houses), delivered on 12/18/2013.**

This survey shows the **expansion of the PMCMV in the northern region of Brazil**, reinforcing the role of housing policy in **reducing the housing deficit**. However, **despite the guarantee of formal access to housing, structural challenges related to infrastructure, access to essential services, and urban integration persist**, compromising the realization of the **right to decent housing**.

Survey of the Sets of the PMCMV – Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program – I and II.

Sent Families - CEF	Enterprise	Units	Ground Floors	Houses	Address	Delivered/Year
5.040	Residencial Viver Melhor I	3.511	489	439	Neighborhood: Lago Azul	08/11/2012
6.825	Residencial Viver Melhor II	5.384	894	648	Neighborhood: Lago Azul	18/12/2013
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8.895</b>				

Between **2014 and 2017**, the **mobilization of residents** and the **actions of the State Public Defender's Office** highlighted **serious deficiencies in the Viver Melhor I and II Residential Homes**, including a **lack of infrastructure, a limited supply of public services, and several structural problems in the housing**.

An important milestone occurred in **2018**, with the opening of **Avenida Governador José Lindoso**, Avenida das Torres, the main access road to the residential area. However, despite this progress, **significant challenges still remain**, especially in relation

to the **quality of construction, the precariousness in the provision of public services, and the lack of urban integration** (Wendling, 2023).

The **initial objectives of the Residencial Viver Melhor were to resettle families living in risk areas and reduce the housing deficit in Manaus**, one of the highest in the country. In addition, the project sought **to promote social inclusion and facilitate access to property for low-income families**, ensuring greater housing security. These goals reflect **an effort to improve quality of life and strengthen social integration through housing**.

For these goals to be effectively achieved, it is essential to adopt **integrated and well-planned approaches** in the formulation and execution of housing policies. This reinforces the importance of considering **all dimensions of sustainable urban development**, including **social, economic, and environmental aspects**, in order to ensure that housing is a real vector of transformation and inclusion.

However, the reality faced by the Viver Melhor I and II residential homes reflects a situation of vulnerability marked by economic, social, and security challenges, exacerbated by the occupation of territories by illicit activities and irregular housing.

Residencial Viver Melhor I and II, located in the expansive North Zone of Manaus, reveals itself as a case through which it is possible to observe the complexities and challenges faced by large-scale housing projects. The analysis by José Ricardo Wendling (2023) unveils not only the precariousness of the insertion of housing projects but also the process of spatial segregation that results from it, highlighting the significant barriers to access to essential jobs, services, and public equipment.

The peripheral location of the residences, the insufficiency of public transportation, and the absence of basic infrastructure emerge as critical factors that compromise the quality of life of residents, while the lack of leisure and cultural spaces, as well as basic commercial services, emphasizes the social exclusion experienced by this community.

In addition to these structural and location challenges, the study by Edilson Paula do Carmo (2018) exposes the struggle of residents against the insufficiency of schools, daycare centers, and inadequacies in water and electricity tariffs, which not only reflect negligence in urban and housing planning, but also directly affect sociability and community integration. The analysis highlights a scenario where the lack of adequate planning and government inertia translate into an environment marked by carelessness and marginalization.

The dissertation by José Carlos Santos (2019) deepens this perspective by examining the changes in the habits and customs of residents post-relocation, showing how the absence of environmental education and social preparation strategies culminated in adverse impacts on the socio-environmental dynamics of the residential. Problems such as improper waste disposal, waste of water and energy resources, and the prevalence of insecurity reflect the urgent need for corrective actions that prioritize sustainability and well-being.

It is concluded that, despite its **essential purpose of providing decent housing to low-income families**, the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** reflects **the structural and institutional challenges in the implementation of housing policies in Brazil**. The experience of these projects shows **weaknesses in urban planning, in the provision of infrastructure and in the guarantee of access to essential services**, fundamental elements for housing to **be, in fact, a vector of development and social inclusion**.

**Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities**, analyzed in **Section 2**, provides a **conceptual framework** that allows the evaluation **of the barriers faced by residents**, demonstrating that the **simple delivery of housing does not guarantee, by itself, a real expansion of freedoms and opportunities**. In **Section 3**, we examine the **main difficulties of the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**, identifying **failures in infrastructure, security, urban mobility, and social integration**.

Now, in **Section 4**, we will deepen this analysis, evaluating **to what extent the conditions of Residencial Viver Melhor I and II contribute to the expansion of the capacities and freedoms of its residents or, on the contrary, reinforce preexisting restrictions and vulnerabilities**. From this approach, we will investigate **what achievements have been achieved, what limitations persist, and what paths can be traced to align housing policies with a fairer and more sustainable model**.

## **HOUSING IMPACT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE RESIDENTIAL VIVER MELHOR I AND II: AN ANALYSIS OF CAPACITIES AND LIMITATIONS**

"So when the day gets dark / Only those who are from there know what happens / It seems to me, ignorance prevails / And we are alone / Nobody wants to hear our voice."

The verse of **Racionais MC's** (1990), in *Panic in the South Zone*, **reflects the reality of numerous peripheral communities, where social exclusion is not limited to**



the precariousness of infrastructure, but materializes in political invisibility and the absence of effective participation of residents. This scenario highlights a central dilemma of housing policies: the mere construction of housing does not ensure, by itself, human development and the expansion of individual freedoms.

In this context, this section uses **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities** to evaluate the impact of **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** on the lives of its residents. The objective is to analyze whether these housing developments contributed to the expansion of individual and collective capacities or, on the contrary, reinforced preexisting socioeconomic constraints and vulnerabilities.

According to the urban insertion parameters established by the Ministry of Cities (Wendling, 2023, p. 141), access to daycare centers and public schools is a significant challenge for the residents of **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**. These parameters determine that housing units must be close to educational institutions, ensuring easy access on foot or by public transportation. However, the reality is that the housing complex does not meet these guidelines, making it difficult to guarantee the right to education.

Based on data from the 2010 IBGE Census, Carmo (2018, p. 686) observed that there is a large deficit in the supply of early childhood education and elementary schools in the region, with more than nine thousand people needing access to educational services. The scarcity of educational institutions demonstrates the challenges families face in ensuring their children have affordable education. Even with the late construction of some schools, the lack of daycare centers continues to significantly limit the autonomy of mothers, making it difficult for them to enter the labor market and compromising the initial development of children.

This deprivation of access to early childhood and basic education can be understood in light of **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities**, which argues that true development should not be measured only by economic growth but by the expansion of human freedoms. The case of Kerala, India, exemplifies this view: even with modest economic growth, Kerala has managed to significantly reduce poverty, thanks to investments in basic education, affordable health, and equitable land distribution (Sen, 2000).



The experience of Kerala demonstrates that **access to education is not only a fundamental right but a determining factor for the autonomy of individuals and their participation in economic, social, and political life.**

This example illustrates Sen's central thesis that development should be understood as an expansion of human freedoms and not merely as an increase in per capita income or gross domestic product. For Sen, capabilities—or the opportunities and freedoms people have to lead the kinds of lives they value—are the true indicators of progress. Education and health, for example, are not only fundamental to human well-being but also empower people to participate in the economic, social, and political life of their communities.

Sen's concern highlights the importance of public policies focused on improving access to education and health and promoting equity as more effective means of fighting poverty and improving overall well-being, compared to strategies that focus exclusively on economic growth. He argues that a one-sided focus on economic growth can neglect essential aspects of human development, such as quality of life, dignity, and freedom of choice.

For **Sen**, capabilities – that is, **the real opportunities people have to lead a life they value** – should be the true criterion for measuring progress. Thus, **the absence of adequate daycare centers and schools in Residencial Viver Melhor I and II not only compromises the education of children but also restricts the possibilities of economic and social autonomy of their families, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and inequality.**

Therefore, the lack of educational services in Residencial Viver Melhor I and II **is not only an infrastructure problem but a direct deprivation of the individual and collective capacities of residents.** This scenario reinforces the need for **public policies aimed at universal access to education and health**, which, according to **Sen**, are fundamental tools to **reduce poverty and ensure truly inclusive development.**

Regarding health in the vicinity of Residencial Viver Melhor I and II, the city provided some medical services through a mobile health unit (UBS) in Viver Melhor I, according to the website of the Municipal Health Department (SEMSA).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Available at: < <https://semsa.manaus.am.gov.br/noticia/prefeitura-oferta-servicos-de-saude-em-ubs-movel-no-viver-melhor2/#:~:text=O%20subsecret%C3%A1rio%20municipal%20de%20Gest%C3%A3o,da%20popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20nos%20vazios%20assistenciais.>> Accessed in: Apr. 2024.

It turns out that, according to reports from the Manaus City Council<sup>6</sup>, the demand for medical assistance is greater than the capacity of the Basic Health Unit in RVM I, making the need to build another Basic Health Unit and an Emergency Care Unit urgent.

The existence of a Basic Health Unit is fundamental, but the overcoming of its capacity and the difficulty of access to medium and high complexity hospitals seriously limit the ability of residents to maintain a healthy life. Proximity and accessibility to health services are essential for the expansion of human capacities.

In **chapter 6 of *Development as Freedom* (2000), Amartya Sen** illustrates how poverty can lead individuals to **take extreme risks** to ensure their survival, citing the case of people who **risk running away from tigers for a dollar or two**. Although this reality is different from the Brazilian urban context, the **lack of adequate mobility also imposes daily challenges on the residents of Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**, directly affecting **their freedoms and opportunities**.

Access to **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** is via **Avenida Governador José Lindoso**, a road that **had its construction divided into two phases: the first, inaugurated in 2010, and the second, completed only in 2018**. The avenue, which stretches for **17.4 km** and connects several neighborhoods of the city, did not offer, until its completion, **direct access to the RVM**, forcing residents to use **a precarious route through the Santa Etelvina neighborhood** (Wendling, 2023, p.126). This initial condition of isolation **not only made daily commuting difficult** but also reinforced **spatial segregation**, limiting **opportunities for access to work, education, and essential services**.

Public transportation in the locality of Residencial Viver Melhor shows the great complexity of these housing complexes. Although collective public transport is an essential social right, the territorial expansion of Manaus has increased the distances between homes and work, study and leisure centers, increasing territorial segregation. RVM I and RVM II residents face some difficulties in daily life, as they have to travel long distances to access necessities. There is a need for several integrated solutions. They must promote accessibility for all and the right to the city. The comprehensive demand for travel, along with the scarcity of routes as well as the limited amount of public transport, exposes the disparity between mobility needs and available infrastructure.

<sup>6</sup> Available at: < <https://www.cmm.am.gov.br/william-alemao-denuncia-suposto-abandono-de-unidades-de-basicas-de-saude-movel-no-viver-melhor/>>. Accessed in Apr. 2024.

As Wendling (2017) points out, the location away from the housing complexes, combined with the exclusive dependence on Avenida Governador José Lindoso (Av. das Torres), makes the daily commute a challenge, especially for those who need to access the Industrial District and other central regions of the city. In addition, the low frequency of buses, the long wait, and the lack of adequate lines intensify the feeling of isolation and make it impossible to access basic opportunities, such as work, education, and leisure (WENDLING, 2017; CARMO, 2018).

The experience of Residencial Viver Melhor I and II, considering Sen's reflections, reaffirms that public policies need to address the essential conditions to expand people's capacities and freedoms, in addition to the supply of housing. This means creating an efficient and inclusive public transportation system, allowing residents to have equal access to the resources crucial to reaching their potential, as well as full participation in society.

Although the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** do not fit directly into the **classic molds of gentrification**, Henri Lefebvre's (2001) analysis of the **production of urban space in capitalism** offers a critical perspective on these housing developments. According to Lefebvre, urban processes are not neutral but reflect **power structures and economic interests that shape the territory**. Housing projects such as Residencial Viver Melhor I and II can be understood **within a broader process of reconfiguration of urban space**, which often **favors capitalist interests to the detriment of the real needs of the local population**. In this way, the precarious insertion of these housing complexes **reinforces segregation dynamics**, displacing low-income populations to peripheral areas without guaranteeing **urban infrastructure and full access to services and opportunities**.

Regarding basic sanitation policies, especially in the aspect of sanitary sewage, negligence in the management of solid waste and sewage directly affects environmental and public health, which demonstrates the critical challenges that the community faces.

The field research by José Carlos Santos (2019, p. 82) reveals a worrying lack of knowledge about selective collection, with 76% of residents unaware of this fundamental concept for sustainability. To make matters worse, almost half of the population admits that the destination of their sewage is the streams, underlining the violation of environmental guidelines and the absence of an effective sanitation system. This practice not only compromises the integrity of local aquatic ecosystems but also imposes a significant health

risk, requiring urgent interventions for environmental recovery and the promotion of sustainable practices among residents.

In this context, the absence of investment in environmental education and adequate basic sanitation infrastructure reflects a prioritization of economic development to the detriment of environmental quality and the well-being of the population. The impressive volume of solid waste collected in the city of Manaus, added to the inefficiency in the management of sewage in the residential area, requires a critical review of public policies aimed at social housing. The implementation of sanitation systems that respect environmental parameters and the promotion of environmental education are essential steps to reconciling economic development with environmental preservation and public health, thus ensuring a dignified quality of life for the residents of Residencial Viver Melhor.

These problems with open sewage and garbage directly affect the health of residents and compromise the ability to live in a healthy and safe environment. Environmental quality is fundamental to human well-being.

Another **essential capacity to be analyzed** is **freedom from an instrumental perspective**, as outlined by **Amartya Sen**, specifically about **protection and security**. **Public safety** is among **the main concerns of the residents of Residencial Viver Melhor I and II**, reflecting **the impact of the absence of effective policing and the increase in crime in the region**. This vulnerability not only compromises **residents' freedom of movement and well-being** but also **limits their opportunities to access work, education, and leisure**, directly affecting the expansion of their capacities.

According to Wendling (2023. p.153), the survey of the Territorial Sustainable Integrated Development Plan "Residencial Viver Melhor I (PDIST, 2016) already indicated a clamorous demand for reinforcement in security, with a significant portion of residents appealing for the installation of a police station in the complexes. Reports by Rodrigues and Silva (2019) show an environment marked by fear, where violence and crime threaten the tranquility and well-being of the community. This situation is exacerbated by the presence of occupations in the surroundings, aggravating the feeling of vulnerability in the face of threats and crimes, and culminating in a unison appeal for more security and protection.

The **isolation** of the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** from the **available security structures** aggravates the situation of their residents. The **considerable distance to the nearest police unit** severely limits the ability to respond quickly and effectively to the

security needs of the community. In addition, the **peripheral location** of the residences, far from the main security instances, such as the **26th Integrated Police District and the 26th Community Interactive Company of the Military Police**, compromises the **efficient coverage of the region**, leaving residents in a condition of **helplessness about public safety**. This scenario is evidenced by the frequent increase in **violent crimes**, such as police killings in the area.

The isolation of the complexes from the available security structures further aggravates the situation, with the nearest police unit located at a considerable distance, which significantly limits the ability to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of residents. The peripheral location of the residences, far from the main security instances, such as the 26th Integrated Police District and the 26th Community Interactive Company of the Military Police, implies a logistical challenge for the efficient coverage of the region, leaving an extensive area, including RVM I and II, in a condition of notable helplessness. This scenario is proven with the frequent news of police killings in the region<sup>7,8</sup>.

**Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities** suggests that **freedom is not only the ability to make various choices (functionings) but also protection from fear and violence**, which are **fundamental to the ability to live fully**. Public **safety**, therefore, is not just an end in itself but an **essential means to expand human freedoms**, allowing individuals to **exercise their capabilities fully and safely**.

In this context, the **lack of public security** in the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II Residential Homes** severely limits freedom of movement and affects residents' sense of security, compromising their **ability to fully participate in social and economic life**. The **constant fear of violence and crime** restricts residents' opportunities to **engage in productive, educational, and social activities**, undermining their freedom of choice and their ability to **develop fully**.

In addition, **in the light of Sen's theory**, the situation in the **Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** illustrates a **failure of the State to guarantee the instrumental freedoms of its citizens**. **Protection from violence and the ability to live in safety are essential conditions** for individuals to access **other freedoms and abilities**, such as **education, health, and employment**. Therefore, **the absence of effective security** is not only a

**Comentado [001]:** Essas notas também estão em Times New Roman.

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <<https://amazonas1.com.br/sargento-e-executado-a-tiros-e-tem-arma-roubada-no-viver-melhor/>> Accessed on: 07 Apr. 2024

<sup>8</sup> Available at: < <https://radioriomarfin.com.br/policial-militar-e-morto-a-tiros-no-conjunto-viver-melhor-zona-norte-de-manauas/>> Accessed on: 07 Apr. 2024

failure in public security but a **social justice problem** that requires an **immediate and coordinated government response** to ensure that **security conditions are aligned with the promotion of equality and opportunities for all**.

For Sen, freedom is not only a matter of achieving various states of being and doing (the "*functionings*") but also of having the guarantee and protection necessary to live without fear. Public security, therefore, is not seen only as an end in itself but as an essential means that enables individuals to explore and expand their capabilities.

In this context, the lack of public security limits freedom of movement and negatively affects residents' sense of security, compromising their ability to participate fully in social life. The constant fear of violence and crime restricts residents' opportunities to engage fully in economic, educational, and social activities, negatively impacting their freedom of movement and their ability to make choices about their lives.

Based on the analysis guided by **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities**, it is observed that the obstacles faced by the residents of **the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II** in accessing **education, health, employment, sanitation, security and urban mobility** are reflections of a **housing approach** that still does not fully integrate the concept of **development as an expansion of human freedoms**. The following table summarizes the **evaluation of the capacities and freedoms** of the residents in different dimensions, considering the **facilities and barriers** found in practice:

**Education:** Late access to primary education and the absence of childcare centers limit the **capacities of children and mothers**. Although there has been an improvement in **access to primary education**, the lack of **daycare** restricts **mothers' autonomy** and compromises child development, resulting in a **partial expansion of capacities**.

**Health:** The **limited availability of mobile UBS** and the **lack of adequate health infrastructure** compromise the ability to **obtain fast and efficient medical care**. Despite some improvements, the **expansion of the capacity to access health is insufficient** to cover the needs of the population.

**Employment and Income:** The **scarcity of employment opportunities** due to the peripheral location of the residential area limits the **ability of residents** to obtain **formal employment**. While transportation improvements may increase **connectivity to the labor market**, there has not been a **significant expansion of employment and income capacities**.

**Sanitation:** The **lack of selective collection and the inadequate disposal of sewage** compromise the **ability to live in a healthy environment**, resulting in a **setback in sanitation conditions**, which directly affects the health and quality of life of residents.

**Public Security:** High crime and the **feeling of insecurity** severely limit the ability to **move freely and without fear**, configuring a **setback in the freedoms** of residents. Inefficient **policing and the distance of security units** contribute to the **deterioration of security conditions**.

**Urban Mobility:** The **insufficiency and poor distribution of public transport** compromise the **ability to access work, education, and leisure**, leading to a

setback in instrumental freedoms, such as mobility and access to essential rights.

In sum, the analysis reveals that, although some capacities have been partially expanded in several areas, such as education and health, others, such as sanitation, security, and mobility, face major challenges that need more effective intervention. This reinforces the need for integrated public policies that ensure sustainable human development, allowing residents to have adequate conditions to exercise their freedoms and achieve a full life.

Dimension	Functionings	Capabilities	Conversion Factors (Enablers and Barriers to Capabilities)	Assessing the Expansion of Capabilities and Freedoms
Education	Late access to primary schools and absence of daycare centers	Limited ability for children to access quality education from an early age	Proximity to schools, transportation, availability of daycare centers, social valorization of education	<b>Partial Expansion</b> (primary education has improved, but the absence of daycare centers restricts mothers' autonomy and child development)
Health	Mobile UBS available, but insufficient to serve the entire population	The ability to get medical care quickly and efficiently is still limited	Distance from hospitals, health infrastructure, quality of care, availability of professionals	<b>Insufficient Expansion</b> (service has improved, but there is a lack of structure to cover the demand)
Employment and Income	Job opportunities are still scarce due to the location.	Limited ability to seek and obtain formal employment	Poor public transport, connectivity to the labour market	<b>No Significant Expansion</b> (improvements in transportation would help increase employability)

<b>Sanitation</b>	Lack of selective collection and inadequate disposal of sewage	Ability to live in a compromised healthy environment	Deficient infrastructure, insufficient public policies for sanitation	<b>Setback</b> (poor sanitary conditions impact health and quality of life)
<b>Public Safety</b>	High crime and a sense of persistent insecurity	Ability to move freely and fearlessly reduced	Inefficient policing, distance from security checkpoints, social and urban conditions	<b>Setback</b> (insecurity limits freedom of movement and the well-being of residents)
<b>Urban Mobility</b>	Insufficient and poorly distributed public transport	Ability to access work, education and leisure compromised	Bus frequency, road infrastructure, transportation cost	<b>Setback</b> (limited mobility restricts other instrumental freedoms)

Source: Authors, 2025.

The above evaluation of the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II, based on **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities**, shows that the impact of a housing policy goes beyond the simple delivery of housing, involving structural factors that determine the freedom and opportunities of residents. The matrix considers four main components: **dimension**, which defines the aspect analyzed (education, health, mobility, etc.); **functionings**, which represent the concrete achievements of individuals; **capabilities**, which indicate the real opportunities to achieve these achievements; and **conversion factors**, which facilitate or hinder the transformation of capabilities into *functionings*. The application of this model reveals that, although there have been occasional advances, such as a partial expansion in education, structural problems – such as precarious transportation, insecurity, and inadequate sanitation – significantly restrict the well-being of residents. Thus, the analysis reaffirms that the **right to housing is only fully realized when there is effective access to essential services and the creation of conditions for the expansion of individual freedoms**, demonstrating the need for public policies that integrate housing and urban infrastructure to ensure true human development.



In conclusion, Residencial Viver Melhor I and II present a valuable opportunity to reflect on and reorient housing and urban development policies towards a model that truly values and promotes human capacities. As we move forward, the need for integrated approaches based on human freedoms is clear. Only through policies that aim to expand human capacities — empowering residents to overcome challenges and participate fully in economic, social, and political life — can we aspire to development that is truly inclusive and sustainable.

## CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed the **Viver Melhor I and II housing complexes** in the light of **Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities**, treating **housing not only as physical shelter** but as an essential catalyst for the expansion of **capacities and freedoms**. The application of this theoretical perspective in the context of **Manaus** revealed significant discrepancies between the intentions **of the housing program** and the **reality faced by the residents**, showing that **without a holistic approach**, housing policies cannot promote the **development of capacities**.

Although the Residencial Viver Melhor I and II were created to provide **decent housing**, significant deficiencies **have been identified** that limit the ability of their residents to achieve a **decent standard of living**. Inadequate **infrastructure and insufficient supply of essential public services** reflect flaws in public housing policies, which do not consider essential aspects of the **well-being** of individuals. These **capacity constraints** directly impact the **quality of life of residents**, restricting their opportunities **to contribute fully to society**.

Therefore, the implementation of effective housing policies must adopt an integrated approach, connecting housing to access to **health, education, security, sanitation, mobility, and employment**. Building resilient and inclusive communities requires a model that goes beyond the physical supply of housing units, promoting conditions that expand individual and social freedoms.

In addition, the limitations of this study **are recognized**, and future research can explore **the relationship between housing conditions and capacity development**, with an emphasis on **vulnerable socioeconomic contexts**. This line of investigation is crucial to improve the understanding of how **housing quality** can impact **human development** in its multiple dimensions.

In summary, **by aligning housing policies with Amartya Sen's Theory of Capacities**, it is possible **to reformulate the conception of housing as a basic human right and an essential basis for the development of human capacities**. By focusing on **expanding capacities and freedoms**, we can design **housing interventions that offer much more than just a physical space** to live in. These interventions can promote **social justice and increase individuals' ability to live full and meaningful lives**. The real challenge is to turn this vision into **concrete actions** that demonstrate a **firm commitment to the well-being and dignity of all citizens**.

Finally, the **Theory of Capacities** proves to be an essential tool to **identify deficiencies in housing projects** and guide public policies that see **housing as an essential right for complete human development**. To **build a fairer and more inclusive society**, we must **prioritize well-being, social justice, and the quality of life** of all, ensuring that people have not only housing but also the conditions for a full life, far from **the precarious reality of the "open sewage kit and wooden wall"**.

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