

ARTICLES

CENTER, PERIPHERY AND CENTRALITY IN PLANETARY URBANIZATION: THOUGHT AND ACTION FROM BRAZIL

Marlon Lima da Silva*

*Universidade Federal do Pará, Programa de Pós-graduação em Geografia, Belém, PA, Brazil

Abstract

As contemporary urbanization has rendered the concepts underpinning our understanding of socio-spatial differentiation increasingly more complex, this article poses the following question: How may we consider the multiple interrelations between center, periphery and centrality within the context of planetary urbanization? As the basis for the theoretical-methodological framework, the production of space and the idea of “urban levels”, both developed by Henri Lefebvre, have been employed. Grounded in the Brazilian context, the text problematizes and synthesizes insights from recent studies, arguing that the approach to spatial production, when articulated with “urban levels”, constitutes a valuable tool for thought and action in the face of emerging complexities. It further highlights that Brazil’s peripheral condition is continually reconfigured within the context of planetary urbanization. The article concludes by asserting the need to rethink the notions of center, periphery, and centrality in order to foster more equitable processes of spatial differentiation across various “urban levels” and multiple scales.

Keywords

Socio-Spatial Differentiation, Scales, Right to the City; Urban Periphery; Center, Centrality, Planetary Urbanization.

ARTIGOS

CENTRO, PERIFERIA E CENTRALIDADE NA URBANIZAÇÃO PLANETÁRIA: PENSAR E AGIR A PARTIR DO BRASIL

Marlon Lima da Silva*

*Universidade Federal do Pará, Programa de Pós-graduação em Geografia, Belém, PA, Brasil

Resumo

Ao considerar que a urbanização contemporânea tem elevado a complexidade de conceitos que orientam o entendimento de processos de diferenciação socioespacial, o artigo levanta a questão: Como pensar, a partir de uma abordagem espacial crítica, as múltiplas conexões existentes entre centro, periferia e centralidade no curso da urbanização planetária? Como suportes teórico-metodológicos, utilizam-se a produção do espaço e a ideia de “níveis urbanos”, ambas de Henri Lefebvre. Baseado no contexto brasileiro, o texto problematiza e sintetiza proposições de estudos recentes e defende que a abordagem da produção do espaço, associada aos “níveis urbanos”, constitui instrumental relevante para pensar e agir diante da complexidade emergente. Ainda, evidencia que a condição periférica do Brasil se atualiza no curso da urbanização planetária. Conclui-se que centro, periferia e centralidade precisam ser repensados para promover processos de diferenciação espacial mais justos nos diferentes “níveis urbanos” e nas múltiplas escalas.

Palavras-chave

Diferenciação Socioespacial; Escalas; Direito à Cidade; Periferia Urbana; Centro, Centralidade; Urbanização Planetária.

CENTER, PERIPHERY AND CENTRALITY IN PLANETARY URBANIZATION: THOUGHT AND ACTION FROM BRAZIL

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Introduction

The complexity of the urban phenomenon, shaped by the expanding global mechanisms of capitalist reproduction, requires considering the notions of center, periphery, and centrality across multiple scales and within diverse socio-spatial contexts (Soja, 2000; Lencioni, 2008; Sposito, 2015; Silva; Rodrigues, 2023a). Consequently, urban studies increasingly call for less geometric and more relational, critical perspectives, such as those informed by the framework of the so-called planetary urbanization (Brenner, 2014; Brenner; Schmid, 2015; Brenner, 2018; Brenner; Katsikis, 2020).

In addressing this challenge, the article poses the following question: How may we consider the multiple interrelations between center, periphery and centrality within the course of planetary urbanization? More specifically, the article aims to problematize and synthesize the notions of center, periphery, and centrality in light of the complex spatial differentiations engendered by planetary urbanization in Brazil. To this end, it draws on two foundational concepts developed by Henri Lefebvre: the production of space and the idea of “urban levels” (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974]; 1986; 2001 [1968]; 2002 [1970]).

It is important to note that the very concept of planetary urbanization, as proposed by Brenner and Schmid (2015), has been put into question in Brazil. It has been argued that “Lefebvre’s urban (-utopia) appears to have been subsumed into the operationalization of landscapes, the process of neoliberalization, colonization,

and the implosion-explosion of capitalism”¹ (Castriota, 2016, p. 519). This critique is grounded in Monte-Mór’s (2015, p. 56) idea of the “urban utopia”, which envisions a radical expansion of participation, citizenship, and democracy within the scope of “extensive urbanization” (Monte-Mór, 2004, p. 262), inspired by Lefebvrian thought.

While it is highly relevant to problematize the proposal by Brenner and Schmid (2015) regarding planetary urbanization, this is not the focus of the present study. The primary aim of this work is to reflect on the findings of recent urban studies on center, periphery, and centrality, particularly those developed in Brazil. Therefore, the goal is not to catalog the various studies addressing the specific debate on planetary urbanization in Brazil, but rather to identify and condense the main problematizations constructed around center, periphery, and centrality, which, in one way or another, intersect with this discussion.

To guide these efforts, the analysis is grounded in two key tools: (i) a literature review and (ii) a critical conceptual reading. Although the topic addressed in this article remains relatively underexplored in Brazil, the use of these tools is highly relevant. This is especially true given that the issues problematized by various Brazilian researchers call for a perspective that goes beyond fragmented knowledge, aiming to highlight the concrete problems that uniquely characterize Brazil, the fifth-largest country in the world by territorial extension.

For this reason, complex thinking is used here as a foundational analytical tool, since it involves an effort “to unite, not in confusion, but by operating differentiations” (Morin, 1999, p. 33). In other words, it is “the kind of thinking capable of reuniting, contextualizing, globalizing, while simultaneously recognizing the singular, the individual, the concrete” (Morin; Le Moigne, 2000, p. 213).

In this regard, one of the major challenges is to extend beyond the disciplinary content, typically problematized and classified within the scope of urban geography. It must aim to incorporate other directions, such as the debates faced in urban sociology, architecture, economics, political science, and urban and regional planning.

This approach may seem confusing to researchers more accustomed to disciplinary knowledge regarding the urban phenomenon. On this topic, Henri Lefebvre himself pointed to the need for constructing a “science of space” that integrates different analytical perspectives (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974], p. 400).

Given this, as the studies selected throughout the text span various fields, the reader may question the perceived lack of focus. However, it is important to emphasize that the principles of the production of space and the idea of “urban levels” serve as central guiding frameworks.

1. This and all other non-English citations have been translated by the author.

In reality, they have the ability to systematically bring together analyses that might otherwise seem fragmented, i.e., confined within the various disciplines dedicated to the study of the urban phenomenon. Thus, much like alloys, the production of space and the idea of “urban levels” help to recognize that “knowledge of the whole also requires knowledge of the parts [...] It is not an easy task, given the persistence of mutilated thought, blind intelligence, widespread narrow-mindedness” (Morin, 2001, p. 34).

Far from considering an analysis in this direction, given its complexity, this article is grounded in a “geographical approach” to the urban phenomenon and the notions of center, periphery, and centrality. To this end, it has mobilized the idea of “spatial differentiation” as the central motivation that attracts geographers interested in understanding the different features of the Earth’s surface in relation to society (Corrêa, 2022, p. 4).

More specifically, the most evident spatial differentiations occurring in planetary urbanization may be thought of through two fundamental premises: (i) the conflict of interests between fractions of capital, i.e., moving beyond the simple antagonism between countryside and city; and (ii) the types of relations engendered by capital in the course of its reproduction, including, for example, economic subordination and political privileges across multiple scales (Lencioni, 2015).

In this process, it is important to consider that “planetary urbanization unevenly intensifies interdependence, differentiation, and polarization across and among places, territories, and scales”² (Brenner, 2018, p. 240), such that the notions of center, periphery, and centrality tend to become more complex, demanding new interpretative efforts.

With these considerations in mind, the core of the discussion is structured into four parts. The first problematizes the notions of center, periphery, and centrality, highlighting them as significant analytical tools not only in theoretical terms but also in practical application. The second introduces the premises of planetary urbanization and argues for the importance of considering the production of space and the idea of “urban levels” as means with which to grasp the emerging complexity that manifests across multiple scales. The third part, drawing on these conceptual foundations, synthesizes studies that touch upon debates on center, periphery, and centrality within the course of planetary urbanization in Brazil. Lastly, the fourth part outlines a synthetic proposal, organized in the form of a table, developed from the systematic review of the studies examined throughout the article.

2. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of BRENNER, N. *Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays*. Birkhauser VerlagGmbH, Basel. (2017, p. 197)

Here, the complex nature of contemporary urbanization is revealed in its multidimensional character, opening new perspectives for understanding the notions of center, periphery, and centrality. These notions give rise to geographical differences capable of informing both thought and action, contributing to the promotion of more equitable processes of spatial differentiation at various levels and across multiple scales.

1. The idea of hierarchy as an analytical framework for understanding center, periphery, and centrality

The notions of center, periphery, and centrality are multifaceted, and can encompass spatial-geometric aspects as well as economic, political, or cultural dimensions. Their meanings varying according to the analytical focus or the perspective of the observer.

The most common definition of center relates to the spatial-geometric dimension. i.e., the middle point of a circle or sphere, equidistant from every point on the circumference or surface (Oxford Language Dictionary, 2025). Thus, periphery would be defined as the outline or boundary of this geometric shape, while centrality would be understood as the attribute of the geometric center, determined by distance.

While rooted in a spatial-geometric dimension, but incorporating economic, political, and cultural elements, the meanings of these notions take on plural and diverse orientations. It is therefore possible to speak of an economic center, a political center, a cultural center, and a city center (Schmid, 2014), as well as of economic peripheries and urban peripheries, the latter of which may carry both objective and/or subjective dimensions (Morcuende; Frago, 2023). Likewise, it is also possible to identify economic, political, and cultural centralities, as well as central areas within different cities (Dematteis, 1996; Silva; Teixeira; Sposito, 2021; Tella, 2016).

There is, therefore, significant polysemy in these notions, which becomes evident depending on the criteria adopted and the perspective of the observer. For example, the economic center of a given city may itself be perceived as peripheral when viewed from a broader standpoint and recognizes that the city is located within a country positioned at the periphery of global economic relations. This line of reasoning can likewise be extended to political and cultural dimensions.

Thus, depending on the criteria and scale of analysis, the notions of center and periphery take on polysemic contours that warrant the researcher's attention. The same applies to the idea of centrality: it refers to the attributes of what is considered the center, revealing a certain dominance over what is considered peripheral.

To illustrate, the following expression has been widely used: “The periphery at the center of the urban debate”. This indicates that, within the hierarchy of contemporary urban issues, what is understood as the periphery is being highlighted by many researchers, thereby assuming centrality in relation to other topics. Rephrased, this statement could read: “The centrality of the periphery in urban studies”.

Hence, it is possible to conceive that the notions of center, periphery, and centrality are always conditioned by the intellectual framework of hierarchy, and are constructed through specific elements positioned in a given relative location. The criteria adopted and the perspective of the observer serve as the defining guides for representation. As Corrêa (2022, p. 2) notes, “it is our gaze that selects what we will see. The Earth’s surface and its metaphor are thus subject to polyvocality, multiple voices, and multiple perspectives... in each, spatial differentiation will be highlighted”.

Following this perspective, the idea of hierarchy is fundamentally about the systematic segmentation of criteria defined a priori, i.e., from a specific viewpoint through which the construction of a coherent and ordered whole is made possible in thought.

It should also be emphasized that hierarchy is commonly used as a fundamental tool for understanding important facets of “spatial differentiation”, that is to say, the “motivation that attracts the geographer, curious to make human action upon the Earth’s surface intelligible” (Corrêa, 2022, p. 1). Specifically, variables linked to the capitalist mode of production, such as: (i) the territorial division of labor; (ii) rural-urban relations; (iii) the spatial structure (whether in the relationship between different cities or within urban agglomerations – metropolises, medium-sized cities, small towns, regions, countries, etc.).

Studies related to urban and regional planning, particularly those from the pragmatic perspective of development, are also fueled by hierarchy (Perroux, 1963; Christaller, 1966; Friedmann, 1967). The foundation lies in recognizing the so-called “central places” through mediating their areas of influence, as well as in systematically planning the most profitable distribution of goods and services within a given spatial context, through the action of both the State and corporations or society.

Regardless of the approach, the way in which the mechanisms of spatial differentiation are understood will define the selection of the most suitable criteria for considering the hierarchy of center, periphery, and centrality, as well as the pathways to mitigate or even overcome the perverse effects of the unequal reproduction inherent in the capitalist mode of production.

Center, periphery, and centrality, therefore, are important analytical tools – not only in the theoretical realm but also in the realm of action. Recognizing and modulating them within the horizons of thought and action are fundamental challenges that must be addressed in order to facilitate the creation of more equitable spatial differentiations, whether in cities or urban spaces. This is because cities and urban areas are becoming increasingly complex (Monte-Mór, 2005), as they grow more global in nature (Brenner; Schmid, 2015).

2. Center, periphery and centrality in planetary urbanization: from the perspective of the production of space and of the “urban levels”

The complexity of the contemporary urban phenomenon has demanded an ongoing reevaluation of ideas and concepts so as to more accurately reflect the dynamics of the present. This endeavor raises a series of questions that have sparked debates around the critical junctures where new spatial differentiations emerge – in the contemporary relationships between countryside and city, rural and urban, center and periphery, among other dimensions (Soja, 2000; Morcuende, 2021).

In addressing this topic, Brenner and Schmid (2015) have emphasized the need to construct a new epistemology of the urban – one that is capable of accounting for the recent transformations driven by global value chains, which are propelled by the contemporary dynamism of capitalist reproduction. Building on Lefebvre’s thesis of the “complete urbanization of society”, i.e., the complex, unprecedented diffusion of the urban phenomenon through the city’s processes of implosion and explosion, initially driven by industrialization (Lefebvre, 2001 [1968]; 2002 [1970]), they have incorporated new dimensions shaped by successive waves of neoliberalization since in the 1980s.

Within this epistemological framework, Brenner and Schmid (2015, p. 172) put forward the thesis of “planetary urbanization”, which refers to the global spread of a set of transformative processes, including: (i) the deregulation and re-regulation of the global financial system and of national and subnational systems; (ii) the flexibilization of productive processes, resulting in the formation of global production networks; and (iii) the digital revolution.

In summary, the authors argue that analyzing spatial differentiations in the context of contemporary urbanization requires recognizing that, while cities remain central to the systemic reproduction of these transformations, it is essential to move beyond them. This entails engaging with what they term *extended operational landscapes* (Brenner; Schmid, 2015, p. 176): the operational landscapes associated with planetary urbanization. These landscapes are

expressed through (i) expansive urban networks tied to resource extraction in agro-industrial export zones (including food, biofuels, oil, etc.), which impact small and medium-scale production as well as environments; (ii) vast operational infrastructures of transportation and communication that intensify circulation and accelerate the reproduction of capital in response to the consumption imperatives of major global cities; and (iii) interregional migration networks enabled by communication infrastructures, fostering new quotidian experiences that transcend national borders.

Within this broad perspective on the urban phenomenon, the rural has come to be conceived as situated at the very core of urbanization (Brenner, 2014; Brenner; Schmid, 2015; Brenner, 2018). In other words, without disappearing, its current content requires renewed interpretations that take into account broader contexts, highlighting planetary urbanization. Within this challenge, it may be considered that “all territory is susceptible to urbanization and all territory becomes homogenized, even as its specialization/differentiation increases” (Morcuende, 2021, p. 16). Thus, “the geographies of uneven spatial development are today being articulated as an interweaving of new developmental patterns and potentials within a thickening, if deeply polarized, fabric of worldwide urbanization” (Brenner; Schmid, 2015, p. 174).

In light of this initial reflection, several questions emerge: If the urban fabric has assumed global dimensions, how should we conceptualize the notions of center, periphery, and centrality? In what way are they expressed and interconnected within the context of the complex spatial differentiations engendered by planetary urbanization?

These are provocative questions, the answers to which will inevitably follow diverse trajectories. Depending on the analytical approach, scale, and forms of hierarchy adopted, the criteria involved will take on multiple expressions across various economic, political, and cultural domains. Therefore, the various lenses through which planetary urbanization is apprehended may orient these concepts of center, periphery, and centrality along distinct paths, even though these notions remain deeply interrelated and embedded within the broader universe of spatial differentiations.

Without seeking to delve into the various possible ways of approaching this topic, the present discussion adopts the perspective of the production of space, drawing on Lefebvrian thought. This choice is justified by the systematic, complex scope offered by this approach, especially since the very concept of planetary urbanization is nourished by the idea of the production of space, or, more precisely, by a mode of thinking through space.

According to Lefebvre (1986, p. 159), the urban “is grounded in a theory of (social) space as both product and producer, i.e., engendered by the mode of production while also intervening at all levels.” These levels are: (i) the productive forces; (ii) the organization of labor; (iii) property relations; (iv) institutions; and (v) ideologies.

In the face of this complex challenge and in an effort to grasp the multidimensionality of the urban, Henri Lefebvre introduced the notion of “urban levels”. Together with the concept of the production of space, this notion plays a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives and the criteria through which to conceptualize center, periphery, and centrality within the context of planetary urbanization.

Although the concept of “urban level” is not explicitly defined, it refers to a methodological procedure developed “to introduce a degree of order into the confused discourse about the city and the urban, which mixes text and context, levels and dimensions”³ (Lefebvre, 2002 [1970], p. 77). It thus functions as a kind of complex hierarchy designed to understand the city and the urban by segmenting processes without isolating them.

In summary, Lefebvre (2002 [1970]) identified three fundamental levels of the urban phenomenon: (i) the “*global level*” (G), (ii) the “*mixed level*” (M), and (iii) the “*private level*” (P). These correspond, respectively, to “general (and global) processes, the city as specificity and intermediary level, then relations of immediacy (linked to a way of life, to inhabiting, to regulating daily life)”⁴ (Lefebvre, 2001 [1968], pp. 65-66).

From a broader perspective and in more direct terms, the three levels are associated with the conceived, the perceived and the lived, respectively. Thus, the tripartite structure of the production of space and the notion of “urban levels” operate in tandem, complementing one another dialectically. Hence, the production of space traverses all “urban levels” in such a way that centers, peripheries, and forms of centrality may be understood as social productions arising from “the triad of the conceived, the perceived and the lived”⁵ (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974]).

3. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Urban Revolution*. University of Minnesota Press. Minnesota. (2003, p. 77) Translated by Robert Bononno.

4. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *Writings on Cities*. Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts. (2000, p. 112) Translated and Edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas.

5. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, Massachusetts. (1991, p. 39) Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith.

It is important to note that the notion of level both traverses and exceeds the concept of scale, while still making use of it (Brenner, 2000; Kipfer, Saberi; Wieditz, 2013). As Corrêa (2018) outlined, the concept of scale encompasses four meanings: (i) economic size (economies of scale); (ii) mathematical (maps, cartography); (iii) spatial (the territorial scope of a process or phenomenon – local, regional, national, global); and (iv) conceptual (the relationship between objects and the theories appropriate to their explanation and cartographic representation). The idea of “urban levels” intersects with all these various meanings, although it aligns more closely with the spatial and conceptual scales. From this perspective, the city extends far beyond a geometric boundary defined by physical agglomeration. In reality, it constitutes a kind of pathway linking the global and the quotidian.

In this framework, the attribute of hierarchization functions as a formal device, since in practice, these levels are intricately interwoven. Consequently, the notions of center, periphery, and centrality are embedded within the broader process of the production of space and its hierarchically structured spatial differentiations. However, this is not a process driven solely by the expanded reproduction of capital, rather, it also constitutes a terrain for the reproduction of everyday life – and is therefore thus open to the new. In this sense, new centers, new peripheries, and new centralities may emerge and be hierarchized in multiple, differentiated ways.

Inspired by this understanding, Carlos (2019, p. 462) argued that “the response to the survival of capital is found in the movement of reproduction that takes place through the quotidian, the urban, and space”. Thus, the three levels tend to be colonized by the logic of capital reproduction, although it is also essential to acknowledge that “[T]he act of producing is, at the same time, the act of producing space”⁶ (Santos, 1980, p. 161), and that “by producing its life, society produces/reproduces a space” (Carlos, 2007, p. 21).

Accordingly, the concepts of center, periphery, and centrality should be understood as outcomes of the production of space and its hierarchically structured spatial differentiations. This requires attentiveness to the complexity and articulation of each of the “urban levels” and their expressions across the multiple scales of the conceived-perceived-lived triad. This is far from straightforward, as the segmentation of levels is itself complex and demands a clear definition of the criteria and conceptual frameworks guiding the analyses.

6. N.B. for direct citations the English version was used of SANTOS, M. *For a New Geography*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis. (2021, p. 124). Translated by Archie Davies.

Following Lefebvrian thought, this task must result primarily from a careful reading of the spatial practices of the multiple agents and subjects who produce, consume, and circulate within different sociospatial formations. As such, the concept of spatial practice becomes central to this interpretive effort as a key tool.

Without delving into the various perspectives on this concept, which incidentally, has been heavily problematized within geography (Pereira, 2024), here we adopt the Lefebvrian understanding that a society's spatial practice may be grasped by deciphering its space (2013 [1974]). In this vein, a key analytical entry point is through recognizing that within a perceived space, spatial practices link everyday reality (use of time) with urban reality (networks and pathways), thereby ensuring a certain degree of cohesion (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974]).

However, the idea of cohesion, as employed by Henri Lefebvre, must not be confused with the notion of coherence in a logical sense. In other words, cohesion does not result from an intellectually constructed coherence based on grand interpretative frameworks. This is because, even considering the strict aim of maximizing profits and returns, different agents “cannot produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication”⁷ (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974], p. 96).

Therefore, the interpretation of perceived space – when articulated with the conceived and the lived – guides the analytical pathways through which diverse spatial practices are identified and understood, attributing to them certain performances and competencies. It is these spatial practices that generate centers, peripheries, and centralities across the various scales and levels at which planetary urbanization unfolds, thereby expressing complex, hierarchically structured spatial differentiations. Even if only for didactic purposes, the segmentation of levels remains a valuable strategy in this challenging task of separating and connecting, of analyzing and synthesizing.

In summary, a clear understanding of the notions of center, periphery, and centrality within the context of planetary urbanization directly depends on a systematic engagement with three fundamental pathways: (i) recognizing the multidimensional and interconnected nature of “urban levels” and the scales of spatial production; (ii) clearly defining the analytical criteria through which the “urban levels” and scales will be articulated in the hierarchical structuring of spatial differentiation; and (iii) making the perspective explicit, i.e., the analytical standpoint from which the analysis is conducted, with due attention to the socio-spatial formations under study.

7. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Production of Space*. (1991, p 37).

3. Reflections on planetary urbanization based on the production of space and the “urban levels” in Brazil: centers, peripheries, centralities, and spatial differentiations

3.1 The global level and conceived space

When considering the global level and its correlation with other levels – center, periphery, and centrality – within the context of planetary urbanization and specifically focusing on Brazilian territory, these notions may largely be understood through the spatial practices of large corporations and the State. While it is equally important to emphasize the emergence of “urban utopias” arising from the actions of other agents and subjects (Limonad; Monte-Mór, 2022), particularly on a private level, it must be acknowledged that this horizon of resistance and “other possible worlds” remains tenuous at the global level.

Thus, the hierarchical structuring of spatial differentiations, which constitutes center, periphery, and centrality, is driven by the correlation between the economic dimension (corporations) and the political dimension (corporations and the State). In this regard, the center becomes synonymous with the locus that simultaneously condenses the abstract and concrete planes of accumulation and power. In this direction, the set of spatial practices essentially reflects two complementary fronts (Silva; Rodrigues, 2023b; Acselrad; Michelotti; Rbeur Editorial Commission, 2024): (i) a tendency to facilitate global business through neoliberal imposition, including the increased fluidity of capital and financial speculation; and (ii) the reinforcement of centrality practiced by global corporations in the process of space production, which translates, for example, into socio-environmental damage. Therefore, in Brazil, new center-periphery structures and new centralities are shaped within the context of planetary urbanization, considering the global level.

In light of this scenario, urban and regional planning is often expected to “correct” socio-economic and environmental “imbalances” through growth-oriented policies. However, the solution typically imposed on economically peripheral territories is to emulate the path of central countries, implementing reforms designed to stimulate, albeit with significant effort, their economic growth potential in the international market (Dos Santos, 1970; Santos, 2014a [1979]; Pochmann; Silva, 2023). This approach has become a mechanism that ultimately expands and re-signifies the subordination inherent in the current latent inequalities associated with the global North-South macro-regional divide. It is also crucial to recognize the “ecological submission [...] creating renewed forms of eco-dependence [...] The peripheries [...] have also become suppliers of spaces for the relocation of environmentally predatory activities” (Acselrad; Michelotti; Comissão Editorial Rbeur, 2024, p. 3-4).

These and other analyses point to the need for a historical re-reading of the so-called “dependency theory,” which was extensively debated in the 1970s in the Brazilian and Latin American contexts by authors such as Ruy Marini, Theotônio Dos Santos, Vânia Bambirra, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Dos Santos, 1970, 2020 [2000]). While open to new problematizations and critiques, it remains a relevant starting point for a systematic understanding of the notions of center, periphery, and centrality in the context of planetary urbanization at the global level. Indeed, this represents a complex challenge of integrating it with new interpretative frameworks in which the production of space and the idea of “urban levels” take center stage.

Without the intention of delving into the debate, but pointing out fundamental preliminary elements that move in this direction, some studies have already indicated the production of new points, networks, and areas, not necessarily urban, built to operationally support planetary urbanization (Arboleda, 2016, 2020). This arsenal of spatial differentiations includes port infrastructure, logistics, and mining activities in Chile, which are linked to an increasing constellation of megacities, ports, banks, and factories in East Asia. In Brazil, Canettieri (2024, p. 10) highlighted the emergence of an “extensive extractive urbanization” that has produced the violent destruction of natural resources and ways of life, in a complex articulation between extractivism, organized crime, and the new far-right. In both cases, it is important to recognize the so-called “hinterlands”, that is to say, the spaces outside cities that are caught up in the whirlwind of planetary urbanization (Brenner; Katsikis, 2020).

From an economic perspective, although not specifically problematizing the urban dimension, but in direct relation to it, Pochmann and Silva (2023) analyzed the effects of Brazil’s integration into globalization starting in the 1990s. Economic indicators of per capita gross domestic product (GDP) during the neoliberal period, from the late 1980s to the present, revealed the poorest performance of the entire republican era, i.e., since 1889, surpassing only the pre-capitalist imperial period. This occurred even despite the fact that between 1980 and 2020, the average growth rate of the Brazilian population was the lowest in all the analyzed periods.

Pochmann and Silva noted that “alongside the decline of the basic classes of industrial capitalism, there was a rise in the primary-exporter complex, linked to the speculative financial sector and import trade” (Pochmann; Silva, 2023, p. 10). As a result, a new peripheral condition (further downgraded) consolidated itself when the country entered the “Digital Era” as little more than a consumer. The shift was accompanied by rentier specialization and export-driven deindustrialization, both stimulated by the commodity boom.

This entire configuration, which materializes in new hierarchically structured spatial differentiations, is associated with the historical-structural dependence that has been widely renewed by the post-1980 neoliberal policies. These policies are underpinned by four main components (Pochmann; Silva, 2023, p. 148): (i) a shift in the composition of the trade balance, with a prominence of low added value products; (ii) environmental degradation from extractivist and agricultural activities; (iii) fiscal renouncement and sub-salaried labor as tools of competitive advantage; and (iv) unaccounted wealth transfer (water, non-renewable mineral assets, etc.), where royalties, when received by the State, do not always reach the general population.

In this context, attention must also be directed toward a research agenda that addresses a form of “new dependent urbanization”, in which financial-informational power demonstrates a significant capacity for extracting income from the periphery (Ribeiro, 2022). This structure tends to express itself in the “urban-differential pulverization of the financial logic”, referring to the “systematic spreading of the socio-spatial reproduction mechanisms of urban financialization, with geographical differences” (Silva; Rodrigues, 2023b, p. 15).

Thus, the complex desire to dissipate the financial logic beyond the so-called centers and peripheries of the global economy becomes evident, translating into new, unequal, and hierarchical spatial differentiations. These express new centralities dynamized in different “urban levels,” scales, and rhythms, being more or less attracted by the “virtualities of place”, within the multiple “socio-spatial formations” (Santos, 2014b).

In this regard, although Brazil may be considered one of the economic peripheries of planetary urbanization, it is important to recognize the emergence of new centralities within the country, both in rural and urban areas. To a large extent, these have resulted from new agro-extractive operational centers aligned not only with the interests of large international corporations but also with local and regional groups (including criminal organizations) that draw upon the historical condition of dependency, which appears to be reshaping itself in the twenty-first century.

Standing as a general backdrop is the parliamentary representation of agribusiness, which reveals the strength of “new” political centralities associated with rural areas (Farias, 2023). These representations have guided the course of major national agendas, especially converging on land, environmental, and Indigenous issues (Pompeia, 2020).

Indeed, the spatial practices stemming from the strategies discussed above give rise to new operational landscapes, urban and otherwise, where the centralities of global corporations and the State shape the complex “creative

destruction” unfolding in Brazil. This destruction is marked by successive socio-environmental, economic, and political deteriorations that amplify historical-structural inequalities, which are continuously renewed amid complex spatial differentiations. Yet, to fully understand and challenge this process, it is essential to engage with other “urban levels” and scales, to examine their interrelations.

The major challenge lies in objectively translating how the mixed level articulates the global level with the private level, thus functioning as an intermediary. In addressing this task, it is essential to recognize that, within perceived space, the mixed level elucidates the mediations of spatial practices at the global level. These practices contribute to the production of new centers, new peripheries, and centralities, with repercussions, for example, in urban networks, intra-urban or intra-metropolitan structures, and the operational landscapes associated with planetary urbanization. Importantly, these mediations only acquire concrete meaning at the private level, i.e., in the lived space of the various agents and subjects, thereby reflecting the complexity that characterizes the production of space within the broader framework of planetary urbanization and its multiscale spatial differentiations.

Lastly, studies focusing on the so-called “agribusiness cities” in Brazil (Elias, 2022) and the “agro-mining business” (Michelotti, 2019; Castriota, 2021) can elucidate important syntheses within this broader and more relational perspective on the production of space, “urban levels,” and planetary urbanization.

However, it is essential that such studies clearly define the analytical standpoint guiding their interpretation, that is to say, they must carefully select the criteria and scales of analysis most suited to effectively revealing the spatial practices of corporations and the State, as well as the evolving spatial differentiations throughout the research process.

3.2 The mixed level and the perceived space

It has been well established that cities play a fundamental role in mediating between the global and the quotidian (Lefebvre, 2002 [1970]). Building on this premise, the dynamics of city morphologies, their spatial content, and their networked relationships are understood to reflect the fundamental contradictions and conflicts inherent in the production of space. These elements are essential for deciphering the spatial differentiations that continually reshape the notions of center, periphery, and centrality throughout the process of planetary urbanization, across diverse socio-spatial formations and multiple scales. This interpretation makes it possible to trace, within perceived space, the interconnections between “urban levels,” while also accounting for the history of places, spatial interactions, and the complex scalar mediations involved in the production of space.

The terms “global city”, “megapolis”, “metropolitan area”, “city region”, “post-industrial city”, “poly(multi)nucleated city”, among others, reflect the importance of contemporary cities in understanding global transformations and their imperatives. These concepts operate within a framework of hierarchical spatial differentiations that express centers, peripheries, and centralities. Within this highly complex landscape, flexible accumulation (Soja, 2000) and the finance-dominated regime of accumulation (Chesnais, 2001) serve as general interpretive pillars through which cities both reflect and mediate the most elemental urban nature of space production.

Within the framework of planetary urbanization, large cities constitute, in themselves, “concentrated urbanization” (Brenner; Schmid, 2015, p. 171). These are significant nodes, forming increasingly global networks that connect not only their immediate surroundings but also vast operational landscapes. As such, these nodes (centers of various scales) forge connections across the globe, mediating multiple flows, whether toward or emanating from places where technical, political, and economic densities are more diffuse, i.e., the peripheries.

With specific particularities, the spatial differentiations of space production in Brazil have followed these contemporary trends regarding the urban phenomenon, in such a way that “urbanization has become unbounded: it ranges from extremes of density, intensity, and agglomeration to highly diffuse morphologies; from urban constellations of unprecedented scale to small points and occurrences, all interrelated through the topological space of networks, flows, and relationships” (Domingues; Godinho, 2021, p. 9).

To illustrate, while Brazil has witnessed the emergence of the Rio de Janeiro–São Paulo “urban megaregion” (Lencioni, 2015), medium-sized cities in São Paulo and in other regions of the country have increasingly connected directly to the global, thereby adding complexity to inherited hierarchical spatial interactions (Catelan, 2012; Sposito, 2015).

Taking the so-called “geography of capitalist accumulation” as a reference, the centralities of many of these new areas and networks may be interpreted through the metabolic interplay between movements of “geographic concentration” and “geographic expansion”, which emerge as part of the effort to create new opportunities for accumulation (Harvey, 2005). Alternatively, they may be understood through the logic of capital concentration and centralization, understood respectively as the expansion of the means of production and of the labor force, and the reorganization of capital through associations and mergers (Lencioni, 2008). In both perspectives, it is important to underscore that “the

specific geography of capitalism can be restructured, but it is never unstructured or entirely freed from a fundamental socio-spatial polarization”⁸ (Soja, 1993, p. 136).

In these configurations and interactions, Lencioni (2008) argued that the concept of centralization is particularly significant in urban studies, primarily because it sheds light on the corporate management practices of large corporations, which tend to prioritize the upper tiers of urban networks, as in the case of metropolises. In the Brazilian context, Lencioni identified São Paulo as the principal center, thereby exerting a high degree of centrality within the urban network, especially in terms of corporate management.

However, the imperative to absorb surplus capital has fueled a frantic search for new locations (Harvey, 2013). Within this process, a number of emerging cities, both medium-sized and small, have gained prominence within the locational selectivity of national and international economic actors operating in Brazil (Catelan, 2012; Silva; Rodrigues, 2023a; 2023b). This trajectory has also been accompanied by the “expansion of financial and speculative capital in the Brazilian countryside” (Pitta; Boechat; Mendonça, 2017, p. 176), thereby producing new operational landscapes linked to financialization.

Part of this dynamic stems from the fact that “[A]s the principal circuit – current industrial production and the movable property that results – begins to slow down, capital shifts to the second sector, real estate”⁹ (Lefebvre, 2002 [1970], p. 146). Thus, “[R]eal property’ (along with ‘construction’) is no longer a secondary form of circulation, no longer the auxiliary and backward branch of industrial and financial capitalism that it once was. Instead, it has a leading role, albeit in an uneven way, for its significance is liable to vary according to country, time or circumstance”¹⁰ (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974], p. 369).

All these conditions necessitate a rethinking of center, periphery, and centrality along at least three major axes of spatial differentiation and hierarchy: (i) intra-urban spaces (not necessarily in metropolises); (ii) the interrelationships among different cities; and (iii) the relationship between cities and operational landscapes within the broader context of planetary urbanization. Financial investments increasingly permeate a wide array of spatial contexts, with new

8. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of SOJA, E.W. *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*. London; New York: Verso. (1989, pp. 111-112).

9. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Urban Revolution*. (2003, p. 160).

10. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Production of Space*. (1991, p. 335).

locational decisions whose boundaries are inherently unpredictable (Silva; Rodrigues, 2023b). Nevertheless, it remains crucial to affirm that “[n]othing is more selective than an investment, or a financial investment, seeking maximum profitability” (Chesnais, 2001, p. 10).

When examining Brazilian cities, particularly at the intra-urban scale, it is essential to stress that the diffusion and selectivity of financial investments do not signal the dissolution of the historically entrenched spatial structure based on a center–periphery logic (i.e., the wealthy and proximate versus the poor and distant), nor do they necessarily indicate a transition toward more equitable cities. Rather, this spatial logic persists in increasingly complex forms, since it is overlaid by processes of sociospatial fragmentation, thereby deepening inequalities and reinforcing segregation. These evolving dynamics call for renewed interpretive efforts aimed at capturing the shifting content and configurations of urban peripheries (Sposito, 2010; Lencioni, 2015; Ferreira, 2018; Cruz; Legroux, 2022; Silva; Rodrigues, 2023a; 2023b; Silva, 2023).

At this scale, conceptual approaches have varied among Brazilian researchers, particularly due to the multiplicity of contexts under analysis. Within the main strands of debate, spatial hierarchies can be understood: (i) through the lens of the metropolization of space and the formation of megaregions (Lencioni, 2015); and (ii) from the perspective of sociospatial fragmentation and the poly(multi) nucleated city (Sposito, 2015).

At the scale of the urban network, it should be noted that the term “urban heterarchies” has been employed as an analytical tool that complements the classical notion of urban hierarchy, aiming to capture the more complex spatial interactions that emerge among urban centers with different sizes and functions (Catelan, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that, as the fifth-largest country in the world, Brazil exhibits urban networks marked by significant internal regional differentiation, shaped over the course of its colonial territorial formation, and thereby reinforcing historically rooted structural dependencies (Corrêa, 1987; IBGE, 2020).

From the perspective of urban and regional planning, regardless of scale, it must be acknowledged that financial logics have contributed to the production of perceived spaces that are increasingly complex, volatile, and misaligned with the sectoral and fragmented frameworks that are commonly applied (Silva; Rodrigues, 2023b). While planning and management instruments inspired by the City Statute (Brazil, 2001) and the Metropolis Statute (Brazil, 2015) represent important normative advances, it is vital to recall that “bad laws may hinder social progress, but good laws alone do not change realities” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 22). It is therefore essential to advance efforts that ensure urban law and policy are attuned to the

dynamism of contemporary urbanization in Brazil. This must be undertaken by fostering fairer spatial differentiation processes, which promote the expansion of citizenship through the construction of a “competent territorial discourse”, one which acknowledges that “[i]n a territory where the location of essential services is left to the mercy of market forces, everything conspires to deepen social inequalities” (Santos, 2007, p. 144).

Along this complex trajectory, and taking Brazil as a point of departure, a Lefebvrian-inspired approach enables us to recognize cities as privileged sites for both analysis and action. Such an approach mediates the various “urban levels” and systematically reveals, across multiple scales, the evolving configurations of center, periphery, and centrality within the broader process of planetary urbanization.

As this complex production of space expands within and beyond cities, it tends to encounter new horizons – resistant or otherwise – that are capable of generating and illuminating renewed spatial practices, representations, and quotidian experiences. These horizons unfold through and within the new spatial differentiations produced in the mesh of the conceived-perceived-lived triad.

In this encounter, it is crucial to articulate the “urban levels” not only to engage with “the socio-political and cultural issues intrinsic to the *polis* and the *civitas* that have extended beyond urban agglomerations to social space as a whole” (Monte-Mór, 2005, p. 946), but also to serve as a foundational instrument for constructing new perspectives – of both thought and action – across the multiple scales of spatial production. Such perspectives must counteract unequal, fragmented, segregating, hierarchical, violent, oppressive, and environmentally predatory spatial differentiations.

3.3 The private level and the lived space

The private level – understood here as the most intense connection to the lived dimension of space, shaped by quotidian life, representation, and spatial practices -constitutes a horizon increasingly penetrated by the logic of consumption. According to Lefebvre (2001, p. 13), “All the conditions come together thus for a perfect domination, for a refined exploitation of people as producers, consumers of products, consumers of space.”¹¹

Indeed, “consumption is becoming the dominant cultural logic of the urban revolution” (Carreras, 2019, p. 256). Hence, the march of planetary urbanization incorporates and diffuses, at varying rhythms across the globe, the so-called “bureaucratic society of managed consumption”¹² (Lefebvre, 2001 [1968]), which

11. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *Writings on Cities*. (2000, p. 85)

12. For direct citations the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *Writings on Cities*. (2000, p. 147)

contributes to (re)constructing and revitalizing centers and peripheries, as well as producing new centralities and urban morphologies. All of this is increasingly mediated by the presence of the “technical-scientific-informational milieu”, which is the “geographic face of globalization”¹³ (Santos, 2014b, p. 239).

Social media advertising, smartphones, and streaming services globally translate the rationality of consumption even before desirable commodities (objects and services) become widely available (Bauman, 2010). Likewise, consumer practices are captured by complex algorithms in various parts of the world (Couldry; Mejias, 2020).

These two authors have even indicated the emergence of a new form of colonialism, which they call “data colonialism”. This is grounded in the corporate appropriation of a multitude of aspects of human life, which are used as a “new” raw material for the reproduction of capital. Couldry and Mejias (2020) further argue that the capture of contemporary data from everyday life resembles historical forms of land appropriation during the colonial period.

Silveira (2021, p. 1), in turn, considers that there is a “conversion of digital capitalism into data capitalism or datafied digital capitalism”, driven by the proliferation of multiple platforms strategically disseminated across the globe by large corporations, which own and structure vast databases that are translated into profit and power, as is the case with Google, Facebook, Yahoo, among others. In this new imperial race to capture information, while China has made advances, “the US is the supreme tech empire”¹⁴ (Kwet, 2021, p. 6).

It should also be emphasized that the segmentation of social groups by income, race, housing, culture, age, and gender produces diverse consumption practices that are captured and modulated in different ways by major corporations – both within cities and across the vast operational landscapes associated with planetary urbanization.

Thus, hierarchically differentiated spatial fragments within urban areas are disseminated through an enigmatic form of advertising, which is, in turn, fueled by these varied consumption practices. These practices, progressively situated beyond traditional economic and urban centers and peripheries, are rapidly giving rise to new centralities.

In this context of planetary urbanization, it is necessary not only to consider mechanisms that surpass binary readings of rural-urban, countryside-city, and

13. For direct citations the English version was used of SANTOS, M. *The Nature of Space*. Duke University Press by arrangement with University of São Paulo Press. (2021, p. 161).

14. For direct citations the English version was used of KWET, M. *Digital colonialism - The evolution of US empire*. March 4, 2021. Available at: <https://longreads.tni.org/digital-colonialism-the-evolution-of-us-empire>.

center-periphery, but also to understand the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of the accelerated pace that makes consumption more frequent in certain places and less so in others. As such, the accelerated production of new spatial differentiations that amplify consumption tends to be a key feature of planetary urbanization, thereby warranting closer attention in urban studies.

Within this potential acceleration, it is important to note that “[C]ontemporary finance capital, with the aid of information technology, has radically reconfigured spatio-temporality [...], as well as daily life” (Harvey, 2006 [1982], p. XXI). In general, the diffusion of innovations, such as the internet, e-commerce, and smartphones, mediates these changes, as does the use of social media, banking apps, and personalized services.

It is also essential to underscore Brazil’s emerging role within the global landscape of digital platform production and usage. The rapid proliferation of these platforms is propelled by the “pace of high finance,” linked to the boom of startups operating in Brazil as instruments of “value extraction” and the “digital vampirization” of labor income (Pessanha, 2020, p. 461). In this context, digital platform-mediated activities (such as Uber, Rappi, iFood, etc.) have intensified the precarization of labor (Machado; Zanoni, 2022), epitomized by the figure of the “just-in-time worker,” whose tasks are subordinated to and controlled by corporate interests through the “algorithmic management of labor” (Abílio, 2020, p. 112). Thus, digital platforms serve to reproduce and update dispossession processes of labor rights in Brazil, exacerbating inequalities, facilitating financial ventures, and ultimately subsidizing consumption.

Given this complexity, it is also important to consider that the spatial distribution resulting from the corporate policies of the major economic groups driving platformization in Brazil constitutes what Tozi (2023, p. 23) has referred to as “urban algorithmic inequalities”. In other words, pricing systems are programmed in ways that reinforce the center-periphery structure of cities. As a result, poorer areas are generally deprived of access to such services.

It is important to emphasize, however, that in many cities around the world (and even beyond the cities) the diffusion of innovations increasingly links quotidian life to the realm of reproduction through consumption. This dynamic rests on two main pillars: (i) the expansion of access to personal credit, which is appropriated by the financial system in the form of debt (Lapavistas, 2013); and (ii) the broad stimulation of commerce, understood here in its widest sense (Aalbers, 2019).

In the drive toward consumption, new “space-time configurations” facilitate the reproduction of financial logic across an increasingly broad spectrum of

the population, resulting in a form of socio-spatial quotidian life of planetary urbanization, through which new spatial differentiations are hierarchically structured within lived spaces. At the private level, centers and peripheries (segmented by race, income, gender, etc.) thus constitute everyday experiences, representations, and spatial practices that both reflect and reproduce new or renewed centralities, increasingly mediated by information technology and financial logic. As a result, a colossal analytical effort is required to interpret center, periphery, and centrality, one that must articulate the different “urban levels” and multiple scales. In this regard, Silva and Rodrigues state (2023b, p. 12):

In the context of Brazilian cities, a set of simultaneous operations can be observed: (a) getting a haircut or exercising inside a shopping mall; (b) receiving groceries at home, ordered via a digital platform; (c) purchasing gifts using a smartphone in the same shopping mall; (d) through a banking app, receiving monthly returns from shares in a real estate investment fund that, interestingly, owns both the shopping mall and the supermarket site. Both are located in or near poor areas or within a large urban project involving a public-private partnership.

This entire set of spatial differentiations taking shape in Brazilian cities and operational landscapes is marked by deep, persistent contradictions. One of the most striking paradoxes lies in the simultaneous rise in consumption and the alarming resurgence of food and nutritional insecurity across Latin America – particularly in Brazil (FAO et al., 2023). This therefore calls for critical reflection on the actual scope of consumption in poor countries. What is being consumed? Who has access to consumption? Under what urban, environmental, political, cultural, and economic conditions do this consumption take place?

In studying “consumption practices” in the periphery of Guarulhos, in São Paulo (SP), Sposito (2022) highlighted the challenges faced by residents within a fragmented urban landscape. Paradoxically, the author demonstrated that, while consumption segments centralities according to income, it also contributes to the construction of a “peripheral identity,” through which it may be recognized that there is a “center in the periphery”. Within this complex structure, it is important to note that “by registering the peripheral-that-became-the-new-middle-class, the periphery appears as both a business and a market to be contested” (D’Andrea, 2013, p. 10).

As a sociological synthesis of these emerging paradoxes, it is relevant to note that the social and historical processes, especially since the 1990s, have generated new representations of the center, periphery, and centrality. In this context,

“peripheral subjects,” despite their homogeneous experiences, have developed a “peripheral awareness” capable of mobilizing different political practices through artistic expression, ecological engagement, and critical debates on racial and gender oppression (D’Andrea, 2020, p. 26). Therefore, the new centralities forged by “subjects and peripheral subjects” clearly symbolize the emergence of renewed social struggles that broaden the meanings of the perverse historical-structural conditions engendered at different “urban levels” and across the multiple scales of space production throughout the Brazilian territory.

Here, in the periphery, or the peripheries, lived spaces also open themselves to difference, re-signifying and complicating the massifying and disintegrative imperatives of consumption and the market – even though both are increasingly controlled by large corporations and underpinned by neoliberal rationality. This thus constitutes a field open to contradiction, differentiation and tension (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974]). Understanding and strengthening it requires an acknowledgement of the multiple scales and distinct “urban levels” through which planetary urbanization is processed across Brazil’s vast, unequal, and differentiated territory, thus engaging with the triplicity of the conceived–perceived–lived, through which the ideas of center, periphery, and centrality are (re)established.

4. A synthetic proposal: an underexplored terrain

Up to this point, three key procedures have been fundamental in conceptualizing the notions of center, periphery, and centrality within the context of planetary urbanization in Brazil: (i) the articulation of “urban levels”; (ii) the multidimensional nature of the production of space; and (iii) the hierarchical spatial differentiations across multiple scales.

To advance toward the construction of a synthetic conceptual proposal that is both coherent and accessible, it is essential to clearly articulate the interwoven understandings of center, periphery, and centrality across the three “urban levels”, while also connecting them to the conceived–perceived–lived triad in the context of spatial production in Brazil. It is important to note that although all the components presented here stem from a shared perspective – namely, studies conducted in Brazil – their findings may be confronted, contested, or affirmed in other national contexts. This is because the theoretical-methodological approach employed enables the development of new research that can contribute to the creation of meaningful comparative frameworks.

Accordingly, three aspects must be highlighted to facilitate understanding of the synthetic proposal presented in Box 1 below. First, the didactic separation of “urban levels” and their connections to the conceived–perceived–lived triad should be understood as a formal analytical procedure. In practice, these levels are

intricately interwoven and operate across multiple scales, just as the conceived–perceived–lived dimensions also do. Second, the distinction between center(s), periphery/peripheries, and centralities is necessary. As previously discussed, depending on the scales and criteria applied, it is possible to simultaneously observe centers and centralities in the periphery – or peripheries within the center. Third, the segmentation of the tables into specific components linking “urban levels,” center(s), periphery/peripheries, and centralities functions as an analytical tool to substantively synthesize the theoretical foundations and empirical findings of research conducted in Brazil. Therefore, this construction is analytical in nature, as many of these studies do not explicitly focus on planetary urbanization.

	URBAN LEVELS	CENTER(S)	PERIPHERY(IES)	CENTRALITIES
PLANETARY URBANIZATION (Production of Space)	Global (conceived)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corporations ▪ State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dependency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financialization ▪ Neoliberalism ▪ Neoextractivism ▪ Flexible accumulation
	Mixed (perceived)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Densities (technical, economic & political) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rarefactions (technical, economic & political) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geographic concentration & geographic expansion ▪ Concentration of capital & Centralization of capital
	Private (lived)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quotidian ▪ Representation ▪ Spatial practices 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consumption ▪ Diffusion of innovations ▪ Data colonialism ▪ Precarization of labor ▪ Peripheral awareness

Box 1. Elements for understanding center, periphery, and centrality in the context of planetary urbanization in Brazil

Source: Own elaboration.

Given these considerations, it is appropriate to present a literal translation of the synthetic framework developed to reflect on center(s), periphery/peripheries, and centrality/centralities in the context of planetary urbanization from a Brazilian perspective. It is also important to outline potential directions for future research.

At the global level, the center(s) of planetary urbanization can be understood as a systematic and dominant set of capitalist impulses (conceived space) embedded within corporations and the State, which orchestrate the production of space by instituting hierarchized spatial differentiations along economic and political lines. In turn, the periphery/peripheries can be understood as a set of new, multiple relations of dependence, driven by the logic of the center.

When examined from a Brazilian perspective, with a global context, these relations have been mediated through centralities associated with financialization, neoliberalism, neo-extractivism, and flexible accumulation.

Among the many possible directions for future research, it is essential to delve into the inner workings of corporations and the State in order to expose their evolving economic and political strategies and tactics. A central question concerns how these actors hierarchize their operational spaces, deploying the notions of center, periphery, and centrality across different “urban levels” and multiple scales. Hence, this calls for a thorough investigation into the inner logics of both corporations and the State, seeking to establish fundamental links with planetary urbanization. Such analysis is crucial not only for understanding the top-down mechanisms imposed on different sociospatial formations, but also for identifying potential – both general and specific – fissures that may guide new pathways of resistance and reconstruction at the global level.

At the mixed level, the center(s) of planetary urbanization can be understood as a set of hierarchized spatial differentiations expressed in areas and networks (perceived space) endowed with technical, political, and economic densities. It is important to note that the periphery also exhibits these same densities, albeit in a rarefied form. From the perspective of Brazil, and at this level under analysis, center–periphery relations are primarily articulated through centralities linked to capital reproduction, expressed in the intertwined processes of “geographic expansion” and “geographic concentration,” as well as the “concentration of capital” and the “centralization of capital”. These dynamics give rise to complex spatial differentiations operating across multiple scales.

In this regard, future research should aim to identify, compare, and analyze the evolution of these new spatial differentiations, taking into account countries, regions, cities, neighborhoods, streets, and operational landscapes as mediations through which planetary urbanization follows multiple paths. These elements mediate between the global level and the private level and are therefore crucial for both considering and acting within the framework of emerging complexity. Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in establishing precise criteria to measure these technical, political, and economic densities in order to hierarchize centers and peripheries across multiple scales, and in doing so, foster more equitable processes of spatial differentiation.

Lastly, at the private level, the notions of center and periphery within planetary urbanization become exceedingly difficult to delineate objectively—if not altogether inseparable. Taken together, they may be conceived as the hierarchical plurality of places (lived spaces) in relation to the quotidian, spatial

representations, and the spatial practices of the multiple agents and subjects who produce, circulate, and consume within different sociospatial formations. This plurality projects diverse interpretations regarding center(s) and periphery/peripheries at the mixed level, particularly at smaller spatial scales (such as streets, neighborhoods, and cities), thereby challenging the formulation of generalizable frameworks derived from larger spatial scales such as countries, continents, or the world.

When examined from the perspective of Brazil, center–periphery relations at the private level reveal that the centralities produced may not only reaffirm the dominant logic of corporations and the State (e.g., consumption, diffusion of innovations, data colonialism, precarization of labor), but may also contribute to the construction of a renewed vision of the periphery. The renewed vision, grounded in the notion of “peripheral awareness”, thereby opens up new horizons marked by fissures and resistance.

Studies along these lines hold the potential to shed light on the tensions between the quotidian, representations, spatial practices, and discourses across different places, thereby feeding back into the other levels of analysis. This is because, in the production of space, the clash between competing projects and meanings gives rise to fissures. As Lefebvre (2002 [1970], p. 85) observed, “Desire insinuates itself through these fissures. [...] Without it everydayness would become hopelessly uniform. Even subversion would become unthinkable”. In a similar vein, Souza (2020) highlighted the idea of “insurgent spatial practices” as a valuable investigative tool for geographers and other sociospatial researchers seeking to understand the spatial dimension of emerging forms social activism.

Lastly, the synthesis presented herein has demonstrated that, within the context of planetary urbanization, the production of centers, peripheries, and centralities unfolds with increasing complexity across all “urban levels” and multiple scales, particularly when studying a vast territory such as Brazil, where historical and structural inequalities have become entrenched. This framework thus serves as an ongoing invitation to critically reflect upon, and actively engage with, the pursuit of more just and equitable processes of spatial differentiation.

Concluding remarks

The uneven advance of planetary urbanization has generated new hierarchical spatial differentiations, demanding that the notions of center, periphery, and centrality be reconsidered in more nuanced and complex terms. In response to this challenge, by adopting an approach using the production of space and the notion of “urban levels”, this article has demonstrated an integrated

analytical pathway capable of systematically mobilizing scales and establishing dialogue across different disciplinary boundaries.

Although the notions of center, periphery, and centrality remain relevant theoretical and practical tools, they demand ongoing refinement in light of the emerging urbanization trends that manifest with specificities and singularities across varied sociospatial formations. In the Brazilian context, this article has demonstrated that the logic underpinning the reproduction of planetary urbanization has intensified inequalities across the various “urban levels” and multiple scales, thereby reinforcing Brazil’s historically peripheral and structurally subordinated position within the global order.

Accordingly, the synthesis of studies conducted in Brazil has revealed that the hierarchization of spatial differentiations at the global, mixed, and private levels highlights centers, peripheries, and centralities of planetary urbanization, with a key feature being their dependent and subordinate position within global capitalist relations. Simultaneously, however, these processes also reinforce the power and centrality of certain local and regional groups, particularly those linked to agribusiness.

At the mixed level, this dependence contributes to the formation of complex spatial structures of “concentrated urbanization” and to new operational landscapes, which reshape perceived space through the creation of renewed centers, centralities, and new peripheries. These hierarchical spatial differentiations tend to exacerbate existing inequalities and facilitate socio-environmental damage.

At the private level, this dependence becomes evident in the widespread consumption of goods not produced domestically and in the diffusion of innovations, elements associated with data colonialism and the precarization of labor, both of which feed into broader strategies aimed at expanding consumption. This presents a deeply paradoxical scenario, particularly in light of Brazil’s return to alarming levels of food and nutritional insecurity. In contrast, however, a growing “peripheral awareness” is taking shape – one that imbues social struggles with new meaning and affirms a horizon of fissures and resistance.

Recognizing these renewed imperatives of planetary urbanization in Brazil represents an awakening to new possibilities for promoting and advancing more just processes of spatial differentiation across multiple levels and scales, thereby also supporting the right to the city on renewed foundations. After all, “[T]he right to the city implies nothing less than a revolutionary concept of citizenship” (Lefebvre, 2014 [1989], p. 205). It is directly connected to, though not synonymous with, the territorial organization of the city (Wachsmuth; Brenner, 2014).

Envisioning urban levels of citizenship may emerge as a future line of inquiry within this broader perspective of planetary urbanization. While this cannot be explored in depth here, it is important to highlight some potential directions, particularly through the lens of what Santos (2007), in his territorial approach to citizenship, defined as “public fixities”. In other words, mechanisms for the equitable geographic distribution of public goods and services by the public authorities, aimed at meeting concrete social demands (economic, political, cultural, environmental) in both urban peripheries and rural areas, regardless of profitability. This perspective offers the potential to generate spatial differentiations that run counter to inequality and to violent, oppressive, and environmentally predatory forms of hierarchical organization.

Far from offering definitive solutions, this article has demonstrated that the notions of center, periphery, and centrality, when grounded in the perspective of the production of space and the idea of “urban levels”, are vital tools in the complex and ongoing tasks of thought and actions within the course of planetary urbanization. This is especially true given the arduous task of clarifying the new contradictions and conflicts that unfold across multiple scales and within different sociospatial formations, thereby revealing part of the complexity that characterizes contemporary urbanization.

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Marlon Lima da Silva

Professor at the Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Pará (IFPA) and a doctorate student on the Postgraduate Program in Geography at the Universidade Federal do Pará (PPGEO/UFPA). He works as a geographer at the Companhia de Desenvolvimento e Administração da Área Metropolitana de Belém (CODEM, 2014-2015) and as a management technician in urban development at the Secretariat of Urban Development and Public Works for the State of Pará (Sedop, 2015-2016).

Email: marlon.lima@ifpa.edu.br

ORCID: 0000-0002-6269-2132

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