

# Transport projects and urban conflict: resistance to formal planning in Fortaleza

Projetos de transportes e conflito urbano:  
resistência ao planejamento formal em Fortaleza

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## Abstract

Resistance to transport projects in residential areas has catalyzed various forms of protest since the 1960s. In contexts of informal urban development, such projects often threaten the stability of vulnerable groups, overlooking the needs and desires of low-income communities. This paper explores the concepts of urban conflict and conflictual planning, which encompass practices and actions that challenge formal planning, through an emblematic Brazilian case study – the Comunidades dos Trilhos, in the city of Fortaleza. The paper contributes to the debate on popular planning in the national context by analyzing distinct strategies and their influence on formal planning, considering factors that either enhance or mitigate their transformative potential.

**Keywords:** conflictual planning; insurgency; displacements; urban transport projects.

## Resumo

*A resistência a projetos de transporte em áreas residenciais tem catalisado diferentes manifestações desde os anos 1960. Em contextos de desenvolvimento urbano informal, tais projetos frequentemente ameaçam a permanência de grupos vulneráveis, relegando as necessidades e os desejos de comunidades de baixa renda. Neste artigo, as noções de conflito urbano e planejamento conflitual, que abrangem práticas e ações de contestação ao planejamento formal, são exploradas a partir de um emblemático estudo de caso brasileiro – o das Comunidades dos Trilhos, em Fortaleza. O artigo apresenta contribuições para o planejamento popular no contexto nacional na medida em que estratégias distintas são analisadas, assim como suas influências sobre o planejamento estatal, considerando os fatores que potencializam ou apaziguam seus poderes de transformação.*

**Palavras-chave:** planejamento conflitual; insurgência; remoções; projetos urbanos de transportes.



## Introduction

Discussions on the neoliberal city, shaped through explicit or veiled participation of the private sector in planning, governance, and management processes, gained prominence in the late 20th century with the proliferation of reflections on the financialization of the economy and society (Van der Zwan, 2014). At the core of this debate are the critical perspectives against the logic of the city as a commodity, produced to attract the market interests and stimulate the growth of profitable activities (Arantes, Vainer and Maricato, 2002). Although these discussions were initially driven by urban researchers and theorists from the Global North, it is worth noting that Latin American scholarship soon began to develop its own theories and critical reflections on the matter. By incorporating the region's specific experiences of urban space production and consumption, these contributions aim to avoid the reproduction of narratives and interpretations that fail to account for the distinct urban dynamics of the region (Shimbo and Rufino, 2019).

In Brazil, the debate around the concepts of financialization and neoliberalism have become increasingly recurrent in urban studies, particularly since the 2000s, when researchers began analyzing the impacts of practices such as privatizations and public-private partnerships (PPPs) on the territories of large metropolitan areas. To some extent, the dissemination of this debate in national scholarship was catalyzed by the way urban policy was regulated through the City Statute (Law n. 10.257/2001), as this legislation introduced, as one of its tools, a 'magic formula' to enable urban restructuring

projects, combining significant flexibilizations in urban regulation with the commercialization of financial assets called Certificates of Additional Construction Potential (Fix, 2004). In this context, as the first experiences of urban restructuring were promoted in association with this new framework of attributions, critiques of neoliberal planning began to mark its significance in the Brazilian academic debate. Cases of exclusionary urban practices have frequently been highlighted, with references to forced removals and gentrification processes as negative outputs (Fix, 2001).

In particular, after the first decade following the City Statute, discussions emerged on how neoliberal dynamics can, paradoxically, make use of the very citizenship and rights-based discourses to facilitate the maintenance of the hegemonic power of capital, aligning with international debates. By analyzing a series of contexts around the world, Miraftab (2009) documents that the adoption of a discourse encompassing social inclusion and participation in urban plans and projects can serve as a form of domination, aiming to appease previous conflicts. In this sense, Freitas (2019) argues that the incorporation of such a neoliberal strategy into formal planning practices, which is based on a fluid notion of inclusion, prevents the triggering of a real social transformation in Brazil, given that the current planning model has demonstrated a low capacity to expand the rights of the most vulnerable groups.

In this regard, arguments such as the scarcity or absence of planning policies have been increasingly losing relevance in the national critique. Instead, scholars acknowledge that, to some extent, the continued perpetuation of inequalities is more closely

linked to the fact that only the dominant groups tend to have influence and access to resources during the decision-making processes (Vainer et al., 2016). Stated differently, the needs of the most vulnerable groups are often relegated to the background in the political process. Thus, neoliberalism applied to the urban planning process can be interpreted as a mechanism that limits the manifestations of alterity within the prevailing social order (Magalhães, 2015). That is the reason why some urban theorists and activists advocate for popular planning practices that, by being contestatory and emancipatory, lead to the construction of alternative futures, destabilizing the dominant order (Friedmann, 1987; Miraftab, 2009; Sandercock, 1998).

The development of this paper is motivated by the understanding that, in contexts where participatory discourse is only used as a tool for camouflage, urban conflicts can be crucial in promoting better futures as they potentialize the rupture with this false perception of inclusive planning. Essentially, the resistance to the outcomes designed by the state symbolises the overcoming of the inertia of the dominated groups, as they rarely have prior organizational structure, meaning the collectivity of such groups are often conditioned to the imminence of conflicts, as well as to the triggering of action (Tanaka, 2017). Urban conflict, in this regard, has the potential to transform latent class struggles – which reflect the historical denial of the right to the city for marginalized groups – into powerful disputes, capable of generating social transformation through autonomous and collective actions.

In light of this, recognizing that investments in high-capacity transport have marked an intense phase of polarization and commodification of space in Brazil – including numerous attempts at evictions during preparations for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games (Castro and Novaes, 2015; Rodrigues, 2015; Tanaka, 2017) – this paper aims to address the following questions: *in the national context, which practices of popular resistance have proven capable of influencing formal urban mobility planning? What factors enhance or appease the transformative power of these practices?* Broadly speaking, the framing of these questions acknowledges that transport projects often lead to urban conflicts, especially when they intersect with informal settlements, although their designs are typically justified based on concepts such as inclusion and social justice (Assis et al., 2024).

To answer these questions, we initially propose a brief discussion of popular planning, aiming to understand the key characteristics that have been attributed by international literature to insurgent practices of resistance and contestation. Next, we contextualize this discussion within Brazilian setting by recognizing the practices adopted by residents of the 'Comunidades dos Trilhos' (Fortaleza/BR) in response to the modernization of the metro-rail system, one of the projects carried out in the context of preparing the city for the 2014 World Cup games. In the sequence, through a comparative analysis among the 17 affected communities, we seek empirical evidence to support associations

between the types of practices adopted and their implications in the initial design of the project. To this end, we considered the influence of other factors such as location advantages and technical constraints. At the end of the paper, we provide final remarks and recommendations for future research.

## Resistance and planning

Although contemporary, the interpretation of urban space as a 'stage for social struggles' has imprecise roots, as the records of the first urban conflicts, involving disputes between distinct social classes, coincide with the emergence of more complex population settlements. In any case, when seeking historical references regarding the influence of social movements on urban planning practices, the 1960s emerge as a significant milestone due to the several instances of popular opposition to urban projects in the North American context. Regardless of the differences in the scope of each project, these popular manifestations generally represented a response to the threats of eviction and demolition that were deemed as necessary to ensure the feasibility of these projects. From an intertwining of empirical experience and academic debate, the concept of *community planning* was developed to refer to confrontational and creative community-based actions aimed at developing alternative plans, following the example of the Alternative Plan for Cooper Square, completed in 1961 (Angotti, 2008).

As a planning practice, *community planning* sparked a broad academic debate on the city planning frameworks that were being carried out, considering their goals, methods and agents, as well as their scope and limitations, thereby driving the theorization of particular planning approaches. Advocacy, radical, transitional, transformative, and progressive planning are some of them, to name a few. Following the Cooper Square experience, for instance, Davidoff (1965) published the paper *Advocacy and pluralism in planning*, introducing the notion of *advocacy planning* as a state-led approach based on the evaluation of multiple plans that represented the interests of distinct groups. Hence, the connection between the terms 'advocacy' and 'pluralism'. The author argues that the debate over possible futures is limited when the public sector holds the monopoly on creation, as the potential of each group to express their own perspectives is tied to their creative autonomy.

Years later, as a particular type of community planning, Friedmann (1987) presents to us his theoretical elaboration of *radical planning*, describing it as a political practice, informed and guided by a theoretical construct of structural transformation. According to him, such structural transformation would occur through an epistemological break with the past. The radical planning would represent a connection between theory (scientific and technical knowledge) and practice, designed to foster social transformation, considering the course of emancipatory actions. Without focusing on urban planning per se, Friedmann

(ibid.) strengthened the critique of the rational-comprehensive planning approach, highlighting its role in perpetuating an elitist and centralized society.

Friedmann's understanding has been regarded by several authors in the urban studies field as a general framework from which it is possible to advance (Tanaka, 2017). As a result, new approaches - under labels such as transformative, insurgent, and conflictual planning - have broadened the debate on what constitutes a rupture with traditional city planning. Sandercock (1998, 1999), for example, expands the concept of radical planning to incorporate community practices that are not necessarily linked to the technical-professional domain. Similarly, Miraftab (2009) argues that community-based planning should not be defined by the presence of a specific actor (the planner), but rather by a set of insurgent practices that create their own terms of engagement.

The author questions the myth of including citizenship conditions in processes led by professionals external to the communities, whether through communicative practices or redistributive actions. In this sense, Miraftab (ibid.) advocates for radicalism through the concept of insurgency, understanding insurgent planning as a practice that seeks to respond to specific forms of domination, related to the neoliberal city, through counter-hegemonic, transgressive, and imaginative actions. Counter-hegemonic because these actions destabilize the dominant order;

transgressive because they aim to break spatial and temporal barriers, navigating across different spaces and political arenas (formal/informal); and imaginative in the sense that they confront the illusion of what the author calls 'TINA—There Is No Alternative,' thus encouraging the design of alternative futures.

In line with this theoretical advancement, Vainer introduces the concept of *conflictual planning* as a practice 'that conceives and activates urban conflictuality as the foundation, information, and dynamic upon which, and from which, policies, plans, and projects are constructed' (2010 apud Tanaka, 2017, p. 13). His elaboration arises from the apprehension that some urban social conflicts have given rise to new and autonomous organizations that seek pathways for political action, alongside pre-existing social movements.

This proposal, which is strongly based on the Brazilian experience,<sup>1</sup> differs from previous theories by emphasizing the importance of urban conflict as a driving and creative source for the construction of just and democratic cities (Vainer et al., 2016). The central idea is that in conflict situations, identities, projects, and collective and autonomous practices can be generated to challenge the dominant order. Thus, it represents a form of alternative planning that is essentially transformative and insurgent, as it can include counter-hegemonic and imaginative strategies, accepting the incorporation of the transgressive dimension, as defined by Miraftab (2009), in different ways.

That being said, as mentioned in the Introduction, this paper seeks to analyze community practices and strategies that can be associated with an understanding of conflictual urban planning, linking them to their capability to influence (or not) dominant planning in favor of dominated groups. To this end, in the next section, we use a case study that involved an urban conflict between a Brazilian Municipality, as the dominant agent, and 17 communities affected by a high-capacity transportation project.

## Rail communities: theoretical and conceptual framework

During the second decade of the 21st century, numerous popular mobilizations were observed in several Brazilian metropolises, particularly in opposition to some urban projects aimed at promoting local and regional restructuring in preparation for mega-sporting events. These efforts were strongly anchored in developmentalist discourses mixed with neoliberal rationality (Iacovini, 2017). Many of them involved improvements in both urban mobility and accessibility (potentially linked to benefits such as reduced travel times and/or enhanced access to different urban activities – work, education, shopping, leisure, etc). In this context, emblematic cases of conflictual planning gained strength and notoriety in both the media and academic communities. The primary reason for this was the evident contradictions in the discourses of legitimation (and persuasion) surrounding urban redevelopment plans and/or isolated high-capacity transportation projects.

Notable examples include: the case of the Arroio Pavuna community, threatened by the construction of the ‘Transcarioca’ Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor in Rio de Janeiro; the case of the Saramandaia neighborhood, threatened by the implementation of the ‘Via Expressa Linha Viva’ in Salvador; and the case of the ‘Comunidades dos Trilhos’ where the threat of multiple evictions is linked to the implementation of the Light Rail Vehicle (LRV) in the city of Fortaleza (Tanaka, 2017). As mentioned in the Introduction, this paper focuses particularly on the LRV case, with the argument that it enables the comparison of different strategies, organization levels, and forms of articulation. Thus, the different approaches undertaken by the 17 affected communities seem suitable to help us address the first research question presented in the Introduction (Which practices of popular resistance have proven capable of influencing formal urban mobility planning?).

We also believe that the choice to consider communities located in the same city may be beneficial both in methodological and phenomenological terms. First, because it seems to favor the development of a less biased investigation, as it is based on the same geopolitical context and, in this case, the same conflict trigger. Secondly, we argue that the socio-spatial differences observed within the same territory may facilitate the identification of factors and attributes that may have either enhanced or mitigated the intended transformative power, which is the focus of the second research question presented in the Introduction (What factors enhance or appease the transformative power of these practices?).

## Establishing the conflict: mobility, informality, evictions

In Brazil, the approach to the 2014 World Cup, and later the 2016 Olympic Games, resulted in the materialization of various projects and initiatives in each of the 12 host cities. The preparation for these events was characterized by public investments in urban mobility and accessibility infrastructure, including BRT, LRV, metro stations, and surrounding roadworks near the competition arenas. While several sectors of society criticized the substantial investments, a smaller group, mainly consisting of academics and social movements, highlighted the negative impacts of these projects on vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on the communities and informal settlements that were partially or totally within the intervention areas (Castro and Novaes, 2015). Overall, the accounts from these groups support the existence of an intersection between forced displacement and urban informality in highly unequal cities (Assis et al., 2024).

17 communities in Fortaleza, occupying land along the city's former railway system, shared this experience. At the time, some

spatial fragments of these communities were deemed necessary for the implementation of the Parangaba-Mucuripe tram line. According to the initial proposal, drawn up and presented by the Ceará State Government, the project's solutions depended on relocating a significant number of families along its 12.7 km axis, which included nine stations and passed through 16 neighborhoods. The communities threatened by the implementation of the project were spatially located from the upper end of the branch, in the coastal and hotel zone of the municipality (the Mucuripe region, close to the main centrality of the city), to its other limit, in the Parangaba neighborhood (an intensely busy region, due to the presence of various shops and services, located in a transition strip between the central area of the city and the peripheral zones) (Figure 1).

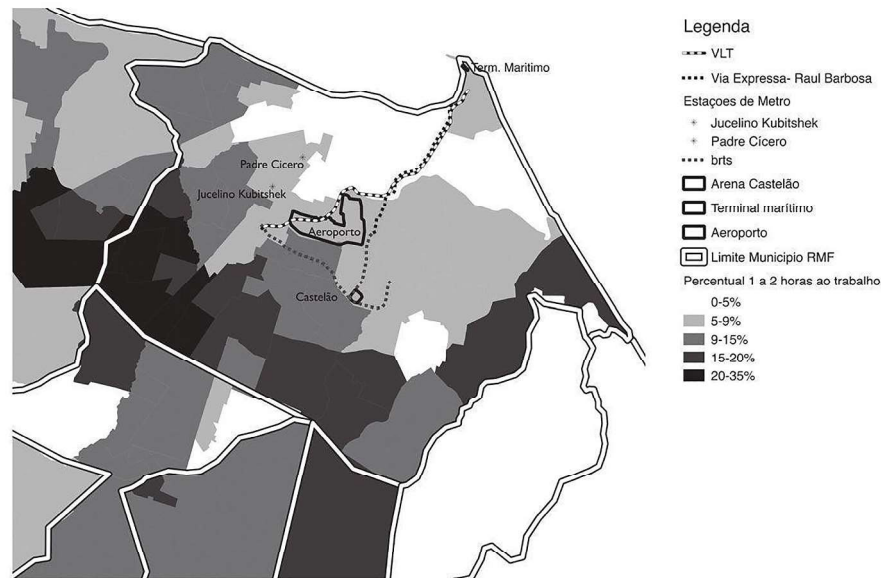
In Fortaleza, the LRV axis connects neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by middle- and high-income families. As highlighted by Iacovini (2017), the domain area of the old Parangaba-Mucuripe Railway used to mark the limit of the urbanized area of Fortaleza until the mid-1970s. However, over the last few decades, this axis has been transformed from an 'external frontier' to an 'internal frontier,' with







Figure 2 – Fifa World Cup 2014 works superimposed on the regions of Fortaleza, categorized according to the average commute time to work



Source: Pinheiro et al. (2015) and Freitas (2017).

in a lecture given by representatives from the State Planning Secretariat. The author notes that the first institutional moments related to the project were characterized by the presentation of the proposal, and already highlighted one of the most striking aspects of the conflict: the lack of transparency in the availability of information from government bodies. In particular, the number of buildings affected was estimated by the residents of the communities, ranging from 7,000 to 2,700. In this context, it is worth noting that the public authorities, until then, held not only the monopoly of the creation but also the

control over information and decision-making regarding who would benefit or be negatively affected by the project, within an environment of uncertainty and vulnerability, both of which are associated with informal development contexts.

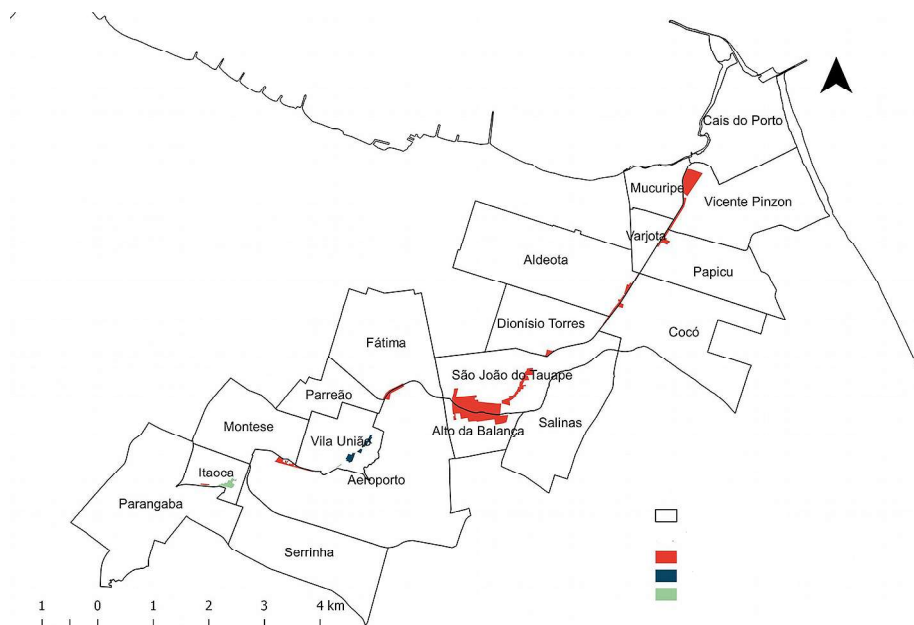
Moreover, it is important to highlight that the attempt at hegemonic control of the process was also observed during the communication with residents regarding the evictions. In general, this communication occurred through local news and, gradually, through official visits by teams hired by the

government to carry out the registration and demarcation of the properties that would be affected. On these occasions, many residents reported that the professionals tried to coerce and induce families into making disadvantageous agreements, exploiting their social vulnerabilities, and emphasizing in their speeches the lack of documents (such as certificates, property registrations, and deeds) that could guarantee the right to possession and ownership of the properties (Iacovini, 2017; Menezes, 2013). In this sense, there was an attempt at manipulation through the distortion and concealment of the rights and legal procedures ensured by the national urban policy itself.

## Conflict Planning emerges from conflict

As mentioned before, 17 communities were affected by the LRV project in Fortaleza. However, of this total, Oliveira (2017) notes that there are no records of resistance manifestations from six communities, all located in lower- or middle-class neighborhoods, closer to the southwest end of the LRV axis (Figure 3), and therefore farther from the main centrality of the state capital. In these communities, residents reported that, despite their desire to resist, they ended up accepting the resettlement negotiations proposed by the

Figure 3 – Affected communities and their resistance



Source: Oliveira (2017).

State Government, as they did not know how to demand alternative solutions. In these cases, residents were relocated to the Residencial Cidade Jardim, more than 5 km away from their original residential location (ibid.).

Regarding the other affected communities, not only are there records of autonomous practices carried out in each locality, but it is also known that there was a genuine articulation among residents, as they organized around the Housing Defense Struggle Movement (MLDM). These communities include: Mucuripe, Jangadeiros, Rio Pardo, Trilha do Senhor, Dom Oscar Romero, São Vicente de Paula, João XXIII, Pio XII, Aldaci Barbosa, Lagamar, and Lauro Vieira Chaves. However, Oliveira (ibid.) notes that the forms of resistance to the project were not homogeneous across the territory, with strategies and levels of engagement, as well as articulation, varying significantly between communities.

This variation will be analyzed in the following section, which aims to identify both common strategies – i.e., those adopted by more than one community – and isolated strategies, associated with specific communities. The main goal is initially to understand to what extent the set of actions carried out by the communities can be framed as a Brazilian example of insurgent or conflictual planning, following the proposal by Vainer et al. (2016) presented earlier. To do so, a documentary and bibliographic research approach was used, based on reading theses, dissertations, articles, and book chapters. Next, we present a list of the identified strategies, emphasizing their common or particular character, and highlighting their

associations with the dimensions that were also previously outlined in the literature review section (counter-hegemony; transgression, imagination):

- *Resistance to the initial process of family registration and property surveys:* This practice was adopted by some communities, with the first recorded event linked to the Lauro Vieira Chaves community, where families resisted the registration and physical measurement procedures, and questioned the low compensation values (Iacovini, 2017). This practice is predominantly characterized as a counter-hegemonic strategy, as it represents an act of insurgency against a procedure established and carried out by a dominant power.

- *Intercommunity articulation:* This strategy was primarily adopted in the years 2010 and 2011 and it was led by certain communities with a history of community organization (such as Aldaci Barbosa, Trilha do Senhor, and Dom Oscar Romero). Reports by Iacovini (ibid.) indicate that the image of unity which was communicated to the externality was able to mask internal weaknesses, divisions, and disagreements. This articulation is predominantly characterized as a transgressive practice, as spatial boundaries were loosened around common interests and needs.

- *Creation, integration and articulation of/ with popular movements, as well as with public bodies, such as the Ceará State Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ceará State Public Defender's Office:* This practice involved residents from various communities and significantly contributed to bringing national

and even international attention to the case of forced removals from the Communities of the Tracks, given the context of the 2014 World Cup. Furthermore, in their respective fields, public agencies positively contributed to the cause. For instance, in 2013, the Public Prosecutor's Office requested the suspension of funding for the VLT project due to the lack of a resettlement plan for the families; the agency also ordered the suspension of house marking and family registration until the environmental licensing for the project was completed. The Public Defender's Office actively participated

in meetings with the communities, organized public hearings with the state government (mediating negotiations), and filed lawsuits and opened cases to defend the rights and interests of the communities (such as claims of adverse possession, attempts at land regularization, complaints about irregularities in the environmental evaluations,<sup>2</sup> requests for project information, etc.). Overall, this strategy is predominantly characterized as transgressive, as it allowed the communities to enter 'invited spaces' while bringing powerful institutions into 'invented spaces' (Miraftab, 2009).

Figure 4 – Protest against the evictions resulting from the VLT project  
Movement of Struggle for Housing (MLDM) banner



Source: Viana, Mota, and Bodenmüller (2014).

Figure 5 – Representatives of the Trilha do Senhor Community taking part in demonstrations in political spaces



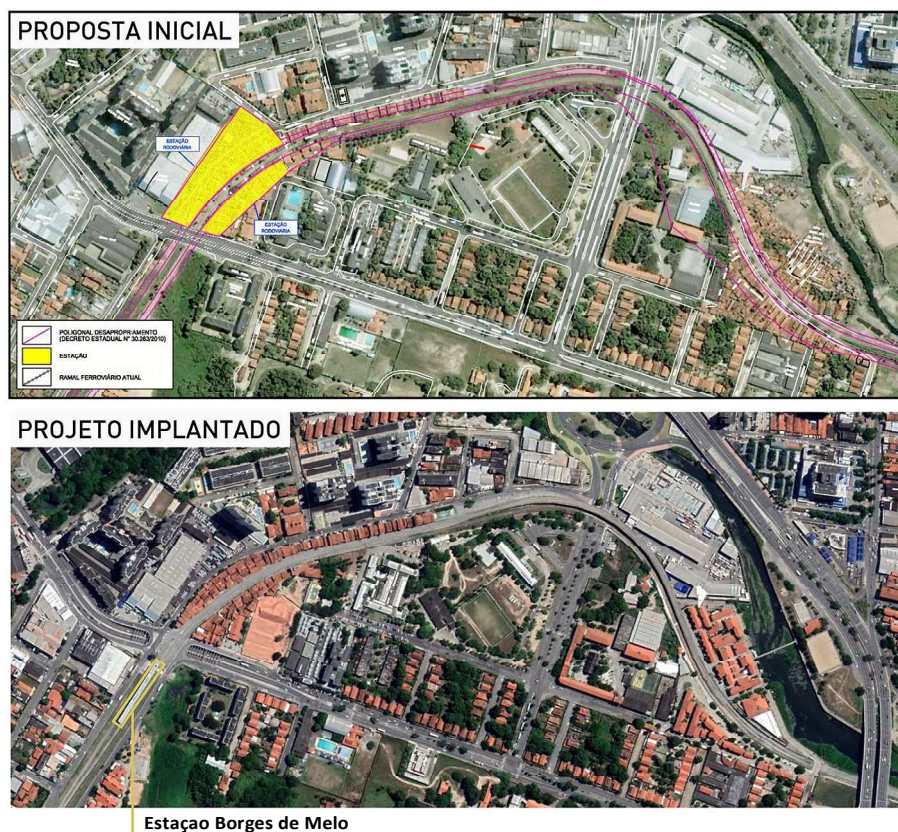
Source: Menezes (2013).

• *Questioning the technical details of the project and proposing alternative solutions:* these strategies were carried out in different ways by distinct communities. In general, questions were raised in the two types of spaces defined by Miraftab (2009), once again exemplifying the dimension of transgression. It is important to note that these questions addressed everything from the design of parallel tracks to the plots of land initially chosen for the stations, which often coincided with areas occupied by low-income households, even when other alternatives

were available. It is also important to consider that, in many cases, it was up to the communities themselves – assisted by external actors such as the model office of the Architecture and Urbanism Program at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), Canto – to think of alternative solutions to minimize the losses. This practice predominantly touches upon the imaginative dimension of the insurgent planning process, where new realities are collectively conceived, allowing for effective route changes in projects derived from conventional planning.



Figure 6 – Example of successful interference in the original project, led by the Aldaci Barbosa Community, directly contributing to reducing the amount of removals originally planned



Source: Fernandes (2019).

• *Resistance to the presence of public officials during their visits*: a strategy observed in the Aldaci Barbosa and Jangadeiros communities during visits by the then Governor, held on the nights of August 2, 2011, and April 10, 2013, respectively. There was strong resistance to his presence in the area (from residents of the visited communities, as well as from other communities and supporters), with the claim that the awaited negotiations should take place

in public, in community centers, not privately, from house to house; and that the Governor had failed to attend certain previously scheduled meetings. Amid boos and much resistance, he was "expelled" from the communities during both visits, according to reports in the national newspaper *O Globo* and the local newspaper *O Povo* (Cid..., 2013). This practice contributed to strengthening the integration within the visited communities and with other communities, and

can predominantly be identified as counter-hegemonic, as it represents resistance to the dominant power (the Governor of the State, who was accompanied by other representatives of power, such as the General Commander of the Military Police, the Chief of the Civil House of Ceará, and security personnel).

• *Use of media and offline design as tools to strengthen the community struggle:* Initiated in 2011 through audiovisual workshops promoted by the Popular Committee of the World Cup (in the communities Trilha do Senhor, Lauro Vieira Chaves, Aldaci Barbosa, and Caminho das Flores), the practice of using various media and design to strengthen and spread

the community struggle gained prominence, particularly in Lauro Vieira Chaves, where it can be identified as an individual practice. In this community, a blog was created (with a history of the struggle, notices, gallery, etc.); projects were developed with the support of Varal (Laboratory of Initiatives in Social Design at UFC); and the documentary *#COPAPARAQUEM? A comunidade que desviou o trem* (2014) was produced. This strategy is predominantly characterized as transgressive in that it spreads an alternative view of the events, different from the one told by the traditional media and other dominant sectors.

Figure 7 – Flyer produced by MLDM

**PROCURA-SE**

**Casa em área valorizada de Fortaleza, com 3 quartos, 2 banheiros, sala, cozinha, varanda, área de serviço e quintal. Próximo a escola, creche, terminal de ônibus, posto de saúde e hospital. Que tenha infraestrutura de saneamento, coleta de lixo e iluminação pública. Paga-se entre 2 mil e 16 mil reais.**

**Quem souber, por favor informe à Dona Mariazinha e às demais 2500 famílias que moram nas Comunidades do Trilho, que estão sendo expulsas pelo governador Cid Gomes e pela prefeita Luizianne Lins, para que no local de suas residências seja construído um trenzinho (VLT) para os turistas que vêm pra Copa da FIFA 2014.**

**Movimento de Luta em Defesa da Moradia – MLDM**  
**Contra as remoções da Copa!!!**

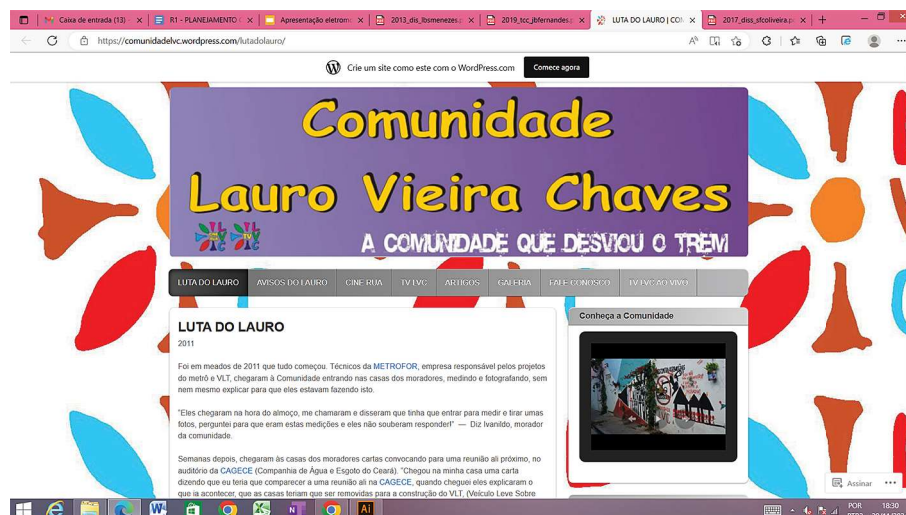
**ALUGUEIS SOCIAIS**

**PROCURA-SE**

Source: Pinheiro (2015).



Figure 8 – Lauro Vieira Chaves Community website



Source: Lauro Vieira Chaves Community (Matos, n.d.).

• *Publication of the “Open Letter to the People of Fortaleza”*: an isolated practice carried out by the Trilha do Senhor Community in 2010. The presentation of the letter contributed simultaneously to several objectives: the dissemination of the community’s struggle regarding the right to remain in the original location; the consolidation of the idea of community unity around converging issues, emphasizing their knowledge of their rights; and the denunciation of the violence perpetrated by the public authorities against these families. Predominantly, this strategy can also be characterized as transgressive, as it, like the previously detailed practice, represents an attempt to bring an alternative version of the facts to the public’s attention, distinct from the narrative propagated by dominant media (Menezes, 2013).

## Conflictual planning: resistance, achievements and losses

As previously mentioned, among the insurgent strategies mapped, we identified both practices that were carried out collectively and actions that were played individually, which means they were adopted only by specific communities. In this section, we aim to relate the forms of engagement and popular resistance (inherent to each community or group) to their influences on the design of the project. In this analysis, we also took into account other factors that may interfere with the achievements, such as technical obstacles and differences in location (an aspect that could make the communities’ removal processes more or less attractive from a market perspective).

It is important to note that there is limited information analyzing the actions carried out by the communities individually. Most studies and analyses focus on the case of Fortaleza as a collective movement, documenting the struggle and resistance of the "Comunidades dos Trilhos" – in the plural. As previously mentioned, not all affected communities are referenced in technical and academic materials, which justifies the absence of some of them in the analysis. This is the case of the following communities: Caminho das Flores, Travessa Livino de Carvalho, Livreiro Gualter, Comunidade do Carvão, and two unnamed communities.

Chart 1 presents all the disaggregated information related to each community (Câmara, Freitas, and Rufino, 2019; Freitas, 2015; Iacovini, 2017; Menezes, 2013; Oliveira, 2017; Pinheiro, 2015; Queiroz, 2020; Rocha, 2014; Viana, 2015). In this chart, the communities are ordered to highlight their distance from the Centro and Aldeota neighborhoods, which represent the city's main central areas, where most of Fortaleza's jobs are concentrated. From this perspective, the communities are listed in descending order based on their distances. This ordering criterion was chosen to facilitate the incorporation of the spatial dimension into the analysis, particularly through the notion of locational advantages (Harvey, 2019; Villaça, 2001), represented here by proximity to urban activities.

As can be observed, collective actions include integration with popular movements and public agencies, participation in formal

spaces (such as public hearings), as well as engagement in invented spaces (such as protests). These actions were closely interconnected, as participation in both invited and invented spaces (Miraftab, 2009) occurred in an articulated way, fostering the integration of community groups from different backgrounds, as well as their collaboration with other organizations involved in the struggle against evictions, such as the Fortaleza Popular Committee for the World Cup.<sup>3</sup>

In this context of articulated community struggle, it is noteworthy to highlight the low – or even absent – visibility of the last three communities listed in Chart 1, all located in more remote areas. The case of these three communities (Comunidade do Carvão, Livreiro Gualter, and Caminho das Flores) drew our attention because, when comparing their locational attributes, levels of engagement, and the outcomes achieved, we observed something quite intriguing: despite their limited engagement, significant changes were achieved, comparing the original and final versions of the project. It is also worth noting that these communities shared the characteristic of having smaller populations compared to the others. In contrast, regarding the areas occupied by the first six communities listed – those that would be more attractive from a spatial location perspective – there is no evidence of direct influence on the original project.

In some cases, the efforts made by communities incorporated the imaginative dimension proposed by Miraftab (2009) through

the presentation of alternative solutions. This was the case for the communities of Trilha do Senhor, João XXIII, Lagamar, Aldaci Barbosa, and Lauro Vieira Chaves. This community also adopted a distinct strategy, incorporating technical knowledge into popular discourse by advocating for the resettlement of displaced families in a nearby Special Zone of Social Interest<sup>4</sup> (ZEIS). Among the five communities mentioned, three achieved significant gains, particularly regarding the reduction of evictions originally planned in the State Government's project. Besides that, both Aldaci Barbosa and Lauro Vieira Chaves communities – two of the most active in the struggle – secured a commitment from the state government to build social housing complexes near their original areas<sup>5</sup> to relocate the families that were unable to remain.

According to the documentary and bibliographic research conducted, The Trilha do Senhor community was one of the most affected in terms of losses, despite its strong involvement with the MLDM, the formulation of alternatives to the imposed evictions, and the active participation in protests, public hearings, and meetings with government representatives. Among the communities analyzed, Trilha do Senhor has the best locational advantages, and its surroundings were benefited by other infrastructure projects beyond the Light Rail Transit (VLT) – for example, a tunnel on the Padre Antônio Tomás Avenue. In this sense, the

evictions in this community served to facilitate multiple changes in the built environment. This combination contributed to limiting the influence of the community's efforts in securing substantial gains, especially regarding the permanence of former residents.

Both the Trilha do Senhor and Lauro Vieira Chaves communities stand out for having explored communication channels and tools to expand and strengthen their struggles against evictions and displacements. In doing so, they transcended their territorial boundaries, reaching not only residents of other neighborhoods in Fortaleza but also the international community, at a time when World Cup host cities were receiving significant media attention due to protests and movements opposing the mega-event.<sup>6</sup> In addition to creating blogs and publishing open letters, as indicated in Chart 1, the participation of families and residents in documentaries and interviews highlights the relevance and impact of their cause.

At the national level, the development of the *Dossier on Communities Threatened by Evictions Due to World Cup Works in Fortaleza (CE)* also contributed to raising awareness of the issue (Tanaka, 2017). Following the example of other cities, residents from the 12 most organized communities chose to draft the document's outline, entrusting much of the content to the Laboratory of Public Policy Studies (LEPP/UFC), which was responsible for consolidating the dossier.

Chart 1 – Resistance practices and their developments

(To be continued)

Communities ordered according to proximity to the center	Resistance practices*												Influence on the project and other achievements
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
1. Trilha do Senhor (Aldeota neighborhood)	X	X	X	X	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	X	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographic research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
2. Dom Oscar Romero (Aldeota neighborhood)	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographic research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
3. Rio Pardo (Papicu neighborhood)	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographic research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
2. Jangadeiros (Vicente Pinzón neighborhood)	X	X	X	–	X	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographical research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
3. Mucuripe (Vicente Pinzón neighborhood)	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographic research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
4. São Vicente de Paula (Aldeota and Dionísio Torres neighborhoods)	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographical research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
5. João XXIII (Dionísio Torres neighborhood)	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	- With the change in location planned for one of the stations, the number of expropriations was reduced to 10 buildings; - At the same time, the community managed to get the compensation processes recognized by decree (State Law 15.194, July 19, 2012) and the social rent increased from R\$200.00 to R\$400.00.).
6. Pio XII (São João do Tauape neighborhood)	X	X	X	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	*Despite extensive documentary and bibliographical research, we found no records of direct influences (achievements) on the original project, specifically related to this community.
7. Lagamar (São João do Tauape neighborhood)	X	X	X	X	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	- The number of expropriations has decreased (it was not possible to find records of the number of reductions); - At the same time, the community has managed to raise social rent grants while they await the resettlement promised by the state.

Chart 1 – Resistance practices and their developments

Conclusion

Communities ordered according to proximity to the center	Resistance practices*												Influence on the project and other achievements
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
8. Aldaci Barbosa (Fatima neighborhood)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	- With the change in location of the Borges de Melo Bus Station, the number of expropriations was reduced (from 250, only 20 buildings were removed); - At the same time, the state government has pledged to build a housing complex nearby.
9. Lauro Vieira Chaves (Montese neighborhood)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	- With the change in the VLT route, the number of expropriations fell from 203 to 53 buildings; - At the same time, the state government undertook to build a housing complex on land located in the identified ZEIS.
10. Comunidade do Carvão (Vila União neighborhood)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	- Com a mudança no traçado do VLT, os 300 imóveis que seriam desapropriados permaneceram.
11. Livreiro Gualter (Vila União neighborhood)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	- With the change in the station's planned location, 100 buildings were relocated
12. Caminho das Flores (Itaoca neighborhood)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	-	- With the change in location planned for one of the stations, the number of expropriations was reduced (it was not possible to find records of the number of reductions); - At the same time, the community managed to get the social rent increased from R\$200.00 to R\$400.00.

**\*LEGENDA**

- A- Integration with popular movements and public agencies;  
B- Participation in formal spaces (such as public hearings);  
C- Engagement in invented spaces (such as protests);  
D- Presentation of alternatives;  
E- Publication of the "Open Letter to the People of Fortaleza" (transgression of barriers);  
F- Participation in the preparation of the Dossier;  
G- Reproduction of the resistance to the government's presence on the occasion of its visit;  
H- Resistance to physical registration;  
I- Internal actions to guarantee the unanimity of the resistance;  
J- Support in the formal discourse to strengthen the struggle (identification of empty ZEIS);  
K- Use of media to spread the struggle (creation of a blog);  
L- Residents' resistance to leaving the buildings.

Source: the authors.

## Final remarks

Although the practice of formal urban planning in Brazil is regulated by a democratic and inclusive legal framework, Brazilian cities have not yet experienced the triggering of significant social transformations, which should imply the real expansion of rights for the most vulnerable groups (Freitas, 2019). In fact, there has been a reproduction of socio-spatial inequalities, not only due to the neglect of the non-hegemonic groups' needs in political processes (Vainer et al., 2016), but also because of the implementation of contradictory urban projects, which have negative implications for these groups (Freitas, 2017). Despite that, in this paper such projects are interpreted as drivers of community engagement, since, by establishing conflicts between dominant and dominated groups, they disrupt the sense of inclusion and citizenship that veils the exclusionary dynamics of urban space production (Miraftab, 2019).

The concept of conflictual planning thus emerges to designate a type of community planning that is recurrent in the Brazilian context (Tanaka, 2017; Vainer et al., 2016). The terminology highlights the role of the urban conflict and encompasses aspects aligned with the international scholarship. The conflictual planning is a counter-hegemonic form of planning by nature; and transgressive and imaginative by necessity. In light of this, in this paper we tried to explore how contestatory practices unfold in the Brazilian territory, analyzing the capacity these practices have to produce alternative futures, in contrast to technocratic planning. Additionally, we examined the existence of other factors that may enhance or suppress this capacity,

such as locational advantages and technical justifications related to both the specifics of the projects and legal impediments or other types of constraints, such as relief and topography.

For this, we chose the Trilha do Senhor community to undertake a case study. The selection of this community was based on the diversity it encompasses, involving communities with distinct levels of engagement and characteristics. In this regard, although our results do not allow us to establish a direct association between the advancements achieved and the level of community engagement, all the documents and publications analyzed highlight the articulation among the 17 communities as one of the most important aspects contributing to the transformations achieved. The main reason for this is that, despite the gains and losses not being homogeneous across all the communities, the transgressive movements of integration, cohesion, and unity are described as key factors for the achievements, particularly considering the promotion of engagement and the circulation of information they facilitated.

Overall, the investigation provided evidence that is highly relevant for strengthening urban popular struggles. Beyond the intra-community and inter-community articulation, it is also worth to mention the importance of strategies such as: (1) the presence of non-hegemonic groups in formal spaces (e.g., hearings); (2) the creation of invented spaces (e.g., protests); (3) the use of media to communicate the struggle, which facilitated the breaking of barriers, including geographical ones; (4) the integration with popular movements and public agencies; and (5) the closer relationship between communities and academic/public institutions. These last two strategies not only

helped the formulation and presentation of alternatives but also facilitated the incorporation of formal discourse into the struggle and the access to information, particularly regarding the right to housing.

That said, we recognize that it would be naive to analyze only the practices themselves, detached from the spatial and temporal context in which the cases unfold. In some instances, the insurgent strategies adopted by different communities, despite being quite similar, lead to distinct outcomes. One possible explanation is that the market context in which each one is inserted can be decisive for decision-making. The cases of Aldaci Barbosa, Lauro Vieira Chaves, and Trilha do Senhor communities illustrate this logic. All three communities played significant roles in the struggle against the evictions caused by the implementation of the light rail transit (VLT). However, as previously detailed, while the first two achieved relevant gains, Trilha do Senhor (the only one among the three threatened by more than one urban mobility project simultaneously) was the one that suffered the most from the evictions.

In general, the selected case also allows us to analyze how the tensions between the dominant power and socioeconomically vulnerable residents play out. What caught our attention were the achievements obtained by the two communities located in the Vila União neighborhood, which, according to Oliveira (2017), did not present any resistance. However, in both communities, there are documentary and bibliographic records indicating that the evictions initially planned

in the project were reduced. Meanwhile, communities like Trilha do Senhor, despite their multiple attempts at resistance, did not achieve equivalent gains. Similarly, among the first six communities listed in Chart 1, no direct gains were identified concerning significant changes in the original VLT project. In this paper, we interpret these occurrences as attempts by the public authorities to make design alterations in areas less valued by the local real estate market, as a means of appeasing the conflict and easing relations.

While some communities (such as Aldaci Barbosa and Lauro Vieira Chaves) are extensively analyzed in official documents and publications, there are communities among the 17 directly affected by the project that are not mentioned by name, not even in the academic references used. We know of their existence through the data collected, as well as through the publication of maps, such as the one in Figure 3. In light of everything that has been presented, we believe that some questions can be formulated, based on our results, to guide future research. These questions are:

- In Brazil, to what extent is conflictual planning capable of disrupting the intentions of hegemonic groups? What socio-spatial contexts make the conduct of conflict favorable to dominated groups?
- To what extent do the notions of identity and social belonging influence struggles against exclusionary projects?
- From a national perspective, what has been the role of transport projects as drivers of urban conflict?



- Regarding transport projects that directly affect poor communities, what are the real benefits generated for the residents who remain? What results are produced for the displaced families, especially in terms of accessibility?

- How have ex-ante evaluations of these projects taken into account the gains and losses associated with each social group? How are removals and resettlements considered? How have these evaluations been debated at the local level?

- What are the pathways for truly participatory planning in the field of transport?

We believe that the answers to these questions are essential for the formulation of projects and policies that genuinely rely on principles of justice, equity, and social inclusion, taking into account not only the intended and estimated effects and outcomes, but primarily the effects and outcomes that occur throughout the entire planning process.

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## Notes

- (1) Cf. Freitas et al. (2021) and Tanaka (2017).
- (2) Environmental Impact study and report.
- (3) In 2011, the Popular Committee of Fortaleza's World Cup was established, with one of its main goals being the fight against evictions and the denunciation of rights violations related to the games. The Committee sought ways to engage with the residents and support their initiatives
- (4) It is an instrument provided for by the City Statute (Brazil, 2001), Law n. 10.257/2001, and the Participatory Master Plan of Fortaleza (2009), Law n. 062/2009. Its objectives are to designate land portions with vacant lots in areas equipped with adequate infrastructure, which are then used for the construction of social housing
- (5) It is worth mentioning that, while awaiting the completion of the promised housing complexes, residents displaced from these communities continue to receive social rent (<https://diariodonordeste.verdesmares.com.br/metro/paywall-7.100?wall=0&ald=1.2096815>).
- (6) In this regard, it is worth highlighting the visit of urban planner Raquel Rolnik, at the time the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, which took place on June 15, 2012, and June 16, 2012. On this occasion, the urban planner visited four of the communities threatened with removal by the VLT project. In addition to delivering strong speeches in favor of the right to the city for socioeconomically vulnerable populations, Rolnik also described the visits on her blog, turning it into a powerful tool for social advocacy.

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