



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

# **THE PERIPHERIES AND THEIR PLACE IN THE CITY**



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In March 2017, the International Network of the Peripheries held its first international seminar, in Maré, Rio de Janeiro. The event's main objective was to construct a coherent vision – open to further contributions – between organisations, movements, groups and individuals who participate in actions in peripheries in their respective locations throughout the contemporary world.

This effort at construction 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 impede the formation of global and complex understandings of the social, economic, political and environmental realities of peripheries. As the Imaginary is fundamental to the foundation of the Real, the stereotypical 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 real needs of these residents, such representations serve to reinforce 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 subjugated (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 urbanistic 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, dictating appropriate forms of social behavior and action..

Furthermore, there exists the promotion of the idea of absence, deficiency and homogeneity as elements of reductionist perceptions and hierarchical classifications of the peripheries in relation to other city spaces. Such a process emphasizes that which the periphery 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 their subjects'/populations' history are denied, their territories considered illegitimate, and their residents exoticised (the quintessential non-civilization).

The peripheries, however, exist in relation to social institutions, in particular to the State and the Formal Market. In this tense relationship, they are often represented as occupations that do not follow hegemonic models as defined by the State or the Market. When they are portrayed by these institutions, it is through perspectives of inferiority and precariousness, dismissing the identities, ingenuity and vast knowledge created within peripheries.

The supporters of this letter refuse the reductionist, stereotypical 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, forms and functions, there are a number of common features among them. We affirm that each periphery constitutes an integral part of the city and composition of the urban fabric and is therefore integrate 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 socio-territorial dynamics or its physical distance from the hegemonic center. 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 communicative arrangements specific to each periphery.

It is from the essential ability to adapt, from the recognition of periphery residents' practices and the objective conditions of their social lives that references must be established for what constitutes decent habitation, starting from the necessary conditions for well-being and well-living. Such a process forms an integral and complex place, where groups engage through values, practices, experiences, memories and social position, affirming their identities as the strength to realize their own lives.

The supporters of this letter therefore consider the peripheries as constituent territories of the city, characterized in part or entirely, by the following challenges that residents face:

- The engagement of workers in subordinate market occupations;
- Higher rates of un- and under-employment and higher rates of informality in relation to employment, particularly for 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 State's War on Drugs strategy – and stemming from the warlike practices of 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 as well as intra-familial violence;
- 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 organizations.

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;
- Multitude 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 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 plurality is to recognize the particularities of each territory and to affirm the citizenship and agency of all residents. Doing so requires the recognition of subjects from peripheries as the group most capable of narrating their own social and cultural practices, as well as their own symbols of resistance and reinvention -- concrete forms of the affirmation and invention of rights, forms that must be wholly guaranteed by public policies. This constitutes a principle of full recognition of social life, democratically oriented and shaped, in the legitimate use of territory by popular groups. Guaranteeing this principle requires the construction of a radical democratic experience of the Right to the City.