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**INFORMAL CITY OCCUPANCY:  
(RE-)THINKING URBAN PLANNING  
PRACTICE FROM AN  
ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## Apresentação

*Entretextos* é uma publicação *online* do Centro de Estudos Interdisciplinares em Educação e Desenvolvimento da Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias (CeIED) e está vocacionada para a divulgação de pesquisas realizadas no âmbito da Educação. Os artigos aqui publicados dizem respeito aos resultados de projetos de pesquisa realizados pelos investigadores da Unidade de Investigação do Instituto de Ciências de Educação da ULHT, bem como por investigadores de outros centros de investigação nacionais ou internacionais, com quem o centro estabelece diversas parcerias.

Para além de publicar relatórios de progresso de projetos de investigação nacionais e internacionais, a *Entretextos* também inclui publicações sobre as pesquisas efetuadas no âmbito dos programas de mestrado e de doutoramento. Do mesmo modo, publica versões preparatórias de artigos, capítulos de livro e textos apresentados em congressos, conferências, seminários, encontros científicos e workshops. Por outro lado, são também privilegiadas as produções que incidam sobre testemunhos reveladores da prática profissional dos diversos atores associados à Educação.

Neste contexto, será destacada a publicação de textos que contribuam para o enriquecimento do conhecimento da investigação científica realizada no âmbito das Ciências da Educação e em domínios afins. O propósito desta publicação é, pois, potenciar relações inter e transdisciplinares e, ao mesmo tempo, revelar trabalhos de investigação que, pela sua dimensão empírica e fundamentação teórica, são testemunhos de uma produção científica sólida e sustentada.

A promoção da reflexão e a discussão sobre a investigação realizada no domínio das Ciências da Educação é um dos objetivos fundamentais da *Entretextos* uma vez que também é seu propósito fornecer quadros teóricos e metodológicos que possam sugerir orientações a todos os que, direta ou indiretamente, desenvolvem investigação na área da Educação.

## Overview

*Entretextos* is an online, double blind peer reviewed publication of the Research Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Education and Development (CeIED) of Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias. It is designed to disseminate research conducted in the field of Education. The papers published here pertain to the results of studies carried out by the researchers of the R&D Unit of ULHT's Institute of Education Sciences, as well as by researchers from other national and international R&D centres with which the CeIED has established partnerships.

Besides publishing progress reports on national and international research projects, *Entretextos* includes publications on the research conducted within the scope of the Master and PhD programmes as well. Likewise, it also publishes original papers, review papers, conceptual framework, analytical and simulation models, case studies, empirical research, technical notes and lectures presented in congresses, conferences, seminars, scientific meetings and workshops. Moreover, special emphasis is given to the productions which concern accounts that reveal the professional practice of the different players associated with Education.

In this context, the publication of texts which contribute to enrich the knowledge of scientific research undertaken in Education Sciences and related fields will be favoured. The purpose of this periodical is, then, to foster inter- and transdisciplinary relations and, at the same time, to showcase research projects which, due to their empirical scope and theoretical foundation, bear witness to a solid and sustained scientific output.

One of the fundamental goals of *Entretextos* is to foster reflection and debate on the research done in the area of Education Sciences since its purpose is also to provide theoretical and methodological frameworks that may suggest guidelines to all those who, directly or indirectly, carry out research in the field of Education.

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## **INFORMAL CITY OCCUPANCY: (RE-) THINKING URBAN PLANNING PRACTICE FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **1. Framework and objectives**

What is the anthropological contribution in the analysis of the formal / informal when thinking about the urban territory? What is (or can be) the contribution of this analysis to rethinking the urban intervention? Can the informality contribute to innovate the urban intervention and normalise the right to the city?

In this paper, we introduce a theoretical discussion that aims to uncover some of the intermediation that hides behind the formal and informal pairs and argues the interest in innovating certain formalisms of urban intervention (Menezes, 2013, 2013a). To (re) invent urban practices and develop studies related with the anthropology field of transformation of urban space (Biase, 2012), we are interested in:

- To understand the contemporary socio-cultural aspects that influences the production of the city and living in it.
- To recover the inhabitant's spatial initiative in order to (re)think the ways cities are made.
- To learn how people respond to their daily needs, inventing new spatialities and new services.
- To understand the various aspects that constitute the field of relationship between technical intervention solutions, social welfare needs, and socio-cultural adaptation capacities to contexts.

In this perspective, we discuss the following aspects:

- The various dimensions of the relationship between technical solutions of intervention and “informal” models of spatial socio cultural occupation.
- The social micro-processes of adaptation, innovation and invention of kinetic spatiality and social settings - that follow the experiences of informal occupation of urban space.



Figure 1: Cidade da Praia, Santiago Island, Cape Verde (2011). All images credited to the author



Figure 2: Cova da Moura, Lisbon Metropolitan Area (2012)

## 2. Is there an opposition between the formal and the informal city?

The idea of opposition between formal and informal city is sustained by certain conceptions that do not consider the continuities between one city and another. The frame highlights some of the general ideas that support the opposition between formal and informal city.

### General ideas about the opposition between formal and informal city

Formal	Informal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is urbanised</li> <li>• The city of elites and middle sectors</li> <li>• Existence of a real estate sector</li> <li>• Access to infrastructures and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is illegal and without urbanisation</li> <li>• The city of popular sectors</li> <li>• Informal mechanisms of access to the land and non-capitalist forms of housing</li> <li>• The access to infrastructures and services is not guaranteed</li> </ul>

To understand an urban complexity as an opposition between the formal and the informal city, does not contribute to appreciate the urban continuities between formal and informal city, in particular because:

- The excessive consideration of the urban order from a dual sense minimizes the interactions and reciprocities between economic and social mechanisms that define the process of urbanization.
- The limitation of urban complexity in bipolar categories (formal / informal, regular / irregular, legal / illegal, centre / periphery), reduces the ability to understand that complexity.
- It is necessary to explore what exist between the relationships that are supposed opposite.



Figure 3: Paraisópolis, São Paulo (2013)



Figure 4: Sal Rei, Boa Vista Island, Cape Verde (2011)

We adopted the Mehrotra (2010) perspective of the informal city as the kinetic city. In other words, this city:

- Is constantly changing;
- Is in continuous movement and reinvention (the formal city, as the city of architecture, is therefore static);
- The role models determine their shape and perceptions.



Then, we are interested to explore other ideas, such as:

- Certain peripheral values do not necessarily manifest themselves as opposed to the values consecrated in the centre.
- There is a continuum of positions between dislocations and appropriation.
- There is a circulation of meanings between formal and informal cities

More than reducing the relationship into categories that emerge from the opposition, it seems more interesting to examine the continuities between centre and periphery, formal and informal, legal and illegal, regular and irregular, static and kinetic. The terms formal and informal city, in the debate of urban planning and intervention, express a contextual duality and can overshadow the definition of urban policies. That division (formal/informal) does not facilitate the introduction of uncertainty, innovation, flexibility, movement, adaptability, social and urban integration. According to Mehrotra (2010), such questions reveal the advantage to explore terms such as: simultaneous, hybrid and other notions that refer to some kind of coexistence.

### **3. From informality to the kinetic sense of city occupation**

The informal city is conceived as the result of a cityscape in constant change – a city in continuous movement, in which much of its physical form is characterised by a kinetic quality (Mehrotra, 2010). Its understanding occurs mainly from the spatial occupation models (as spatiality and social settings, much related to collective and public spaces), values and life supports, rather than architecture. The kinetic city is primarily understood by the bias of “street landscapes”. Processions, festivals, residents, street vendors are some of the social expressions of the kinetic city.

Participating in the invention of street landscapes, the spatialities created go beyond the informal city and penetrate the formal city. These landscapes are produced by a continuous adaptation process to the environment and are reflected as urban kinetic spatialities.

The physical form of kinetic city has a temporary nature, constantly reinvented and mainly composed of recycled materials (plastic, cardboard, scrap metal), contrasting with the static city of architecture, whose materials are more permanent. The kinetic city regards the resources and social tactics related with a strategy of survival and adaptability to the environment, connected to a strategy of sustainability. To understand the processes of creation of kinetic spatiality, we must consider issues related to adaptability, flexibility, resistance and diversity.



Figure 5: Paraisópolis, São Paulo (2013)

The informal city progresses with a lack of services, infrastructures, employment, etc. Poor and disadvantaged populations need management of minimum resources allows the invention of new services and spatialities, adapted to the existing resources and time. Then, the profile of the informal city is defined in accordance with the inhabitant spatial initiative (Segaud, 2009), according to their capacity of adaptability and management of minimal resources. Therefore, such notions as flexibility, diversity and kinetics are useful to understand the continuous (re)invention of spatiality. The reason being that the social dynamics and the values associated to the space constitute the most important aspects of interest in this city.

#### 4. Final notes

These considerations introduce the need to think about new forms of urban and regional planning and to intervene in the context of what exist in between cities. Therefore, a better contextualization of the role the contemporary urban planner has a correlation with a greater politicisation of urban design implying the abandonment of the primary deductions about the level of needs and programs, mainly because we live in a context of uncertainty (Sieverts, 2004). This implies the development of a work directly connected to the new social and cultural opportunities, and indicates the need for research on new potentials and the most attractive aspects from a political viewpoint in the “shape margin of manoeuvring and preposition” of urban planning (Sieverts, 2004). These issues are linked to social justice and spatial justice.

It matters to capture the intertwined relationships between formal and informal city because they generate

a synergy that depends on the mutual integration without the obsession of a formalized structure (Mehrotra, 2010, 2008). And also to consider the kinetic city as the point of intersection between the need (often in terms of survival) and the unexplored potentials of the existing infrastructure that creates innovative services. Innovation also occurs through the invention of spatialities required by people in order to survive and develop. It is important to know:

- How people accommodate to specific environmental problems.
- How the environment is changed by people and adequate for the purposes established by them.

But, human adaptability must also be examined in the light of such issues as poverty, access to land, health (etc.) (Moran, 2010). Adaptability as a capacity depending on the potential of response from a complex organism to adjust to the interaction process with environment and as the ability of society to provide answers to environmental variations, allowing their survival and development (Couto, 2009, 2010). In an environment of uncertainty and scarcity of resources, the adaptability is manifested through management of the minimum resources, which enable people to invent and innovate. It's important to expand the culture of the city in a broader sense (for example: access to social and physical infrastructure). The tactics and innovations that urban, poor and marginalized population can offer are to be analyzed rather than focus on a mere intervention in the supply of resources. Mainly because the kinetic city relates to on resources and "survival strategy – often a sustainable strategy" (Mehrotra, 2010).

The kinetic city is created from a variety of informal initiatives, should not be taken as model to be reproduced by urban design (Mehrotra, 2010). We do not want to take the informal city, nor the landscape that fits as models to be replicated by the intervention and urban design. Especially when it is known that the original meaning of the idea of informal city relates to the unequal modes of distribution and access to urban resources. The informal city should rather be taken as a source of inspiration, since it introduces flexibility, diversity and the possibility of continuous adaptation to the environment, conditions that are not always easy to provide in the formal city (Mehrotra, 2010). In this way, rather than focus on a mere intervention of resources provisioning, it matters to understand and work with the tactics and innovations developed by the inhabitants. Therefore, we are interested to understand the adaptability to the environment as a possible way to restore the people's initiative in the city production.

Space is a product of interrelations in global and local scales, a realm of possibilities for multiplicity and coexistence of different and multiple trajectories. Therefore, the space being constantly (re)done, it is open and not finalized; it is not a crystallized product, but a constantly changing process (Massey and Keynes, 2004). This creates unpredictability and uncertainty. The interrelationships between spaces create dynamic and hybrid spatialities without definitive elements. It matters to understand and capture, not the urban form itself, but the social dynamics that gives sense and meaning to spatialities, inferring flexibility and continuous adaptability. From this perspective, we are interested in knowing the social forms of space occupation, which refers to the analysis of spatialities that are created kinetically, and that, from an anthropological perspective of space and urban transformation, infers the importance of restoring the inhabitant initiative related to the living space.

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