

ARTICLES

THE URBAN-REGIONAL ORDER IN RENTIER-NEO-EXTRACTIVIST DEPENDENCE: REFLECTIONS FROM BRAZIL

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to engage in a dialogue with the classic debate on dependent urbanization, based on the following initial research question: to what extent, even today, is the Brazilian urban-regional order determined, among other factors, by relations of dependence? The hypothesis argues that the contemporary articulation between rentierism and neo-extractivism reinforces Brazil's situation of dependence, paving the way for different urban dynamics, linked to processes such as reprimarization, financialization and deindustrialization of the country. In methodological terms, this involves rescuing the tradition of Latin American urban studies that sought more comprehensive and totalizing ways of understanding the relationships between power, accumulation and production of space, highlighting, in doing so, topics for a research agenda around the "new dependent urbanization".

Keywords

Financialization; Neoextractivism; Urban Space; Dependency; Rentierism; Dependent Urbanization; Urban-Regional Order.

ARTIGOS

A ORDEM URBANO-REGIONAL NA DEPENDÊNCIA RENTISTA-NEOEXTRATIVISTA: O CASO DO BRASIL

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Resumo

O objetivo do artigo é dialogar com o clássico debate sobre a urbanização dependente, com base na seguinte pergunta inicial de investigação: Até que ponto, ainda hoje, a ordem urbano-regional brasileira é determinada, entre outros fatores, pelas relações de dependência? Defende-se a hipótese de que a articulação contemporânea entre rentismo e neoextrativismo reforça a situação de dependência do Brasil, abrindo caminho para dinâmicas urbanas diversificadas, vinculadas a processos como a reprimarização, a financeirização e a desindustrialização do país. Trata-se, em termos metodológicos, de resgatar a tradição dos estudos urbanos latino-americanos que buscavam formas mais abrangentes e totalizantes de explicar as relações entre poder, acumulação e produção do espaço, ressaltando, ao fazê-lo, tópicos para uma agenda de pesquisa em torno da “nova urbanização dependente”.

Palavras-chave

Financeirização; Neoextrativismo; Espaço Urbano; Dependência; Rentismo; Urbanização Dependente; Ordem Urbano-Regional.

THE URBAN-REGIONAL ORDER IN RENTIER-NEO-EXTRACTIVIST DEPENDENCE: REFLECTIONS FROM BRAZIL

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Introduction

This article engages with the classic debate on Latin American dependent urbanization from the 1960s and 1970s, grounded in the following initial research question: To what extent do relations of dependence, among other factors, still determine the Brazilian urban-regional order today? The aim, therefore, is to articulate reflections on current trends in Brazilian urbanization to the “expanded field of dependency”¹ (Svampa, 2023, p. 260). Furthermore, the concept of urban (and regional) order employed herein (Ribeiro, 2017) underscores the need to analyze these trends in light of the political, economic, and social attributes that structure the accumulation of power and wealth in the country.

It is also argued that contemporary capitalism is characterized by a rentier accumulation pattern, in which control over property is more significant than direct command over the production process (Christophers, 2020; Paulani, 2022). This signifies that, at present, at least for the main capitalist actors, income derived from property (rents, interest, dividends) prevails vis-à-vis income derived from production (profits in the strict sense). It was considered that rentierism, by “sharply [marking] the contemporary accumulation process”, also “changes the means and outcomes of the dependency relationship”² (Paulani, 2022, p. 87).

1. Schuldt and Acosta (2006) argue that, in the absence of alternatives, Latin America’s abundant natural resources tend to distort the structure and allocation of economic resources in the region’s countries, leading to wealth concentration, poverty, and the entrenchment of “rentier mentality”.

2. This and all other non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

Thus, if twenty-first-century Brazil, following the exhaustion of import substitution industrialization, has not only been transformed into a platform for exporting agricultural and mineral commodities but also into a platform for financial valorization, this transformation has taken place within the framework of a new historical form of dependency. Today, dependency is fundamentally defined by the subjugation of the periphery and semi-periphery of the world-system to the predominance of rentism and their repositioning in the international division of labor. With imperialist domination now even more pronounced than during the classical debate on dependency, Brazil, for example, once considered a semi-peripheral country, is undergoing a process of re-peripheralization, marked by deepening trends such as deindustrialization and the reprimarization of its export agenda.

However, despite these new developments, the validity of classical perspectives such as those of Castells and Véliz (1973) is still upheld, particularly as presented in *Imperialismo y urbanización en América Latina* [Imperialism and Urbanization in Latin America], a landmark collection in the debate on dependent urbanization. To comprehend the specificities of Latin American urbanization, the authors argued that, despite the region's diversity, it was essential to emphasize what, at that time, had unified its countries in terms of economic and political processes – namely, “a certain similarity in the position they occupy within the system of imperialist relations” (p. 1). This remains true today, as does Castells' (1973) “guiding hypothesis”, which suggests that Latin American space expresses “the articulation of spatial forms derived from the different types of domination that have shaped the continent's history” (*ibid.*, pp. 7-8).

In the same collection and in an earlier text, Quijano ([1968] 2014; 1973) also argued for the need to “explore the association between the process of dependency and that of urbanization in Latin America” (p. 76). In doing so, he highlighted two fundamental aspects: (i) the changes in the profile of the urban network in each period of the dependency system and (ii) the transformations in the nature of the urban society inhabiting that network.

Singer (1973), for his part, despite contributing to the aforementioned collection, criticized the work of Castells (1973) and Quijano ([1968] 2014; 1973). For him, in addition to operating at a high level of abstraction, such elaborations promoted an apology for national capitalism by assuming that, during periods when dependency was reduced or questioned, the urbanization of Latin America was more balanced. Singer (*ibid.*) further believed that the fundamental issue lay not in the relationship between dependency and urbanization, but rather in the genesis and expansion of monopolistic capitalism across the region. According

to Singer, even though, for example, there were “significant causal relationships between dependency and marginality” these should be studied at a more concrete level, where “dependency ceases to be the main source of social determination and becomes one of the several factors influencing development, urbanization, and marginality” (*ibid.*, p. 312).

Clearly, the controversies between Castells, Quijano, and Singer do not exhaust the entire tradition of critical Latin American urban theory, which, at that time, was concerned with, among other issues and objects, the relationships between urbanization and dependency. In the same context, Pradilla and Jiménez (1973) published, for example, *Arquitetura, urbanismo e dependência neocolonial* [Architecture, urbanism and neocolonial dependence], in which they offered a critique of the role of architecture and urban planning as instruments of domination “within the structure of structures that is the Colombian neocolonial dependent social formation” (*ibid.*, p. 10). Also from 1973 is another famous collection, *Urbanización y dependencia en América Latina* [Urbanization and dependence in Latin America], edited by Schteingart. Subsequently, authors like Kalmanovitz (1982) expanded objections to dependency theory in general, while authors like Pradilla himself (1984, 1987) questioned some central concepts of dependent urbanization theory, such as his critiques on the concept of marginality.

In any event, herein, the need and urgency are defended to revisit the debates on dependent urbanization. The central working hypothesis is that the contemporary articulation between rentism and neo-extractivism has reinforced Brazil’s situation of dependency, paving the way for diversified urban dynamics linked to processes such as reprimarization, financialization, and deindustrialization. Methodologically, the study draws on the tradition of Latin American urban studies that have sought more comprehensive and integrative approaches for describing the relationships between power, accumulation, and the production of space. In doing so, it highlights key themes for establishing a research agenda on the “new dependent urbanization”.

To contribute to the advancement of this debate, the article is structured into four sections in addition to this introduction. The first section provides a synthesis of the historical forms of dependency. The second offers a distinct characterization of the current form of dependency, termed “rentist-neo-extractivist”. The third section, by drawing on the arguments of Oliveira (1978) and Kowarick (1979), proposes a periodization of urban development in Brazil, based not only on dependency relations but also on a pattern of alternating periods of structural ambiguity of the State and periods dominated by the overexploitation of labor and urban plunder.

The conclusion highlights the key topics discussed, suggesting avenues for future research on dependent urbanization in contemporary Brazil.

1. The historical forms of dependency

The expanded field of dependency is marked by significant controversies. Since the seminal works of Gunder Frank (1969), Cardoso and Falleto ([1969] 1984), Dos Santos (1970), Marini ([1973] 2005), and Bamberger ([1972] 2013), a broad debate has emerged regarding the nature of dependency and how it has changed over time. For Dos Santos (*ibid.*), for example, dependency should be identified with:

(i) the successive arrangements of the world economy and its laws of development; (ii) the dominant economic relations in the centers and how they are articulated with peripheral spaces; and (iii) the economic relations existing in the periphery, which is led, through a combination of internal and external determinations, to the situation of dependency.

Based on this approach, Dos Santos (1970) distinguished three historical forms of dependency:

- i. Colonial dependency;
- ii. Financial-industrial dependency, consolidated at the end of the nineteenth century; and
- iii. Technological-industrial dependency, emerging after World War II.

However, alternative approaches and periodization also exist, underscoring the fact that the debate on dependency relations has continuously necessitated the reassessment and refinement of these very relations. Dos Santos (1970) himself identified technological-industrial dependency as a new form of dependency. Around the same time, Cardoso and Falleto ([1969] 1984) also proposed a new type, which would give rise to dependent and associated capitalism. From that point onward, efforts to update the concept have been ongoing, since it “was never a static category; on the contrary, it was conceived and applied as a dynamic and recursive notion” (Svampa, 2023, p. 479).

Celso Furtado, for example, published *La nueva dependencia: deuda externa y monetarismo* [*The New Dependency: External Debt and Monetarism*] in 1985. The title reflects the analytical path chosen by the author: Latin America’s external indebtedness, managed in alignment with monetarism, was deepening relations of dependency, which had been at least somewhat mitigated during the developmentalist period.

It is widely recognized that this initial phase of adjustments in the Brazilian economy represents the “pre-history” of the country’s elites adhering to neoliberal reforms. From the 1990s onward, these reforms further deepened the situation of dependency, eroding what little had been achieved in establishing a complex, diversified, and integrated productive system in Brazil. It was during this decade, in 1995, that *A globalização e a “novíssima dependência”* [Globalization and the “newest dependency”] by José Luís Fiori was published, in which, following a review of dependency theories, he argued for the continued relevance of the dependency analysis framework. Notably, in his characterization of the *novíssima dependência*, Fiori not only highlighted the central role of financial power and the control of innovation processes by the main actors in the capitalist world-system but also the constraints imposed on macroeconomic management in peripheral countries.

More recently, Paulani (2022) conducted a review of thought on dependency, proposing a characterization of the current historical form of dependency: “dependency 4.0”. Building on Fiori’s (1995) contributions, Paulani placed particular emphasis on Marini’s work (1995; [1973] 2005), especially “*Procesos y tendencias de la globalización capitalista*” [Processes and trends of capitalist globalization], in which Marini revisited and expanded upon his ideas first outlined in “*Dialéctica de la dependencia* [Dialectic of Dependency]” (1973), a seminal work that foregrounded the concept of the overexploitation of labor.

As Paulani (2022) noted, Marini (1995) argued that overexploitation tends to become widespread, even in central countries. However, this would compromise the dependency theory he had originally proposed, since, at that time, Marini ([1973] 2005) maintained that the overexploitation of peripheral workers functioned as a kind of internal compensation in the face of dependency relations. Peripheral capitalists, subjected to the transfer of value to the center, compensated for this subtraction through the overexploitation of labor³ (Amaral; Carcanholo, 2009). Thus, if this condition, which accelerates the depletion of the workforce, becomes widespread, what would underpin contemporary dependency? The answer lies mainly in the technological monopoly and the segmentation of global production.

In 2022, Paulani proposed that the various characterizations of dependency, including the “original ECLA dependency”, be placed on a continuum of historical forms, as summarized in Table 1.

3. Overexploitation takes four main forms: (i) increased work intensity; (ii) extended working hours; (iii) capitalist appropriation of part of the workers’ consumption fund; and (iv) increase in the value of labor power without wage increase (Amaral; Carcanholo, 2009).

Historical forms/ authors	Value transfer mechanisms	Description
(ECLA)	Unequal exchanges	Derived from the peripheral primary-exporting position, the benefit to central countries arises from trade relations characterized by unequal exchanges.
New dependency I (Theotônio Dos Santos, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falleto)	Remuneration of foreign capital employed in domestic production	Internationalization of peripheral internal markets. The benefit to central countries arises from the guarantee of additional markets for their multinational corporations.
New dependency II (Celso Furtado)	Remuneration of foreign monetary capital (indebtedness)	Transfer of a portion of the internally generated value to the center to remunerate the owners of the monetary capital lent to peripheral countries.
Newest dependency (José Luís Fiori and Ruy Mauro Marini)	Monopoly on technological progress and constraints on peripheral macroeconomic management	Concentration of technological progress and decision-making processes. Markets are deregulated, and the production structure becomes segmented. Access to technology is restricted, and peripheral economies are pushed toward “healthy” macroeconomic management.

Table 1. Historical forms of dependency

Source: Own elaboration based on Paulani (2022).

Based on this continuum, Paulani (2022) proposed renaming the “newest dependency” to “dependency 4.0”: a historical form of dependency that “no longer primarily involves exchange relations”, but is “based on rentism that characterizes the current accumulation process and the nature of ongoing technological progress” (*ibid.*, p. 69).

In summary, for this author, the characteristics of the newest dependency should be associated with the eminently rentist attributes and the trends for the digitalization/platformization of twenty-first century capitalism.

2. Rentist-neo-extractivist dependency

Considering the discussion thus far, it may be stated that contemporary dependence is based on at least the following aspects:

- i. Neoliberalization, globalization, and financialization;
- ii. Macroeconomic policies defined at the center;
- iii. The advancement of information and communication technologies, which has reinforced the concentration of decision-making processes and the segmentation of productive structures;
- iv. Control over innovations exercised by large corporations (especially big techs) and central states; and

- v. Control over knowledge-commodities and intangible goods. This does not signify that material production, particularly agricultural and mineral commodities, should be disregarded. In fact, within the context of the reprimarization of dependent economies, primary-exporting activities have gained renewed importance.

It is precisely the interplay of rentism, 4.0 technologies, and repositioning within the international division of labor that connects the discussion on dependence to the concept of neo-extractivism. This concept carries multiple meanings, with particular emphasis on the notion of opportunities that emerged for Latin American countries during the “commodities supercycle” (2003–2014).

For Svampa (2023), this cycle corresponded to the commodity consensus, in which progressive Latin American governments were expected to foster economic specialization in the export of agricultural and mineral goods, using the resulting revenues from this specialization to finance development projects and address longstanding problems. However, critiques of this conception of neo-extractivism highlight the failure of “neodevelopmentalist” projects and the significant liabilities, in terms of socio-environmental conflicts, arising from a focus on commodity exports. Consequently, Svampa (2023) asserted that the “new dependence [...] must be understood in light of the prevailing extractivism” (*ibid.*, p. 493).

In summary, the concept of neo-extractivism is now recognized by various authors as the predominant pattern of accumulation in Latin America, driven by the intensive exploitation of agricultural, mineral, and energy resources for export while simultaneously generating (or regenerating) various forms of conflict over the appropriation of nature and territories. This represents an evolution of classical extractivism, characterized by large-scale projects, greater integration into global, including financial, markets, and the fragmentation/segmentation of production chains. Alongside Svampa (2018, 2023), scholars such as Gudynas (2009), Acosta (2011), and Zibechi (2017) have primarily focused on exposing the consequences of neo-extractivism, not only from a socio-environmental perspective but also in terms of its role in reaffirming Latin America’s dependent and subordinate position within the global system. Meanwhile, authors like Linera (2013), particularly during the commodity supercycle, underscored the opportunities that neo-extractivism could bring.

It is also important to consider the “expanded concept of extractivism” (Gago; Mezzadra, 2017, p. 574), which posits that the logic of extraction implies a profound externality/indifference of capital toward living labor, social cooperation, and the sustainability of human-nature relations. Today, this logic is understood to extend beyond classical extractivist sites. These reflections closely align with debates on

rentism, which problematize a set of capital operations that, while surpassing extractivism in its strict sense – i.e., primary-exporting activities – link these and other activities to logistics and financial circuits (Arboleda, 2020).

Thus, data mining, the extraction of income from popular classes through indebtedness, the capture of urban rents, the exploitation of labor via digital platforms, and the appropriation of the genetic and cultural heritage of traditional peoples, among others, are all considered forms of neo-extractivism.

If the case of Uber is considered – as a global company, it holds a monopoly over its digital platform, enabling it to extract income – along with data – not only from workers but also from consumers/users of the platform. This occurs without the company fully assuming responsibility for the productive process itself or for the actual provision of transportation services. It is as if the company operates in relation to a network of collaborators who pay rents to access its platform. In other words, from its position of externality, Uber extracts income from partner drivers, derived from the service provided to users. Ultimately, the company's sole concern is the efficient functioning of the platform.

However, viewed from another perspective, the nature of digital platforms, which exert strict control over labor despite its remote and algorithmic nature, generates a dynamic that appears to align more closely with the mechanisms of the overexploitation of labor. This is especially evident when considering the externalization of costs and risks, as well as the intensity and duration of work shifts. It is also important to mention the labor performed by consumers, who evaluate the tasks carried out, sparking debates on the role of the consumer as an active participant in the production process.

In any case, it is important to emphasize that the power to extract data and value from platforms is grounded much more in the control of property relations than in the direct control of production relations, as suggested by the concepts of rentism and neo-extractivism adopted herein. Which companies are in a position to compete with Uber, offering platforms with the same reach and scalability? Which companies possess the same capacity to create and control networks, thereby exercising their financial-informational domination? Despite the existence of similar companies and the creation of alternative platforms, all of this has, thus far, proven incapable of undermining the concentrated power of this company, which is based on the monopoly it holds over its platform – a platform whose creation and operation require large volumes of financial capital, enormous information density, and complex logistical capacities.

It should be noted that this configuration of power in digital platforms seems to have been anticipated by Castells (1996), who proposed that “*the network enterprise makes material the culture of the informational, global economy: it transforms signals into commodities by processing knowledge*” (Emphasis in original)⁴ (*ibid.*, p. 192). In other words, the power to create and manipulate “social” and “business” networks is becoming increasingly relevant in terms of capitalist domination. There is no doubt that cases such as this, where companies originating from the center and operating in networks seize large portions of digital goods and services markets in peripheral economies, are paradigmatic of rentist-neo-extractivist dependency conditions. As further illustration, it is possible to reflect on the case of Airbnb, which captures a portion of the incomes from the short-term rental of its hosts’ properties. According to data from the company itself, its services in Brazil saw a “31% increase compared to the previous year, totaling 5.2 billion dollars, equivalent to 5.2% of all direct tourism activity in Brazil” (Oxford Economics, 2023, p. 4).

Lastly, the characterization of dependence presented herein also draws on the arguments of Fontes (2010). According to the author, the enormous volume of interest-bearing and/or fictitious capital, centralized and concentrated, currently exerts unprecedented pressure on labor and nature. These capitals increasingly need to find profitable opportunities and business alternatives, connecting the channels of financial and productive valorization and placing everything and everyone at their disposal, which is done through various mechanisms of expropriation and commodification.

Regarding labor, for example, Fontes (2010) suggested that primary expropriations (of land/rural means of production), leading to rural-to-urban migration, have been replaced by various forms of secondary expropriation (of rights, basic living conditions, etc.) affecting populations concentrated in urban spaces. Undoubtedly, this perspective aligns with the generalization of the logic of expulsions, which, according to Sassen (2016), reflects the hypertrophy of finance and is responsible for promoting not only the precariousness of working and social reproduction conditions but also new rounds of commodification of land (both rural and urban) and natural resources. All of this leaves a trail of destruction and displacement of other forms of territorial appropriation.

Building on the arguments of Fontes (2010) and Sassen (2016), it is proposed herein that in contemporary Brazil, the urban has become not only the foundation

4. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of CASTELLS, M. *The Rise of the Network Society – The Information Age – Economy, Society, and Culture*. Volume I. Wiley-Blackwell. (2009. p. 199).

but also the object of pressures that intricately combine trends of exploitation, extraction, expropriation, and plundering. This is crucial for defining the current historical form of dependence, linking it to the urban context, which aligns with Brazil's transformation into a platform for export, financial valorization and the expansion of urban digital services. These platforms now serve as the central axes of dependence.

3. The Brazilian urban-regional order in rentier-neo-extractivist dependency

As previously mentioned, the interpretation of the Brazilian urban-regional order presented herein is indebted to the classic debate on the distinctive dynamics of urbanization in Latin America. This section revisits the contributions of Oliveira (1978) and Kowarick (1979).

Writing within the same political-intellectual context that shaped studies such as *Imperialismo y urbanización en América Latina*, Oliveira (1978) argued that the urban sphere was where “the problems of capitalist expansion in Brazil began to be synthesized in every direction” (*ibid.*, p. 67). In his view, at that time, no aspect of national life was untouched by “an urban problem or a problem that manifests as urban” (*ibid.*). However, he cautioned against focusing solely on the phenomenology of urban issues, emphasizing the need for comprehensive explanations of their underlying causes. This, he contended, required a periodization of the urban in Brazil, grounded in the processes of accumulation, class formation, and the development of the capitalist State.

After analyzing the colonial, imperial, and *República Velha* [Old Republic] periods, characterized by agrarian hegemony, Oliveira (1978) argued that, from 1930 onward, the Brazilian urban sphere became the expression of the “so-called horizontal-vertical mobility, which socially legitimized industrial growth, and offered individual and even class-based prospects” (*ibid.*, p. 72). By horizontal mobility, he referred to the substantial demographic flow toward major cities, whose expansion created opportunities for upward social mobility. This period, he suggested, was defined by a moment in which “the horizon of possibilities seemed to offer everything to everyone” and in which, exceptionally, a “fusion between the nation and the State” took place, with the State expanding “through the affirmation of the nation” (*ibid.*).

It is important to clarify the meaning attributed in this article to terms such as “affirmation” and “construction” of the nation. These refer to a set of processes that tend to establish:

- i. Minimum levels of social homogenization;
- ii. Varying degrees of democratic forms of stabilizing internal social conflicts;
- iii. Linkages and territorial solidarity among the country's different regions; and
- iv. Mechanisms to counteract the forces of territorial disarticulation stemming from external influences

In the Brazilian case, this process unfolded in an unequal, partial manner, since a fully constituted nation-state never truly emerged. Rather, the fusion between the nation and the State remained inherently unstable. In cases like Brazil's, nation-building has been marked by only intermittent, unfinished attempts (Furtado, 1992).

In any case, the period that began in the 1930s corresponded to a typical situation of the "structural ambiguity of the State," in which the dominant classes were forced to accept significant levels of social and, at times, political participation by the urban proletariat in order to counter the agrarian oligarchies. This, in turn, influenced attempts at nation-building, whose most significant expressions were found in the urban sphere: the expansion of industry and transportation systems, the growth of major cities, the affirmation of labor rights, and so forth, even though large segments of both the rural and urban popular classes remained marginal to this process.

It may be stated, therefore, that during this period, the urban order was characterized by a reduction in distributive inequality – at least when compared to the treatment of social and urban issues in the preceding period, marked by agrarian dominance, the primary-export model, and the minimal liberal State – although significant regional inequalities persisted.

As Pochmann and Silva (2023) have observed, it was only from this period onward that a fraction of the popular classes gained "access to consuming goods and services of the Industrial Era" and the establishment of "citizenship parameters regulated by specific legislation, composed of social and labor rights" (*ibid.*, p. 68). With regard to urban issues, this period, coinciding with a relative weakening of dependency ties, witnessed initiatives such as the *Lei do Inquilinato* [Tenant Law] (Brazil, 1942) and the creation of the *Fundação da Casa Popular* [Low-Income Housing Foundation] (*ibid.*, 1946), which, despite their limitations, represented a response to the housing problem in Brazilian cities that had previously been nonexistent.

This is not concerned with advocating for national capitalism, as proposed by Singer (1973) in his debate with Castells (1973) and Quijano ([1968] 2014, 1973), nor about suggesting the existence of a more balanced process of urbanization and industrialization. Rather, the period under analysis was marked by tendencies that manifested as the structural ambiguity of the Brazilian State and its relationship with the urban sphere – this being the central contribution of Oliveira (1978) revisited herein. In order to ensure the expansion of capitalism, the state had to incorporate some level of response to the interests of the low-income classes, particularly the industrial proletariat, within the social pact of industrialization. However, ambiguity persisted, as evidenced by the recurring restriction of opportunities for political participation and autonomous worker organization.

However, according to Oliveira (1978), this period was replaced by another, which began with the “Kubitschek⁵ Restoration” (1956–1961) and was consolidated after the military coup of 1964.

Initially, this ambiguity not only persisted but, indeed, became even more pronounced. The issue of the Northeastern region was explicitly addressed, leading, in 1959, to the creation of the Northeastern Development Superintendency (Sudene) as a proposed solution. Social struggles intensified, particularly in support of agrarian reform, prompting efforts to regulate tenancy and labor relations in rural areas, culminating in the enactment of the *Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural* [Statute of the Rural Worker] (Brazil, 1963), under the João Goulart administration. That same year, attempts were also made to systematize key aspects of Brazil’s urban question, exemplified by the Housing and Urban Reform Seminar held at the Hotel Quitandinha in Petrópolis (RJ).

However, from this initial moment, the Brazilian economy and its industrialization process became increasingly dominated by the expansion of multinational corporations. Thus, caught between national affirmation and deepening dependency, various deadlocks emerged, coinciding with the worsening economic and institutional crises. Ultimately, the military coup eliminated this ambiguity, paving the way for a new phase.

According to Oliveira (1978), it was during this new phase – coinciding with the country’s metropolitanization – that the urban became the “anti-nation,” or rather, that the “urban anti-nation” emerged in the form of the “definitive establishment of production and political-social control in the city,” primarily aimed at “repressing and stripping the working masses of their means” (*ibid.*, p. 73). Urban problems

5. Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira, also known by his initials JK, was a prominent Brazilian politician who served as the 21st president of Brazil from 1956 to 1961.

multiplied, disproportionately affecting the lower classes, while the benefits of the synergy between capitalist expansion and urbanization were captured almost exclusively by the elites and middle classes. A clear example of this dynamic is the priority allocation of housing credit to these groups within the framework of the establishment of the Housing Finance System (SFH) (Brazil, 1964a).

After a phase of stabilization, there was significant economic growth, but social inequalities increased at an even greater rate. Ultimately, reflecting the broader movement of conservative modernization, the transformation of large landed estates into agribusiness enterprises, as advocated in the Land Statute (Brazil, 1964b), led to the increasing expulsion of rural workers. At the same time, large cities, particularly those in the Southeast, were transformed into highly dualized and polarized agglomerations, serving as the primary locus of expansion for surplus popular masses excluded from the economic model.

It was precisely in analyzing this period, marked by the emergence of the “urban anti-nation”, that Kowarick (1979, p. 55) coined the term “urban spoliation.” In his argument, alongside overexploitation, which leads to the depletion of labor power in the sphere of production, urban spoliation, i.e., the lack or precariousness of access to housing and collective consumption goods and services, further intensifies this depletion in the sphere of reproduction.

It can thus be said that it was during this period that the Brazilian bourgeoisie consolidated its process of denationalization, both in terms of capital ownership in the most dynamic sectors of the economy and in terms of defending an autonomous development project. However, at least until the early 1980s, the state remained sufficiently strong and active in strategic sectors to sustain economic expansion. This expansion was driven primarily by income concentration and external debt, signaling the transition from “new dependence I” to “new dependence II.” Nevertheless, the country’s conservative modernization resulted in the formation of a complex, diversified, and integrated productive apparatus (Pochmann; Silva, 2023). Regional inequalities were not eliminated, although strong spatial and intersectoral linkages were established within the national territory.

In summary, the structural ambiguity of the State had been fully contained, and the new “associated” bourgeoisie, in promoting its power pact and shaping the urban-regional order, effectively excluded the lower-income classes from social and, above all, political participation, whose interests, both in production and reproduction, were largely disregarded.

This article argues that, for much of the twentieth century, the Brazilian urban-regional order oscillated between structural ambiguity (1930-1964) and the overt convergence of the overexploitation of labor and urban spoliation

(1964-1985). The latter marked the advent of the “anti-nation urban” (Oliveira, 1978) and the deepening of dependency relations. It further contends that the perspectives of Oliveira (1978) and Kowarick (1979) provided a useful framework for delineating two subsequent periods, namely: (i) the “long 1980s”; and (ii) the period of ultraliberal inflection and intensification of the Brazilian urban crisis, between 2016 and 2022, set in motion by the parliamentary coup that interrupted Dilma Rousseff’s second government (2015-2016).

The first period extends from the late 1970s until the coup in 2016. Notable events during this time include the strikes in the ABC region of São Paulo, the formation of autonomous labor unions and social movements, and the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution. This document served as the legal expression of a new phase of structural ambiguity and the rise of a social and power pact that aimed to replace the prevailing forms of domination during the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). But how was this ambiguity expressed?

On the one hand, the political and economic crisis of the 1980s provided a backdrop for the social and political forces seeking to embed and implement the interests and demands of organized labor, rural and urban social movements, and broader claims for civil, political, and social rights within the country’s new constitutional framework. These forces, eminently progressive and distributive, included the formation of the National Movement for Urban Reform (MNRU) and its mobilization around the approval of the Popular Amendment for Urban Reform, which was only partially achieved through articles 182 and 183 of the 1988 Constitution.

On the other hand, following the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, neoliberalism gained greater traction in Brazil, materializing in concrete measures such as privatizations initiated during the government of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992). From that point forward, various levels of government grappled with the tensions between the partially crystallized social distributive program in the 1988 Constitution and the country’s successive rounds of neoliberal adjustment. Ultimately, neoliberal initiatives predominated, particularly in the realm of macroeconomic policy, which came to be structured around the trio of inflation targets, primary surplus, and, from 1999, floating exchange rates. Even within the framework of the “newest dependency” however, rural and urban social struggles throughout the 1990s yielded tangible outcomes, such as the expansion of agrarian reform through expropriation during the first Fernando Henrique Cardoso government (1995-1998) and the approval of the City Statute (Brazil, 2001) in his second term (1999–2002).

This ambiguity persisted during the administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) (2003-2010), a period known as “Lulismo”, which, according to Singer (2012), “exists under the sign of contradiction. Conservation and change, reproduction and overcoming, disappointment and hope in the same movement” (*ibid.*, p. 9). For Singer, it is precisely the “ambiguous character of the phenomenon that makes its interpretation difficult” (*ibid.*).

One paradigmatic example within the scope of urban order is the launch of the *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* [My Home, My Life] Program in 2009, which serves as a compelling indicator of the contradictions between the social-liberal and openly neoliberal tendencies that shaped the core of the Workers’ Party (PT) governments. Following the broader pattern of combining gradual reform with conservative pacts (Singer, 2012), this initiative sought to reconcile demands for the right to housing with the interests of expanding the real estate and construction markets. These efforts unfolded in the context of responding to the 2008 financial crisis but were also linked to reviving national development debates, reconfigured as “neodevelopmentalism.” This agenda gained momentum particularly during Lula’s second administration (2007–2010), following the launch of the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) in 2007, and continued under Dilma Rousseff’s governments (2011–2016). However, as is well known, these debates and initiatives largely remained within the confines of a conciliatory approach, balancing, on one side, targeted social policies, consumer credit expansion, and minimum wage increases, and on the other, the preservation of the macroeconomic framework established in the 1990s.

Thus, despite the significant increase in investments and public spending, as in the case of education, in addition to a noticeable expansion of the social and political participation of the popular classes, financial rentism and renewed specialization in the export of agricultural and mineral commodities increasingly gained space.

With regard to the regional issue, the National Policy for Regional Development (PNDR), launched in 2003 and formally established in 2007 should receive mention. However, despite the resumption of discussion on the country’s regional inequalities, the initiative encountered significant implementation difficulties largely due to the dominance of neoliberal hegemony and impasses surrounding the federative pact.

As in the twentieth century, the structural ambiguity of the State once again gave way to an irreconcilable contradiction, mirroring the intensifying political polarization following the 2014 presidential elections and the 2014-2016 recession.

Within this new scenario, some of the very agents who had benefited most from the gradual, conservative reformism of the Workers' Party (PT) governments, such as several agribusiness representatives, were at the forefront of the 2016 coup. These and other agents eagerly embraced the ultraliberal agenda of the Temer Government (2016-2019) – “Bridge to the Future”, which was marked by the approval of a Spending Cap in 2016 and the Labor Reform in 2017. This trajectory was reflected in the Bolsonaro Government (2019-2022), which not only broadened the ultraliberal shift, as seen in the approval of the 2019 Pension Reform, but also for setting into motion autocratic and disruptive trends that culminated in an attempted coup d'état aimed at preventing the inauguration of the third Lula Government.

In short, the emphasis was on a renewed oscillation from structural ambiguity (the long 1980s) to the overt combination, at least during the ultraliberal inflection period (2016-2022), of the overexploitation of labor and urban spoliation. This shift was marked by a drastic reduction in the social and political participation of the low-income classes, reflected in the deepening urban crisis and the expansion of informality and precarious, platform-based labor, especially in large cities.

The difference, however, is as follows: in this new oscillation, even during the period of structural ambiguity, there was little to no space for questioning dependency relations. As seen above, these relations have continued to deepen since the 1980s and increasingly exert a direct influence on the urban-regional order.

It is still necessary to construct the appropriate mediations between current trends in Brazilian urbanization and the new historical form of dependency. These mediations may be explored through concepts such as the “pattern of capital reproduction” (Ferreira; Osório; Luce, 2012, p. 37) and the “pattern of capitalist development” (Filgueiras, 2018, p. 524). A successful example of the application of the former concept for this purpose, considering the case of Chile, may be found in Tonin (2021). However, in general, it is observed that, unlike in the twentieth century, dependency (in its rentier-neo-extractivist form) is now dismantling rather than shaping the relatively complex, diversified, and integrated productive apparatus that once existed in the country. From a socio-territorial perspective, it is reinforcing what Pacheco (1998) referred to as the fragmentation of the nation. This is partly because the very spatial forms and configurations – public enterprises, infrastructure, fixed capital, etc. – that once constituted this apparatus and structured the territory have become “objects” rather than merely “landmarks” of accumulation, through privatizations and concessions.

Moreover, this inevitably had a profound impact on Brazil's urban network and order, on interregional relations, and on the emergence of a new form of dependent urbanization. This was characterized by the crisis of large cities,

the financialization and digitalization of urban spaces, and a relative shift in power and economic dynamism (or at least the highest economic growth rates) toward emerging centralities. The expansion of these centralities stems from the production of mineral and oil commodities (Pessanha; Silva Neto, 2004; Cruz, 2003; Melo; Cardoso, 2016), logistics activities (Diniz; Gonçalves, 2022; Yassu, 2021), and agribusiness (Elias; Pequeno, 2007), while, at the same time, metropolises experience the concentrated effects of deindustrialization (Ribeiro, 2024).

In summary, what we term as the “new dependent urbanization” represents, from a methodological standpoint, the initial development of a typology of urban dynamics strongly determined by the key axes of the current historical form of Brazilian dependency. Figure 1, below, provides further clarity on the issue at hand.

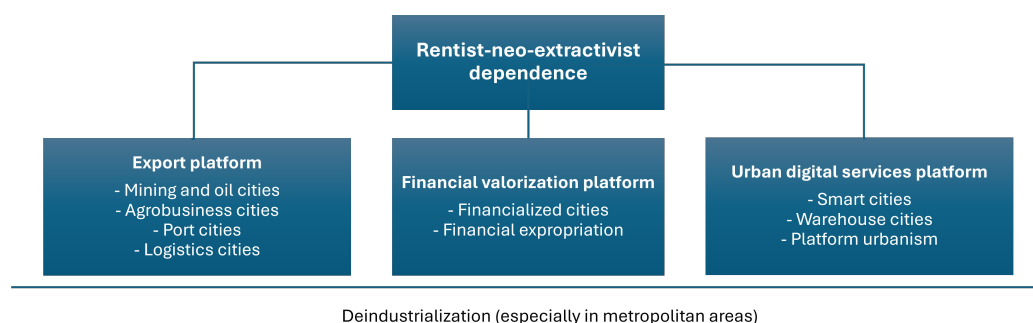


Figure 1. Typology of Urban Dynamics Linked to the New Historical Form of Dependency

Source: Own elaboration.

In other words, it represents a set of spatio-temporal fixes (Harvey, 2013) within the Brazilian urban-regional order that accompanies the country’s transformation into an export platform, a platform for financial valorization, but also a platform for the expansion of urban digital services. These fixes are characterized by the fact that their dynamics and morphological expressions are predominantly imposed by forces beyond the control of the “Nation”.

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that the contemporary articulation between rentierism and neo-extractivism reinforces Brazil’s historical state of dependency, with profound implications for the urban-regional order. This assertion resonates with the reflections proposed, for example, by Pochmann (2022) and Bombardi (2023), who have highlighted the trends of diminishing national sovereignty in the face of emerging neocolonial relations of domination. Hence, revisiting the debate on dependent urbanization becomes crucial. The central themes and issues explored in works such as *Imperialismo y urbanización en América Latina* have precisely

indicated the establishment of an “imperialist urban order,” a term used but not developed by Castells and Véléz (1973, p. 3). In other words, as Latin American dependency deepens, the social production of space is increasingly determined by the dynamics of subordinated relationships between the periphery and the center of the capitalist world-system – a reality that seems even more pertinent today.

That being said, we conclude by outlining several topics that stem from the arguments presented herein and that could serve as avenues for further research on the new dependent urbanization:

- i. The current historical form of dependency and the corresponding urban-regional order both express and deepen the antisocial, antinational, and antidemocratic nature of Brazilian capitalism.
- ii. In this context, the country’s dominant classes have been definitively transformed into something akin to comprador bourgeoisies (Poulantzas, 1978), meaning classes that are directly and extensively subordinated to international capitalist interests.
- iii. These same classes have renounced any semblance of autonomy in terms of macroeconomic management and have completely abandoned control over the spatial matrix of Brazilian capitalism. This is manifested, primarily, in the destruction of the state’s capacity to carry out urban-regional planning, even in the service of capital, while arbitrating the relationships between the general interest and private interests.
- iv. The social production of urban space, particularly real estate activities, is increasingly subordinated to the logic of fictitious capital valorization.
- v. This direct submission to the logic of fictitious capital valorization, which operates globally in search of new “rights of value appropriation,” reverberates both in rural and urban areas, leading to processes such as the overexploitation of labor, the commodification of land, and the privatization of common goods.
- vi. It is also necessary to consider the possibility that a significant volume of overaccumulated capital, arising from Brazil’s primary-export activities, is being redirected into real estate valorization circuits.
- vii. Lastly, it is important to highlight the deepening historical fusion between the “urban question” and the “national question”. The most severe consequences of the loss of control over our historicity

in global capitalism are increasingly concentrated in the cities, particularly in the metropolises, manifesting in the contradiction identified by Sampaio Jr. (1999) between nation and barbarism.

These and other topics, which seem to confirm the hypothesis regarding the emergence of an urban-regional order under imperialist domination, call for a renewed political and academic debate on urban reform and the right to the city in Brazil. This debate must not only engage with reflections on national development but also contribute to fostering a genuine “democratic revolution”, in the sense outlined by Florestan Fernandes (1980) – a revolution capable of “instituting”, rather than “restoring” democracy, and that “seeks to incorporate the people into the Nation” (*ibid.*, p. 58). Undoubtedly, this proposition, written at the dawn of Brazil’s redemocratization, remains equally valid today, in a context of “nation reconstruction”, following serious threats to democratic continuity.

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