Jardim da União: from Urbanization to Land Regularization

Submitted By: São Paulo City Hall



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Executive Secretariat of the Watersheds Program – São Paulo City Hall

Organization Type: Subnational government

Website: https://prefeitura.sp.gov.br/web/secretaria_executiva_do_programa_mananciais

Practice Details

Country(ies): Brazil

City(ies): São Paulo

Start Year: 2021

Ongoing: No

End Year: 2025

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing & Informality
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

Located in the southern zone of São Paulo, in a water source protection area, Jardim da União was the subject of a comprehensive urbanization and land regularization project, promoted by the Executive Secretariat of the Mananciais Program, in partnership with CDHU. The initiative transformed an informal settlement into a qualified urban territory. The main challenges were the precarious occupation pattern and the resulting environmental degradation. The self-built houses lacked infrastructure, leading to inadequate waste disposal and environmental contamination. The housing growth in São Paulo during the 1970s drove irregular occupations in water source areas, prompting the creation of restrictive laws on land use in these regions. In 2006 and 2009, specific laws were enacted for the Guarapiranga and Billings APRMs, expanding the scope of the Mananciais Program. Since then, urbanization and infrastructure have become essential conditions for land regularization, as in Jardim da União.

Solution Developed

The Executive Secretariat of the Mananciais Program developed an urban plan for Jardim da União to reduce environmental damage and ensure families could remain in the area. The project aimed to balance environmental recovery, urban integration, and social development through an integrated action plan across Social Assistance, Projects, and Works. Alongside sanitation and mobility improvements, green spaces were created for stormwater management, including a park and two squares that foster social interaction and act as barriers to new occupations. The project adopted a distinct architectural and urban design, reinforcing community belonging. Public spaces strengthened citizenship, improved quality of life, supported healthy childhood development, and encouraged family ties, collective actions, and residents' care for the territory.

Implementation

The methodology adopted combined integrated urban planning with active community participation, focusing on social inclusion and environmental preservation. Through an interdepartmental effort, the Mananciais Program received support from other entities, such as CDHU and Sabesp. The urban project designed for Jardim da União was planned to achieve a balance between housing needs and the sustainable development of the area. Infrastructure improvements included the installation of water supply and sewage collection networks, stormwater drainage, road paving, accessible sidewalks, landscaping, public spaces for social interaction and leisure, urban agriculture, and 16 housing units for families in situations of extreme vulnerability. In addition to physical interventions, the project promoted legal security through land tenure regularization, with the delivery of 618 property titles.

Chronologically, construction began in the second half of 2021, starting with urbanization works and the implementation of public facilities. In 2024, the housing units were built. Land tenure

regularization began after the completion of infrastructure works and was concluded in 2025. In total, R$ 30,377,114.43 were invested.

From the outset, the project was designed to meet the needs of the local community, adopting an active listening approach to address the problems faced and to incorporate the residents' perspectives on potential improvements.

Enablers & Obstacles

Within the legislative framework, the New Mananciais Law (Law No. 9,866/1997) and the Specific Law for the Billings Environmental Protection and Recovery Area (APRM Billings – Law No. 13,579/2009) began to consider the consolidation of pre-existing settlements, bringing a new perspective to urbanization in protected areas. This legislation started to take into account the actual occupation patterns of each watershed in the Billings region, recognizing their diversity and current uses. As a result, it became possible to intervene in these settlements while ensuring the environmental protection of the areas.

On the social front, community engagement played a fundamental role both in mobilizing families and identifying their needs, and later in the stewardship and care of the area.

Results & Impact

In order to understand the positive impacts of the project, as well as identify areas for improvement, a structured survey was conducted in 2022 by the project team and administered by the social team of the Mananciais Program. A total of 485 people participated in the survey, of whom 291 were women and 194 men, with the majority being young adults between 30 and 49 years old, the predominant age group in the area.

Regarding education, 23.7% of respondents had never attended school or had not completed primary education, highlighting the presence of functional illiteracy within the community. Concerning employment and income, 76% of participants were working, with a strong female predominance (82%), while only 18% of workers were men.

The survey results revealed a high level of satisfaction and a noticeable improvement in living conditions for the estimated 2,000 residents. Among the highlights, 85.55% expressed satisfaction with infrastructure improvements, 53.2% acknowledged strengthened community ties, 90.1% approved of the waste collection system, and 87% were satisfied with the leisure areas.

With land tenure regularization, families gained security to invest in their own homes. Furthermore, the implementation of urban infrastructure not only enhanced the quality of the territory but also increased environmental awareness within the community, encouraging collective actions for preservation and stewardship.

Replication & Scale Up

The housing practice described can be replicated in similar contexts, where there is a precarious occupation pattern in water source areas. Successful replication can be achieved through an integrated and synchronized action plan. Interdepartmental collaboration practices are also highly beneficial in such cases.

This housing practice is already a model of action for the Mananciais Program and is being implemented in other areas.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

Jardim da União is part of the Mananciais Program, which urbanizes precarious settlements in environmentally protected areas while improving reservoir water quality. Actions follow specific environmental legislation and receive support from the São Paulo Municipal Government. The program implements an integrated action plan, including urbanization projects, public health, education, and cultural facilities, parks, and housing complexes.

Lessons & Takeaways

Urbanization brought improvements to the territory, but also new social challenges. Sidewalks, intended for public use, began to be used for parking. Even after attempts at dialogue by the social team and the residents' association, it became necessary to install concrete elements to prevent improper use. With the paving of streets, the increased vehicle flow raised the risk of accidents. For this reason, a project review was carried out, requesting action from CET, which led to the installation of additional speed-reduction measures, such as speed bumps and traffic signage.