

Urbanization, peripheries, and politics: forms of organization, agendas of demands, and struggles of the peripheral population today

Urbanização, periferias e política: formas de organização, pautas de reivindicação e lutas da população periférica hoje

The notion of periphery, consolidated in Brazilian urban studies, plays a fundamental elucidating role in revealing that these territories have developed historically. The periphery, understood as a spatial expression of capitalism's structural inequality, has been conceptualized as the "place of and for poor workers" (Holston, 2013). Classic studies on peripheries, such as those by Kowarick (1979) and Maricato (1979), highlighted that these agglomerations – distant, precarious, and not always formalized – housed the essential workforce for the functioning of the economic machinery, demonstrating that Brazilian capitalist urbanization was sustained by violent super-exploitation, negative inclusion, and the dissemination of precariousness.

However, far from being merely passive spaces of spoliation, contemporary peripheries are articulated as spaces of elaboration, claim, and political struggle, engendering decisive social and spatial transformations in recent decades (Richmond et al., 2022). Caldeira (2024) has suggested thinking about "peripheral urbanization" through the lens of a transversality between these spaces and official and formal logics, navigating the tenuous boundaries between the legal and the illegal. The presence of the State, as a provider of public policies, has expanded in several directions since redemocratization, structuring policies of undeniable reach and improving the living conditions of peripheral populations. The recent creation of the Secretaria Nacional de Periferias (SNP) in 2023 under the current Lula administration signals an effort to incorporate peripheral demands into public policy, representing a significant achievement. In addition to resuming policies from the Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC) aimed at the urbanization of favelas that had been suspended in the previous government, the SNP carried out caravans to the peripheries, mapped the actions conducted by social movements and technical advisors in the peripheries, and promoted awards for successful initiatives that featured the protagonism of peripheral communities. These are precisely the various political initiatives present in the peripheries that are not restricted to the institutional spaces of the State but are built outside it, such as collectives, associations and social movements, among others.



These transformations, above all, also mark an epistemological shift in the field of urban studies, which, as is known, is constituted by multiple disciplines (such as architecture and urbanism, geography, sociology, economics, territorial planning, among others): the notion of periphery, marked as a place of structural vulnerability, incompleteness, or lack, is now also understood as a “fertile environment for social change” (Simões and Medeiros, 2025). Although the periphery is the spatial expression of the inequality of capitalist urbanization, it also carries transformative potential collectively constructed by those who live in these spaces (Urvoy, 2020). This process of political subjectivation allowed the popular classes to stop identifying themselves solely by the moral category of “worker” and to begin asserting themselves as “peripheral subjects,” thus constituting a powerful tool in the struggle for legitimacy and recognition (D’Andrea, 2022). This political energy arises from the sharing of experiences, in the Thompsonian style, lived by marginalized individuals, resulting in their own forms of organization and collective action.

Gradually, from stigma to the condition of belonging to a certain peripheral identity, being peripheral became a source of pride and a basis for self-affirmation. Several social movements began to claim themselves as peripheral, a self-proclaimed peripheral cultural scene emerged, along with partnerships with public authorities, NGOs, political parties, unions, etc. (Ramos et al., 2024)

Nevertheless, the peripheries accumulate adversities. They are the places where the population most affected by structural racism is concentrated, facing state violence and the territorial control of criminal factions (Hirata, Rocha and Santos Júnior, 2024). Daily, this population deals with precarious, informal work or unemployment (Abílio, 2022), in addition to terrible housing conditions (Denaldi, 2022) and limited resources for their social reproduction (Canettieri, 2025), thereby, for example, perpetuating indebtedness (Santos, 2026). In these spaces, experiences of exploitation and disrespect accumulate. However, it is also in these spaces where a set of practices are conceived, tested and put into action to try to navigate the accumulated difficulties: struggles against evictions and community self-construction initiatives; mothers’ movement for health posts; defense of participatory budgeting; Cultural gatherings and collectives making films, music, and art; intersectional articulation of feminist and Black movements; community-based preparatory courses in the favelas; community kitchens and gardens. Many of these experiences can teach us about possible futures for our metropolises.

In contrast to urban landscapes produced for the growth of capital, the peripheries can be understood as “landscapes for life” (Rolnik, 2019) – that is, spaces dedicated to reproduction – and thus offer the possibility of expanding the sociological and urbanistic imagination so that another possible urbanization may emerge.

This issue of *Cadernos Metrópole* welcomes the thematic dossier “Urban Peripheries and Politics Inside and Outside Institutions,” aiming to recognize the diverse political practices “of” and “in” the peripheries. The papers compiled here draw from a variety of disciplinary, methodological, and conceptual perspectives, allowing readers to construct the complex kaleidoscope of peripheral territories. The political action of the peripheries occurs “with,” “against,” and “despite” the State. Whether the action is aimed at building public policies and engaging with formal participatory spheres – such as councils and forums – or through direct action – such as demonstrations and protests – or through the construction of autonomous alternatives with solidarity networks and community practices, these political actions occurring in the peripheries deserve greater understanding from academia.

Political practices in the peripheries are shaped by multiple agents, including social movements, public officials, cultural collectives, and others, resulting in diverse outcomes such as public policies, demonstrations, community spaces, and more. This “society in movement” does not necessarily seek to conquer state power, but rather to expand living and lived territories that, by asserting their difference, point towards overcoming the hegemonic system through their own practices of survival and cooperation (Bartholl, 2018; Zibechi, 2015). The peripheries possess an insurgent power capable of developing critical responses to the coloniality of urban knowledge, as the way space is produced in the peripheries is carried out externally to technical and institutional domains, operating through a sum of insurgent energies and activism that challenge the material and symbolic place of the hegemonic order (Velloso, 2022).

The articles highlight the great heterogeneity of political practices established in the Brazilian peripheries. In the study by Réia Silvia Gonçalves Pereira, Wania Mesquita, and Vânia Sierra, *“I am Pastor Ana”: conflict and ethics of everyday life in a favela*. In this article, we are introduced to the ethnographic case of Ana, an evangelical pastor who challenges the power of drug trafficking, rooted in her charitable and religious work. Her case sparks a discussion about the multiple institutions, between legalism and illegality, that regulate daily life in the peripheries. The paper *Participatory Mapping as a form of collective mobilization for hydrological disasters emergencies*, by Talita Gantus--Oliveira and Henrique Candido de Oliveira, presents the experience of developing a technical-community map in the Vila Sônia neighborhood of Itaquaquecetuba/SP, a peripheral area vulnerable to hydrological disasters, with the aim of building safe and accessible pathways for the population. This mapping used a participatory social cartography methodology, strengthening community bonds and improving public policies adapted to local realities. In Bruno Dias Magalhães’s work, *Urban agriculture as ambiguity and ambivalence in the periphery of Belo Horizonte*, the practice of agriculture as a space for political dispute is analyzed. Mariana Camillo Sant’Ana and Alex Ferreira Magalhães, in the paper *Data production on Brazilian favelas and the problem of intercensal comparability*, investigate the conceptual and methodological transformations promoted by the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) in the identification of Favelas and Urban Communities (FCU), pointing to possible occurrences of ruptures in the identification process, causing discontinuity effects in the territorial interpretation of favelas and impacting the development of public policies. In *Tracing housing indebtedness: the case of Ponta Grossa/PR (2009-2023)*, Carlos Picanço Wambier and Igor Sporch da Costa, in turn, explore forms of indebtedness in urban peripheries, through the action of the housing policy of the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program, by analyzing the properties of the Program repossessed due to default. Lia de Mattos Rocha, Monique Batista Carvalho and Jonathan Willian Bazoni da Motta, in *Associativism “under siege”: violence and collective action in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas*, based on ethnographic research, point to the curtailment of associative and community practices by organized crime. *Why not occupy? The experience of the Kilombo Urbano Squat in Pelotas, State of Rio Grande do Sul*, by Bárbara Hypolito, discusses urban occupations as political actions that transcend institutional frameworks and produce new micropolitics and self-managed ways of inhabiting, grounded in affection and insurgent subjectivities. Aline Maria Matos Rocha and Linda Maria de Pontes Gondim, in the paper *A “periphery” in the “center”: the case of Vila Vicentina (Fortaleza, State of Ceará)*, address a review of the categories of “center” and “periphery” based on the case of the Vila Vicentina Resistance Movement, highlighting the dynamics of urban space transformation that blur these categories and make them more nuanced,

referring not only to geographical fixity but also to the social practices that unfold in these places. The article *Invisible cities, amazing people: between self-management and resistance in Latin American peripheries*, of Angélica Tanus Benatti Alvim, Bianca Moro de Carvalho and Marina Erendina Contreras-Saldaña closes the issue's dossier by analyzing self-management and community leadership practices in informal settlements in Brazil and Mexico, pointing out how these collective and solidarity-based practices transform urban life in urban peripheries, reconfigure relations between the State and society and experiment with different forms of local governance.

In addition to the main dossier, this issue of *Cadernos Metrópole* features several supplementary texts. In *Unequal urbanization, punitive control and citizenship in dependent economies*, Matheus Boni Bittencourt discusses the relationship between urbanization and public security in Brazil, exploring how urbanization processes intersect with the police-penal control of certain urban territories, resulting in the criminalization of poverty and violent practices. The article *The role of green infrastructure in urban drainage: diagnosis and guidelines*, by Adriana Emi Büchler Otakara and Alba Regina Azevedo Arana, explores the importance of adopting green infrastructure for urban drainage, discussing how land-use and occupation problems and the undersizing of drainage systems often disregard this dimension of urban infrastructure. *Notes on climate and the city: an analysis of a (re)urbanization project in Curitiba, Paraná*, authored by Leticia Peret Antunes Hardt, Carlos Hardt, and Marlos Hardt, continues to emphasize the environmental issues of metropolises and proposes to analyze the Climate Risk Management Project of the Bairro Novo do Caximba neighborhood in Curitiba/PR, indicating possible approaches for more resilient urban planning in the face of the climate crisis. Bianca Macêdo, Germana Nunes de Oliveira Melo, and Carlos Felipe Grangeiro Loureiro discuss, in *Evolution of mobility patterns by gender and its transversalities in Fortaleza, Brazil*, the strategies of displacement in the city, considering the dimension of gender as an important variable to understand the differences related to the patterns and durations of daily trips. Otávio di Nardo D'Andréa, in his article *Cosmologies of totality and material practices at the Umbanda National Sanctuary*, investigates the relationship between Umbanda's cosmology and the space of the National Sanctuary, indicating that ritual bonds shape an ethical relationship of attentiveness to the environment. Lucas Yudi Moriya Sampaio, in the article *Analyzing music in the city: a methodological essay in the Catete and Gloria neighborhoods, Rio de Janeiro*, presents a methodology for approaching musical practices in the city in both material and immaterial ways. Thus, the research contributes to understanding the role of music in the city by analyzing the relationships and patterns it constructs, materially and immaterially, within urban space. *An evaluation of popular participation in the participatory Planning Cycle in Fortaleza*, by Elielson Dias dos Santos and Gil Célio de Castro Cardoso, analyzes the potential and limitations of grassroots participation in Fortaleza's urban planning. *Real estate dynamics in "Olympic Rio": production expansion and reproduction of inequalities*, by Samuel Thomas Jaenisch, analyzes the expansion of residential real estate in Rio de Janeiro during the city's preparation cycle to host the 2016 Olympic Games. The research results indicate that, despite the increased supply of new housing units, inequalities deepened, exacerbating existing urban conflicts. Pablo Correa Lima, Frederico Braida, and Marcelo Luís Ribeiro Silva Tavares, in the article *Contested public space: scenarios for street vendors in Juiz de Fora*, discuss the controversy surrounding the presence of street vendors in the central region of the municipality, seeking to present possible scenarios for occupying the space for this inclusive

use. Finally, in *From the “New Projectment Economy” to the Communist Party-led Development* Elias Jabbour and Javier Vadell present the concept of communist party-led development as an offshoot of the Projectment Economy, capable of capturing the set of institutional innovations underway in China, pointing towards a new form of organization for economic development.

The number of *Cadernos Metrópole* invites reflection not only on the political centrality of the peripheries, but also on topics of interest for research on Brazilian metropolises. The thematic and methodological diversity gathered here reiterates the need for an academic perspective that understands the multiple complexities of the metropolis, challenges the coloniality of knowledge, and thus points the way to a more just and inclusive urbanization.

We wish you all a good read!

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