



INSTITUTO
MARIA E JOÃO
ALEIXO

LETTER FROM MARÉ, RIO DE JANEIRO -
A MANIFESTO FROM THE PERIPHERIES:

THE PERIPHERIES AND THEIR PLACE IN THE CITY

In March 2017, Instituto Marie e João Aleixo (IMJA) held their first international seminar on Peripheries Globally, in Maré, Rio de Janeiro. The main objective of the event was to construct a coherent vision - open to further contributions - between organisations, movements, groups and individuals who participate in actions in peripheries in their different locations throughout the contemporary world.

This construction effort is not a trivial one. In fact, as it is widely known, we live in a social world dominated by representations of the peripheries - and of those who live in them - based on stigma and stereotypes that prevent global and complex understandings of the social, economic, political and environmental realities of peripheries.

Imagination is fundamental to the foundation of reality. Stereotyped representations of the peripheries where cities' most impoverished social groups reside often influence public policies and private social investments. In addition to not meeting the reality of residents' demands, they contribute to reinforcing processes of material and symbolic appropriation, weakening collective strategies built by groups from the peripheries to exercise their right to the city.

Stigmatization occurs in both dominant (hegemonic) and in subaltern (non-hegemonic) countries within the current socio-economic and political order. Assumptions are often socio-centric and the examination of peripheries is often based on models related to urban theories and cultural/aesthetic assumptions determined by hegemonic social groups and dominant classes. These groups establish what is healthy, pleasant and appropriate for the functioning of the city based on the current 'civilization' model. They also define a particular concept of order and what forms of social behavior and action are deemed as appropriate.

Alongside this, there is a promotion of the idea of absence, lack and homogeneity. These factors operate within reductionist perceptions and hierarchical classifications of the peripheries in relation to other city spaces. The periphery becomes significant in what it is not in comparison to an idealized model of the city based on colonial cultural and educational models, in the majority of cases, by the city's wealthier populations. From this perspective, peripheries are seen as precarious spaces and subjects from the peripheries have their history denied and the areas where they live not recognized as legitimate nor their habitation there. Frequently they are treated in exoticising ways (as the "non-civilized").

The peripheries exist in relation to social institutions, in particular to the state and the formal market. Within this relationship, they are often constituted by occupations that do not follow hegemonic models as defined by the state or the market, and when created by these institutions, they are portrayed as examples of subalternity and precariousness. Such a view deprives subjects of their identities and denies the multiple practical innovations and knowledge built within peripheries.



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The supporters of this letter refuse the reductionist, stereotyped and disqualifying view of peripheries. Peripheries have a plurality of social, economic and cultural forms and dynamics which pose a challenge to their definition, therefore requiring broad frameworks of understanding to help guide more specific readings. While acknowledging that peripheries across the world are heterogeneous in their conditions and forms of functioning, there are a number of common features amongst them. We affirm that each periphery constitutes an integral part of the city and composition of the urban fabric and is therefore integrated within it. Peripheries are central to the city, providing identity, meaning and humanity.

The periphery should not be defined negatively by what it is not or does not have in relation to the socio-territorial dynamics or its physical distance from the hegemonic centre. Peripheries must be recognized for their everyday practices that create the social fabric of the city, including their potential for invention, differentiated forms of occupation of space and counter-hegemonic communication arrangements specific to each periphery.

It is from the essential ability to adapt that the practices established by residents must be recognized and the objective conditions of their social life inform definitions of what is decent housing and what are the necessary conditions for ensuring well-being.

The supporters of this letter therefore consider the peripheries as constitutive of the city, in part or in their entirety based on the following challenges that residents face:

- The engagement of workers in subaltern and informal market occupations;
- Higher rates of un- and under-employment and higher rates of informality in relation to employment, particularly concerning young people;
- A greater concentration of groups in conditions of oppression or exploitation - people from black and indigenous backgrounds, immigrants, gypsies, refugees, religious and ethnic minorities and other discriminated against groups - who seek, to a greater or lesser extent - to maintain their cultural practices and identities;
- High incidence of violence in public spaces - partly as result of the War on Drugs - and stemming from both state security forces and criminal groups;
- Presence of unequal gender relations that translates into high rates of violence against women and girls within their everyday lives;
- High incidence of rights violations and prejudice against LGBT groups - especially of trans groups - culminating in high homicide rates of this group;
- High incidence of fatal violence against young people, with a strong racial and ethnic profile;
- Levels of formal education below the city average;
- Areas marked by processes of environmental degradation and expropriation due to the actions of private and public organization.



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We also affirm that peripheries are characterized by numerous potentialities:

- Presence of a young population offering a source of innovation and bringing a broader range of demands and public actions for the guaranteeing of rights;
- Strong neighbour and kinship relations characterised by sociability, reciprocity and solidarity with a strong appreciation for common spaces as sites of socio-cultural coexistence;
- Various forms of cultural, artistic, and performative forms, means and modes that invent, renew and actualize urban narratives;
- Strong presence of solidarity and popular domestic economic initiatives;
- Strong presence of alternative forms of urban, educational, economic and real estate services and equipment among others, in response to insufficient, absent and/or inadequate state and formal market investments in these fields;
- High degree of self-regulation of public space by the residents, reflecting their experiences and exercising autonomy;
- Creative urban solutions in terms of housing, provision of public services and communal infrastructure, which should be considered as a reference for the whole city;
- A home to pluricultural and multiethnic practices due to the experiences of coexistence between different nationalities, ethnicities and religions - without disregarding the existence of situations of conflict and intolerance;
- Sites of invention and knowledge production, the complexity of which must be widely recognized and valued by society;
- The presence of participatory collective models, movements and social organizations fighting for their rights and broadening the range of demands and actions towards improved democratization of the city.

To understand the city in its diversity is to recognize the particularities of each area and to affirm the citizenship and agency of all residents. Doing so, requires the recognition of subjects from peripheries as protagonists capable of speaking for themselves and on their own social and cultural practices, symbols of resistance and reinvention and exercising of their rights - which must be guaranteed within public policies. This is essential for the full recognition of democratic social life built on recognition of the legitimate use of space by everyone. Guaranteeing this principle requires the construction of a radical democratic experience of the right to the city.