The social production of space in platform capitalism

A produção social do espaço no capitalismo de plataforma

We are pleased to present this issue of *Cadernos Metrópole*, which focuses on a crucial topic for analyzing the transformations of the contemporary world: platform capitalism and its profound impacts on the social production of urban and regional space.

We are living through a period of radical changes in the functioning of capitalism, even more disruptive than the transformations of the 1970s. Scholars have proposed a range of terms and frameworks to capture the essence of this new period: "financialized capitalism" (Lapavitsas, 2009), "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019), "rentier capitalism" (Christophers, 2020), "techno-feudalism" (Varoufakis, 2025), among many other possibilities. This issue, however, focuses specifically on "platform capitalism" (Srnicek, 2017), examining its reverberations in the spatial organization of cities and regions. In this context, concepts such as "platform urbanism" (Graham, 2020), "digitalization of urban space" (Lee et al., 2020), and "urbanization of the internet" (Mezzadra et al., 2024) have gained prominence. Although we recognize the theoretical roots of these discussions in formulations about the "regime of flexible accumulation" (Harvey [1989] 2008), the "technical-scientific-informational milieu" (Santos, [1996] 2008) and the "network society" (Castells, 1999), the 21st century introduces significant and substantive new dynamics.

The technical-scientific revolution has reached unprecedented levels, driven by the spread of technologies such as the internet of things, big data, machine learning, augmented reality and – most notably – artificial intelligence. These and other innovations are redefining the way we relate to time and space, giving rise to new forms of human (and urban) experiences that are deeply entwined with the platformization and digitalization of capitalism. That is, experiences increasingly mediated by the central role played by digital platforms and social networks.

Currently, intense debates are underway regarding the impacts of social networks and digital platforms on the political sphere, processes of subjectivation, educational socialization, the world of work, and other domains that have been radically transformed as these networks and platforms exert their influence.

In the political sphere, at least since the scandal involving the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica and its role in the 2016 U.S. elections and the Brexit campaign, concerns have grown over how the pervasive reach of social media platforms threatens democratic processes. Scholars such as Han (2022) underscore the multifaceted ties between digitalization and the crisis of democracy, which – according to his provocative framing – degenerates into *infocracy*: a regime that, in his words, "degrades human beings into cattle, into *consumer animals and data*" (p. 7, author's emphasis).

Regarding processes of subjectivation, it is worth noting the recent success of the British series Adolescence, which reached a record 66.3 million views on Netflix within just 11 days. This fictional production explores the serious consequences of children and adolescents growing up in a new historical stage. A stage in which caregivers, whether voluntarily and/or involuntarily, have very little control over the content that reaches their children via computers, televisions, tablets and mobile phones connected to the internet.

The excessive and unregulated use of digital devices and media by children and adolescents lies at the heart of an ongoing debate in Brazil and around the world about banning the use of smartphones in school spaces. A growing body of research in the fields of neuroscience, psychology and pedagogy, among others, has highlighted the risks and impacts of prolonged and unmediated use of these devices and media on mental health and the teaching-learning processes.

With regard to the world of work, disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and political economy have made significant strides in recent years in characterizing the connections between platformization and precarious working conditions (see, for example, Antunes, 2018 and 2023). Today, concepts such as uberization circulate not only in the academic world (Abílio, 2017, 2019 and 2020), but also in judicial and legal debates concerning work on digital platforms.

While many other cases could be cited, what we aim to underscore in this presentation – and in this issue of Cadernos Metrópole – is the following: the operation of digital platforms, structured around their respective business models, not only reconfigures existing dynamics but, more importantly, introduces new conflicts and challenges related to the "urban question" (and even the "regional question"). To illustrate this point, consider the disputes currently unfolding in Brazil's two largest cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, surrounding the regulation of mototaxi services and short--term rental platforms, mediated by digital technologies.

Ultimately, grasping the dynamics of the platformization of capitalism, in its connections with the social production of space, requires, first and foremost, the understanding of the hypertrophy of financial investment capital (interest-bearing capital and fictitious capital) and the emergence of a new form of domination: financial-informational domination', which permeates all dimensions of life in society.

In the context of this new form of domination, a huge volume of over-accumulated capital has been redirected toward investments in digital platforms and tech companies. Beyond already consolidated Big Techs like Amazon and Google, the 2008 financial crisis, for example, paved the way for a range of app-based businesses to introduce new operational models. These are grounded in algorithmic management, "logistical rationality" (Cuppini, Frapporti and Pirone, 2022), "digital-informational machinery" (Antunes, 2023) and monopolistic control over georeferenced technologies. As previously suggested, these dynamics carry profound and far-reaching repercussions in the most diverse spheres and deserve ample attention within the fields of urban and regional studies.

Faced with this complex scenario, a new research agenda is emerging, based on the impacts of the platformization of capitalism on the social production of space. It is necessary to explore how the expansion of digital service platforms affects the mechanisms for capturing urban rents and reshaping real estate markets, thereby intensifying trends towards the commodification and financialization of cities. We need to analyze the influence of short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb on property prices and gentrification processes. Finally, there is an urgent need to investigate how these platforms impact on the social and occupational structure of cities, stimulating comparative studies on their performance in different urban contexts, both in Brazil and around the world.

In addition, these issues are closed aligned with the debate on 'logistical urbanization', which emphasizes the connections between extraction, logistics, and finance (Arboleda, 2020). In the sphere of e-commerce and related activities, logistics has emerged as a core component of accumulation processes, demanding increasingly sophisticated management of spatial 'fixes' and 'flows' (Diniz and Gonçalves, 2022). And this is where the debate becomes more wide-ranging, reaching and transcending the regional scale, since logistics involves, above all, complex multi-scalar arrangements (Yassu, 2021 and 2022).

In short, this issue of *Cadernos Metrópole* brings together theoretical and empirical contributions that explore this new and important frontier for transforming life in the 21st century cities. We hope that this set of articles will contribute to a deeper and more informed debate about the challenges that platform capitalism presents for the future of urban, metropolitan and regional spaces.

Finally, it is important to summarize the way in which the articles are laid out and articulated.

Firstly, Vanessa Lacerda, Rejane Prevot and Renan Moura mobilize the concept of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), along with the broader debate surrounding the rise of the so-called gig economy. Their article: *Gig economy, surveillance capitalism, and labor relations in Brazil,* critically examines contemporary labor dynamics in the country, highlighting the tensions and transformations at play.

Next, we present an articulated reading of a series of four articles that deal with the impact of digital rental platforms on property markets. These are the following contributions:

1) *From QuintoAndar to the top: the restructuring of the Brazilian rental market through platforms*, by Lucas Meirelles Toledo Ramos Batista;

2) *Airbnb Predominance Index: the platform's influence on the Brazilian rental market*, by Josiane Nascimento Andrade, Cristina Pereira de Araujo and Claudio Tadeu Cristino;

3) *Rental through digital platforms in central areas: a hybridization between housing and lodging,* by Iana Ludermir Bernardino; and

4) *Financialization of urban space and platform capitalism: real estate production in Porto Alegre, state of Rio Grande do Sul*, by Nicole Leal de Almeida, Carolina Rezende Faccin and Heleniza Ávila Campos.

When put together and compared, these contributions offer a rich overview of how these platforms, especially Airbnb, but also QuintoAndar, affect the traditional dynamics of Brazilian property markets. They also highlight issues relating to urban financialization, socio-spatial segregation and the right to the city.

Further on, the articles by Eugênia Dória Viana Cerqueira, Marden Barbosa de Campos and Dimitri Fazito, *Belo Horizonte 4.0: Airbnb and the regionalization of the lived space*; and by Donizete Correa Franco Pires and Jussara Raimundo Fuchs, *Presence and absence of the State: the location of Airbnb in Blumenau, state of Santa Catarina*, continue to reflect on the foundations and spatial effects of Airbnb's operations. However, each article emphasizes different concerns. In the first case, user reviews are shown to generate processes of regionalization of the lived space in Belo Horizonte. In the second, the analysis points to a shift in public road investment patterns in Blumenau, a mid-sized industrial and tourist city, suggesting that such investments are being concentrated in areas where Airbnb listings are located.

The articles *Crossing borders: uberization and logistics in the periphery of capitalism*, by Juliana Cornacchioni and Isadora de Andrade Guerreiro; and *E-commerce and logistical urbanization in last--mile delivery*, by Diogo David de Matos, problematize the issue of logistical urbanization, as their titles suggest. In our view, this becomes all the more urgent considering that, whether in the sphere of e-commerce or in other domains, the "logistical rationality", already mentioned in this presentation, has become one of the main drivers of territorial organization in the name of capital accumulation.

The article *Platformization and algorithmic exclusion: IFood's territorial strategies in Belo Horizonte (state of Minas Gerais)*, by Leandro Ribeiro Duarte and Fabio Tozi, also highlights the central role of logistical rationality. In this case, Ifood is the platform under scrutiny and the issue of "algorithmic exclusion of undesirable territories" is brought into focus. It goes without saying that, at their core, all digital platforms operate – at least to some extent – according to this logic of logistical rationality.

 The texts by Bianca Tavolari and Marcella Puppio, *Regulation of platforms: distortions in urban planning and zoning in São Paulo*; and by Gustavo Mattos and Ana Marcela Ardila, *Braking the platform: an analysis of the regulatory confrontation involving Uber in Colombia*, are of the utmost importance in academic and political terms, because they underline the imperative of regulating digital platforms. Platforms that have acquired extensive capacities to interfere and "distort" what

happens in the field of urban planning and management. In fact, this is a real "disruption" promoted by the platforms, as they generally circumvent and/or subvert established urban legislation, imposing their business models and territorialization patterns. Then, once a real "short circuit" has been established in urban life (to recall and expand on an expression by Milton Santos), the platforms place themselves in a very privileged position to "negotiate" the limits and possibilities of their operations. This has been the case not only in Brazil, but across the globe.

Finally, we encourage a close reading of the article *Smart Porto Alegre: case study of a neoliberal urban restructuring*, by Joana Winckler. The author explores the impacts of the smart cities agenda, analyzing the regulatory adjustments and urban projects that have shaped practices and representations in Porto Alegre. This article undoubtedly provides valuable insights not only into the specific case at hand, but also into the broader dynamics of similar initiatives that are in force or being planned in other Brazilian cities.

In addition to the articles included in this dossier, the following complementary texts are also available: *"São Paulo 1975: growth and poverty": a discussion on poverty*, by Paulo Cesar Xavier Pereira and Thaís Oliveira Ponte; *Pacts, dissonances, and protests: reflections based on the central area of Recife*, by Norma Lacerda, Antonio Felix Neto and Vitória Rodrigues Lacerda; *Territorial Impact Assessment: application of a methodological proposition to the Brazilian reality*, by Jaqueline Lima Amorim and Ednice de Oliveira Fontes Baitz; *Urban occupation and socio-environmental vulnerability in the Itacorubi River sub-basin, Florianópolis, Brazil*, by Cássia Regina Segnor and Almir Francisco Reis; and *Child labor and cashew nut production in João Câmara, state of Rio Grande do Norte*, by Cláudio Roberto de Jesus and Welter Peterson da Silva Oliveira.

We wish everyone an enjoyable and enriching read!

Luiz César de Queiroz Ribeiro [I]
Nelson Diniz [II]
Organizers

[I] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9344-8135
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional. Rio de Janeiro, RJ/Brasil.
Instituto Nacional de Ciência e Tecnologia, Observatório das Metrópoles. Rio de Janeiro, RJ/Brasil.
lcqribeiro@gmail.com

[II] https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7492-5900
Colégio Pedro II, Departamento de Geografia, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.
Observatório das Metrópoles. Rio de Janeiro, RJ/Brasil.
nelsondiniz@hotmail.com

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