

# Suburban industrial remnants: the transformative potential of the Latin American developmental legacy

Remanescentes industriais suburbanos: potência  
transformadora do legado desenvolvimentista latino-americano

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## Abstract

This article integrates a comprehensive study of the legacy and potential of suburban industrial remnants and reflects on contradictions and opportunities for urban transformation. It emphasizes the socio-spatial effects of industrialization and deindustrialization in Latin America while focusing on the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, prioritized in Brazilian developmental policies. Authors in the fields of critical geography and ethnographic anthropology who highlight local and global interactions, uninterrupted urban dynamics, and multiple logics, practices, and territorial forms are references for the research. Despite increased contradictions and conflicts deriving from historical processes, today there is a potential material and symbolic capital to benefit local populations if plurality in social relations is considered and forces present in the main agents who act in the suburban space are activated.

**Keywords:** industrial remnants; Latin American urbanization; railway suburbs; Rio de Janeiro.

## Resumo

*O artigo insere-se em pesquisa abrangente sobre o legado e a potência dos remanescentes industriais suburbanos, refletindo sobre contradições e oportunidades para uma transformação urbana. Enfatiza efeitos socioespaciais da industrialização e desindustrialização latino-americanos, focando nos subúrbios ferroviários da zona norte do Rio de Janeiro, priorizados nas políticas desenvolvimentistas brasileiras. Autores da geografia crítica e da antropologia etnográfica que destacam interações locais e globais, ininterruptas dinâmicas urbanas e multiplicidade de lógicas, práticas e formas territoriais, são referências para a pesquisa. Avalia-se que, mesmo acirradas as contradições e os conflitos decorrentes de processos históricos, hoje há capital material e simbólico potencial para beneficiar populações locais, se considerada a pluralidade nas relações sociais e acionadas forças presentes nos principais agentes atuantes no espaço suburbano.*

**Palavras-chave:** remanescentes industriais; urbanização latino-americana; subúrbios ferroviários; Rio de Janeiro.



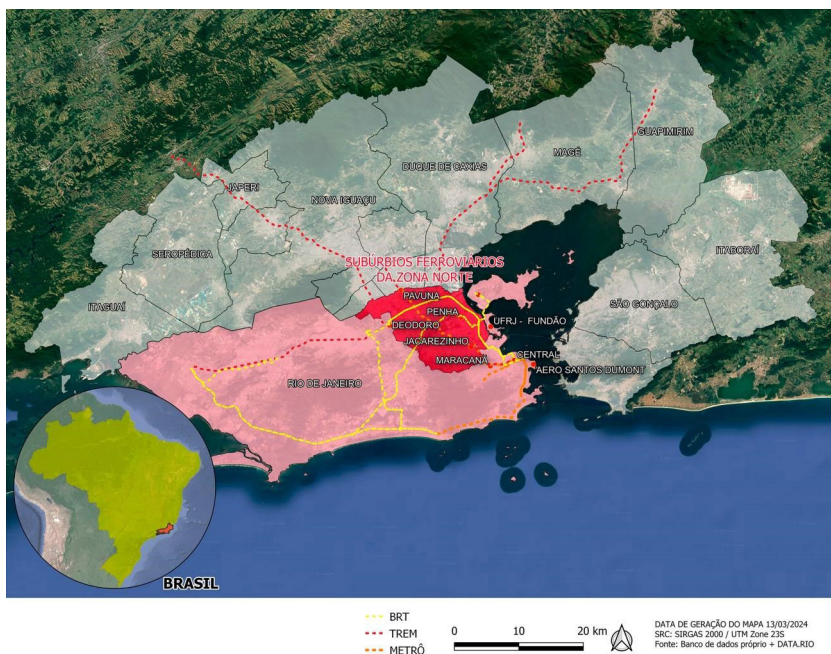
# Introduction

This article stems from an investigation on the legacy and potentiality of suburban industrial remnants reflecting on contradictions and opportunities for urban transformation. It emphasizes the socio-spatial effects of industrialization and deindustrialization in Latin America, focusing on the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro (see Figure 1), prioritized in Brazilian developmental policies during the period of 1930s to 1970s. Today the suburbs are inhabited by a large and diverse population, who could be identified with the concept of ‘urban majority’ (Simone and

Rao, 2012, p. 316), lately defined as "roughly corresponding to the intertwining of poor, working and lower middle-class residents, the term referring less to specific identities than to a mathematics of combination"<sup>1</sup> (Simone et al., 2022, p. 334).

Like other suburban areas in some of Latin America's largest cities, Rio de Janeiro's railway suburbs intensified urbanization in mid-20th century, stimulated by the national priority given to industrialization led by the economic crises in central countries. However, from the 1980s onwards, the policy of incentives for industrial sector ended, initiating a process of factory emptying in many of the establishments located in the suburbs. Up to now, the complexities

Figure 1 – Location map of the railway suburbs in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro – 2004



Source: image generated by the author with 2004 map by [www.data.rio](http://www.data.rio).

absorbed from both processes – industrialization and deindustrialization – associated with contradictions and opportunities, are reflected in multiple forms of occupation the suburban territories and its ways of life. From globalizing strategies to everyday negotiations, these complexities provoke continuous urban changes, directing our thoughts to space-time relations.

Through times a derogatory collective image was imprinted on the railway suburbs (Fernandes, 2010), even being situated relatively close to the Centre and accessible by different modalities of transport. This collective image was emphasized by the numerous industrial remnants and associated types of housing. Values usually linked to them are from the manufacturing world and correspond to a-historical and unesthetic attributes that brought a lack of private and public interest in investments in infrastructure and urban services.

Currently, in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, part of its old manufacturing establishments is still active. Commonly its production remains in the economic context due to the capacity of adapting to recent technological and consumption changes, even if it tends to reduce the space occupied, equipment and labour used. Sometimes, due to the lack of investments, active industries adopt inadequate means of production, bringing environmental and urban problems.

Another part of these old industrial establishments lost their original function, having been converted to different uses, varying from hegemonic production to spontaneous appropriation. Usually, the first are consolidated uses in the urban fabric; the second, are

instable. Some keep the former spaces and buildings preserved, despite the change of use, safeguarding their original structures. Others do not show traces of the industrial past, having been partially or even totally altered.

Among those latter, there still is a part of the old factories that are inactive, waiting for changes in their use and their occupation. Eventually they have spaces and buildings temporarily appropriate for very unstable activities. Although these industrial remnants are often considered material and symbolic references, being abandoned they negatively impact the local environment. For contrasting so heavily in the urban fabric and accumulating meanings from the past, we can also understand these old industrial establishments as a *rugosidade* (roughness) (Santos, 1980). This concept is applied for distinguished urban areas in time and space, which attributes give them a potential for urban transformation if it is driven by social action.

Recently, the suburban industrial remnants, especially the inactive ones, were considered in the political debate involving changes in urban land use legislation. and the demands of local populations.<sup>2</sup> However, often in the academic field, the focus of the discussion is the heritage value of the industrial legacy.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we prioritize in this article the potential of industrial remnants in urban transformation considering contemporary challenges in the suburban territories where they are located, and the benefits that could be brought for their populations.

To reflect on the potential of industrial remnants for urban changes benefiting local populations requires understanding the

socio-spatial effects of industrialization and deindustrialization in the suburban region and analysing processes, spatialities and materialities resulted from establishing factories. So, first we investigate the bibliography and data on Latin America late industrialization in the period of the 1940s to 1970s, and on the deindustrialization in the 1980s and 1990s (Solimano, 1998; De Mattos, 2015 [2004]; Gorelik, 2005; Pradilla Cobos, 2018).

It seemed also relevant to investigate the relationship between the factory legacy and the territorial contexts, searching to understand the effects of the industrial remnants' presence in everyday urban life. We seek reference in authors of critical geography and ethnographic anthropology who emphasize local and global interactions, continuous urban dynamics, and multiple territorial logics, practices and forms. In this field, Doreen Massey's propositions about how to approximate to space are our main reference, which evaluate their relation through recent changes with a "progressive politics also to be imagined." (2005, p. 10). The space is understood as a product of interactions, "from the immensity of the global to the infinitely small", and it is possible to claim equality by proposing "a relational understanding of the world and a politics that responds to it". From this perspective, we emphasize the role of the State<sup>4</sup> and organizations that eventually integrate and immerse new spaces of social life (Fontes, 2018, p. 221), and of different groups

of population, comprising the most vulnerable ones, that have the capacity of leading more radical changes (Santos, 2000).

Doreen Massey also understands space as "the sphere of possibility, of the existence of multiplicity in the contemporary sense of plurality", "with the broad recognition of the coexistence of others, with their own trajectories and their own stories", and in the context of "in permanent construction", opening to unimaginable futures (2005, p. 9). To understand the multiplicity of suburban contexts, we refer to the articulation of hegemonic logics with "new circuits, contestations and territorial claims" in the peripheral urbanization in São Paulo described by Teresa Caldeira (2016), and "the intense contiguity of disparate and provisional forms, functions, and ways of doing" in territories experienced by the 'majority of the population' (Simone, 2018). We emphasize the "multiple layers of time, institutions, and interests, and to capture traces of the daily practices of local actors" (Escobar, 2008, p. 25), the need to integrate local points of view (Liernur, 2010) and share relevance of space and time (Simone, 2022).

With the thoughts presented by the authors mentioned above, the investigation on industrial remnants proposes to have a comprehensive, multiscale, timely and collaborative<sup>5</sup> approach. The material we present in this article includes preliminary results and partial reflections of an ongoing

research based in literature review, cartographic analyses and interviews with qualified informants already conducted. These latter are initial initiatives to incorporate suburban points of view and detect signs of changes in the dynamics of capital and culture and on everyday praxis, allowing us to trace some considerations on the opportunities brought in the reconversion of industrial remnants.

## Suburban industrialization and deindustrialization

In the 1970s, seminal works in the field of history and economics provided explanations about external and internal factors, characteristics and consequences of Latin America industrialization (Cano, 1990 [1978]; Luz, 1978). This industrialization was identified as 'late' because its processes occurred many decades or even a century after in relation to central countries. It was also identified as industrialization of 'import substitution' for being stimulated by the economic and political crises in the first decades of the twentieth century in these countries. From 1970s on, the debate intensified, especially in the field of economics and geography (Mello, 1991 [1982]; Mendonça, 1990), to explain not only the processes of industrialization, but also those of deindustrialization (Solimano, 1998; Pradilla Cobos, 2018).

Latin American industrialization as a 'social construction' was fortified from a hegemonic and Eurocentric vision sustained by a double understanding: First, the thought that Latin America corresponds to a "new

continent, without history", an "empty land" resistant to any kind of intervention (Gorelik, 2005, p. 113). Second, the idea of the need to propose innovative and centralizing solutions, powerful if thought as a unique territory (Ribeiro, 2000). In this context, some of the largest Latin American cities were prioritized for industrial investments as they had better infrastructure, availability of labour, and proximity to more efficient internal market. In Brazil, since the 1930s, industrial investments were concentrated in only two urban centres: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, resulting in a growing disparity in national territorial urbanization (Santos, 1993).

In this ideological framework, at the urban scale, the national developmental policy based on industrialization had a strong impact on the railway suburbs of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In spatial and territorial terms, the results were heavy governmental interventions in suburban areas in the 1940s associated to the establishment of numerous and large industries. In the suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, the contrast between the land occupied by the large industrial plants and the small grain of the ordinary urban fabric, shows the effects of this policy. They are also present in the increase of the territorial fragmentation that already occurred since the mid-nineteenth century due the crossing of railways. The enlargement of streets, the opening of new highways and the construction of viaducts associated with the industrialization policy<sup>6</sup> increased the fragmentation in the railway suburbs. Some of them also had an intense change in their landscape by landfills that altered the relationship of proximity with hydric recourses.

The municipality intervened in the territorial organization and spatial configuration in the suburbs through its urban instruments. In the 1930s, urban zoning became the essential mechanism to control territorial planning. Principles of efficiency and technique were introduced, replacing previous legal precepts of land use planning (Maricato, 2000). In 1937, industries were already treated in the urban zoning of Rio de Janeiro,<sup>7</sup> which established as their location the suburbs of the North Zone of the city (Albernaz and Diógenes, 2023). The large demarcated industrial zone encompassed a considerable part of the suburban railway area, only excluding territories more densely occupied by residences near train stations and extending it to areas close to the edge of Guanabara Bay, in which the State was already planning to open a new urban highway, the Avenida Brasil.<sup>8</sup> Until the 1970s, the delimitation of the industrial zone in the railway suburbs would be increased, reinforcing the industrial and working-class neighbourhood character of this part of Rio de Janeiro.

Especially from the mid-twentieth century to 1970s, industrialization attracted to the suburbs a large contingent of migrants from rural areas where living conditions were very precarious mainly for the absence of public policies. The population growth rate between 1920 and 1970 in the entire territory of Rio de Janeiro reached 43%, being significantly higher in its railway suburbs where the manufacturing establishments were concentrated, 190%.<sup>9</sup> The population of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, which in 1950 was just over two million

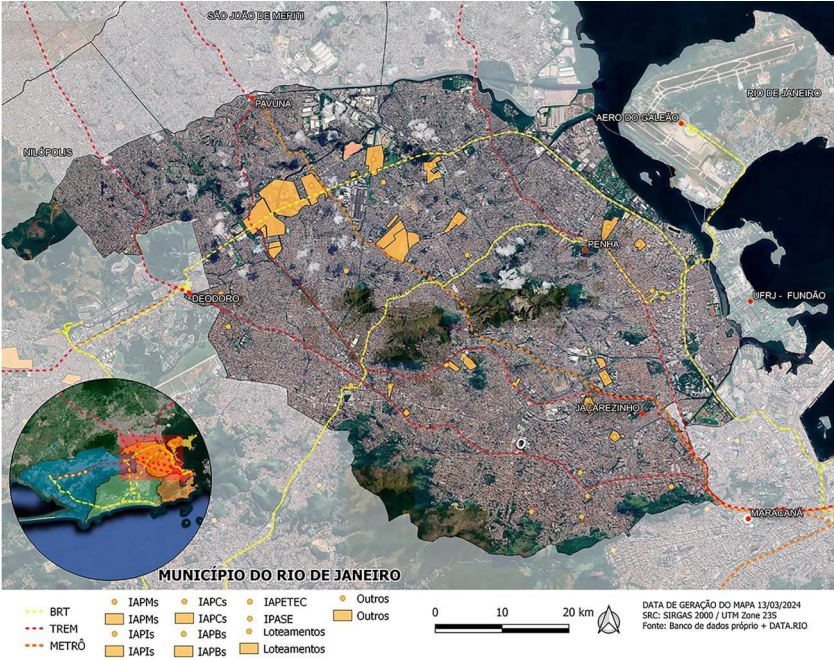
inhabitants, in 1970, in Rio exceeded four million inhabitants and, in São Paulo, it reached six million.<sup>10</sup> In 1949, São Paulo already had about 30% of Brazilian industries and employed about 40% of Brazilian industrial workers. About five million migrants who arrived in São Paulo between 1950 and 1960 were attracted by the industries.

in terms of the socio-spatial effects of industrialization, the role of the State in providing the basic items of urban life is worth noting. In the central countries, either due to capitalism demands to expand consumption of the mass-produced goods from industry, or the growing pressure from syndicates, State provided housing, health and education for the working class (Botelho, 2001). In Latin America, distinctly, the State understood its responsibility to the emerging industry to invest directly in infrastructure. There was a lack of commitment in the public policies in providing the labour class with the basic living items.

Although the insufficiency of housing policies by the State attending the growing railway suburban population, since the 1940s there have been distinct public initiatives that changed the suburban landscape. Over decades, alongside the housing stock occupied in suburbs by families seeking a quieter life before the establishment of industries, a diversity of buildings emerged from different housing policies. An example of this multiplicity are the housing complexes built by pension institutes during the 1940s in the railway suburbs in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 – Current map of housing complexes built by pension institutes (IAPs) during the 1940s in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro – 2004

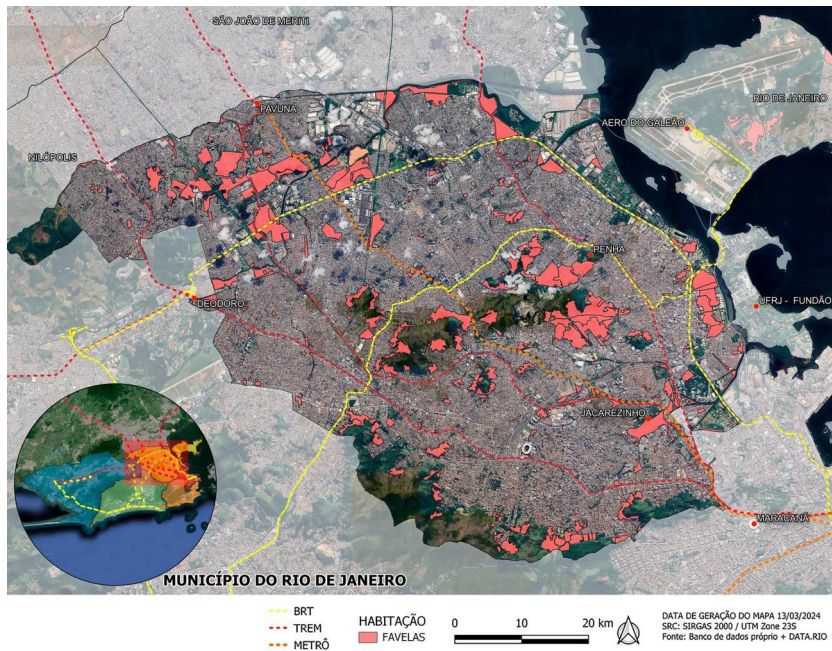


Source: image generated by the author with 2004 map by [www.data.rio](http://www.data.rio).

The difficulty to have dwelling access for local populations led to an increase of housing units in informal settlements self-built since the beginning of industrialization. They also drove to new informal occupations in lands devaluated by the real market. The railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro were occupied by numerous favelas that even today continue to grow and constitute huge informal settlements (Silva, 2005), as shown in

Figure 3. One of the most emblematic examples of this phenomenon of irregular occupation resulting from suburban industrialization is the populous Complexo do Jacaré. Once it was the residence of a large part of the workers of the former General Electric lamp factory, home to many representatives of labour syndicates constituted during period of industrialization (Silva, 2008).

Figure 3 – Current map of favelas in the railway suburbs in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro



Source: image generated by the author with 2004 map by [www.data.rio](http://www.data.rio).

After the late 1970s, Latin American national economic policies increasingly moved towards opening to foreign markets, reducing the role of the State in the economy and deregulating the private sector activities (Solimano, 1998). In the suburbs, gradually and continuously there was a decrease of jobs in the industrial establishments, starting a process of deindustrialization.

On a global scale, the oil crisis in the 1970s was pointed out as one of the main factors behind the imbalances in the

industrial production. The emergence of new technologies and mechanisms of network integration compressing space-time (Harvey, 1992 [1989]), and favouring the global acceleration, besides the dissemination of neoliberal ideology as a new regulatory regime, are as well indicated as relevant components in the dissolution of the prevailing industrial sector. To these aspects, we must add the growing financialization resulting mainly from the hegemony of US dollarization.



From then on, Latin American deindustrialization only tended to increase due to external and internal economic difficulties as the oil crises, and the progressive financialization of the economy. At the national level, the uncontrolled inflation, external indebtedness and the replacement of labour by equipment brought by new mechanical, electronic and communication technologies, were main problems for the industrial sector. In the early 1960s, In Rio de Janeiro, the supply of factory jobs was particularly affected by the transfer of the country's capital to Brasília.

In the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, the decline of the industrial sector increased in the period from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Many factories situated in the railway suburbs were closed or had their productive activities restricted, leading to environmental and urban impacts near the industrial lots<sup>11</sup> and financial difficulties for their population and a great urban. During the period of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), the persecution of syndicates' leaders led to a continuous demobilization of the workers' movements. Despite these adversities, many housing complexes were built in the suburbs financed by the National Housing Bank (BNH) created during the military dictatorship, changing the landscape of the suburbs.

The BNH residential complexes built between the 1970s and the end of the 1980s, first were integrated to public policies aiming to provide housing for low-income population. However, as they were constructed in partnership with the real state, they ended up being directed to supply housing for families

who afford to pay the prices of the formal market. So, it was not an option for the most vulnerable layers of the population, whose alternative remained to live in the favelas. In this period as in subsequent ones, there was a growing increase in the occupation of these settlements in the suburbs, accompanied by a growth in the diversity of housing types, favouring the contemporary multiplicity "of forms, functions, and ways of doing" (Simone, 2022, p. 4) in the railway suburbs.

Many factories were converted to other uses, such as gated residential buildings, shopping malls and hypermarkets, associated with the hegemonic logic. Some were also converted in spaces for religious purposes, informal housing, shops and workshops, contributing to the expansion of *favelas* in suburban areas. Recently, a few industrial remnants were occupied for activities linked with militias for paramilitaries purposes that simulate combat situations or training.

In a very recent empirical reading, from the period between 1995 and 2018, in addition to the diffusion of the Brazilian industrial sector to contexts of medium or small agglomerations, related to agroindustry, it is verified a persistent concentration of factories in the pioneer big metropolitan cities where industrial sector was once stimulated (Silva, Severian and Monteiro Neto, 2021). However, the expansion of industries only took place in the outskirts of the metropolis, confirming the industrial emptiness, the weakening of industrial jobs and the need for resignification of the railway suburban territories of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro.

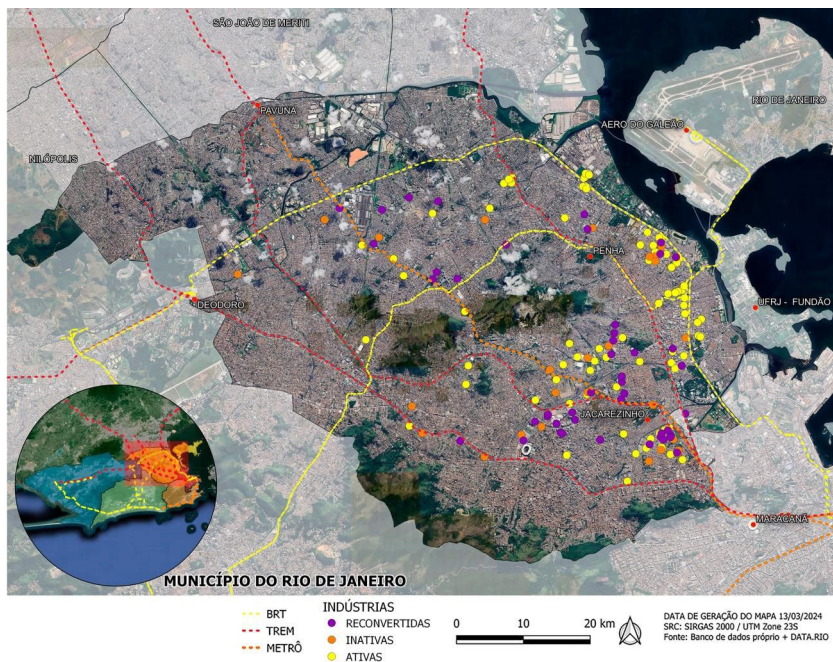
## Industrial legacy in the suburban contexts

As we saw in the previous section, what the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro are today entirely links to the project outlined by development policies. Adrian Gorelik (2005) comments on the destiny of other Latin American metropolitan territories outlined with the same intensity by the incursions of urban planning. Among what remained of the incomplete implementation

of the government's ambitious industrialization program, there is today a legacy in the suburbs that brings a trail of new problems, but also of new opportunities. They are verified in the numerous industrial remnants categorized into active, reconverted and inactive industries (see Figure 4).

What remained of the industrial sector in the suburban railway region of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro is influenced by the heavy intervention of the State at the national level, including landfills of mangrove areas and the opening of highways. Almost

Figure 4 – Current map of industrial remnants' categories in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro – 2004

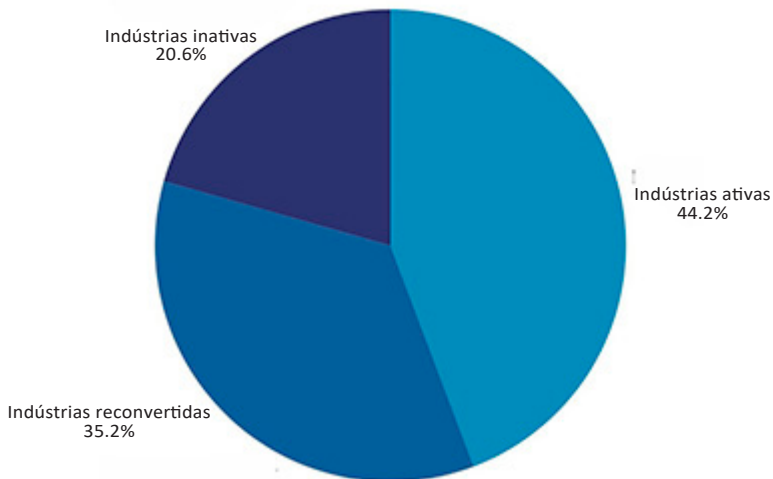


Source: image generated by the author with 2004 map by [www.data.rio](http://www.data.rio).

45% of the totality of industrial remnants (in absolute number) situated in that region, are today active (see Figure 5). Most of them were inaugurated in the high period of the developmental policy between the 1940s and 1970s. They are concentrated in the neighborhoods of Bonsucesso and Ramos, located close to heavy public interventions: Manguinhos landfills and Avenida Brasil, Rio de Janeiro's largest highway.

Besides Bonsucesso and Ramos, indicated above, the neighbourhood of Jacaré, which was a pioneer industrial location in the suburbs, is one of the few territories with a great number of functioning factories in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. It is noteworthy that most of the Jacaré neighbourhood has been demarcated as an industrial zone since the beginning of zoning in 1937.<sup>12</sup> Over time, areas that became more attractive to the real estate market were

Figure 5 – Chart of active, converted and inactive industries in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro



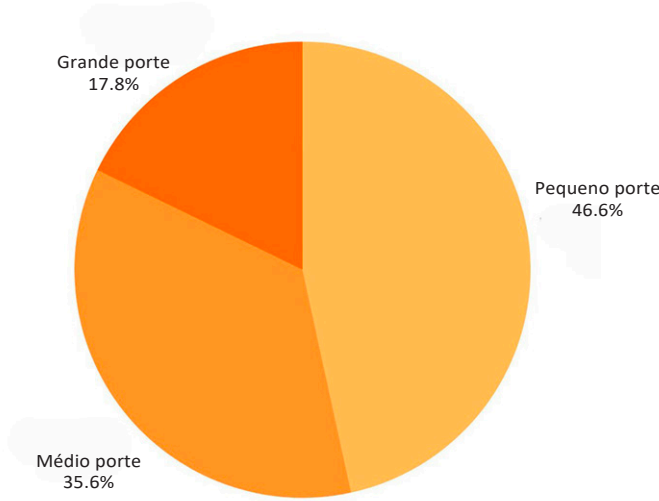
Source: author's 2024 research database.

released from the delimitation as an industrial zone. Large factories account for less than 20 per cent of active industries<sup>13</sup> (see Figure 6). This is certainly due to the greater difficulty they face in adapting to the new rules of the consumer market. The nature of production in medium and small factories is varied. In general, they have been set up more recently.

Of the 55 per cent of industrial sites that are no longer active, approximately 35 per cent have been converted to other uses. Analysing these converted industrial remnants shows

us the coexistence of very different logics of urban production and transformation (Caldeira, 2016). It indicates the presence of local and global interactions (Massey, 2005) that make the suburbs the mosaic of disparate forms, functions, and ways of doing and living (Simone, 2022). It is a complex and dynamic coexistence in which at one extreme there are patterns of spatial organization and typology, produced by the logic of the real estate market, and at the other, the most varied values permeate the patterns of occupation.

Figure 6 – Chart of the size of the active industries in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro

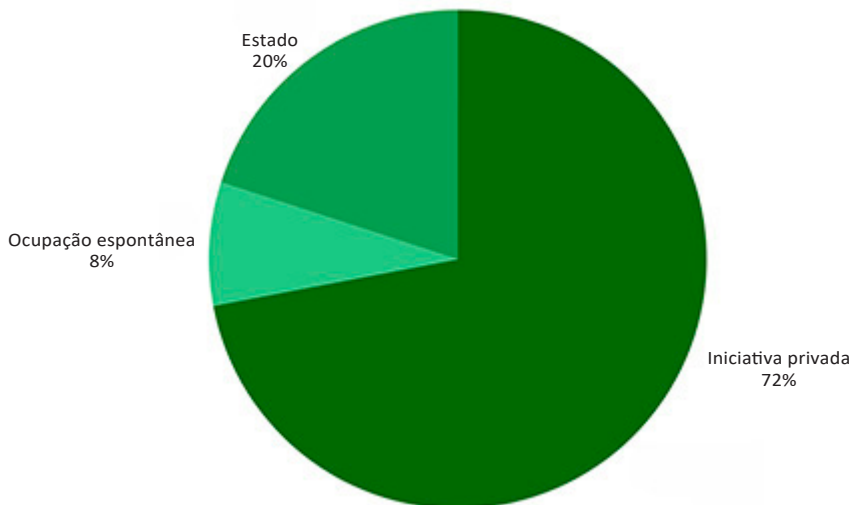


Source: author's 2024 research database.

Most of the converted remnants had their uses modified by the private sector - in absolute numbers almost 75 per cent. During the 2010s, many of them – approximately 40 per cent of the converted industries – had their uses changed by the real estate market (see Figures 7 and 8). The pioneer initiatives were the change of industrial remnants into huge shopping centres, maintaining the original land division and usually its main structure. The three shopping centres established in different

railway suburbs in Rio's North Zone modified everyday consumption and leisure practices in the whole suburban region. They introduced new values characteristic of the global sphere, and also led to a significant increase in the land value in the nearby urban tissue. This increase in value was due both to the presence of shopping centres and to government improvements to urban infrastructure, generally in terms of accessibility, indicating the adoption of some public policy aimed at the suburbs.

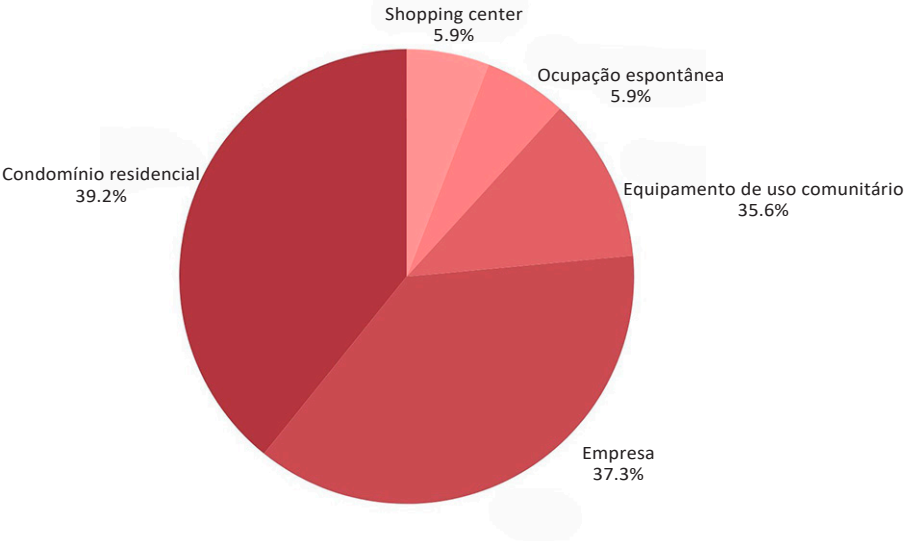
Figure 7 – Chart of the Agents Producers of Converted Industries in the Railway Suburbs of North Zone of Rio de Janeiro



Source: author's 2024 research database.



Figure 8 – Chart of New Uses in Converted Industries of the Railway Suburbs in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro



Source: author's 2024 research database.

These initiatives are followed in time by the conversion of industrial remnants into residential gated communities, often located around one of the converted shopping centres or elsewhere in the same neighbourhoods. Their main characteristics are the occupation of former industrial plants of enormous size - usually more than 15,000 square metres, rising to more than 85,000 square metres - and their implementation being linked to the recent public housing programme *Minha Casa Minha Vida*.<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that this housing policy was aimed at low-income populations, the new residential condominiums in the

suburban railway region of Rio's North Zone, being located in areas with some infrastructure and, therefore, higher valued in the real estate market, ended up occupied by middle classes populations. This accentuated the already existing internal socio-spatial differentiation.

In contrast to the conversion of industrial remnants associated with the logic of business, changes in use occurred in the railway suburbs of the North Zone by communitarian collectives or groups, mainly for housing of vulnerable populations. It accounted about 10 per cent of the converted industries in absolute numbers that occupied abandoned factories of

different sizes, mixed with other informal uses. Sometimes they use the old factory structures, and sometimes they extend outside the boundaries of the factory grounds. In general, they are located in neighbourhoods that are quite different from those where prevail remnants converted by the formal market. They are in devalued contexts, where there are still active industries, and in areas close to *favela* complexes. Their environments are often considered unsafe and violent because of recent entry of crime and urban militarisation.

Among the converted industries, exceptional situations deserve to be mentioned for inclusive and innovative potentiality as urban planning practices. One example is the converted industry occupied by former workers who, through negotiations with the former factory owners, received part of their property as payment for owed labour compensation. There is an example of government action exercising its role as Expanded State<sup>15</sup> when pressured from a community collective. The initiative resulted in the construction of housing buildings and partial land regularisation in a converted industry occupied irregularly. There is also the example of a former industry converted by a philanthropic institution in 2015 into a football field who managed the equipment from 2015 to 2020. It was then deactivated and in 2022 was reactivated by a local community group.

The work of the Expanded State answering to the pressures of subordinate groups is present in about 20 per cent of the total converted industries. Commonly, they are

large former factories next to *favelas* complex, such as *Complexo do Alemão*, for housing, educational, sports and leisure facilities, promoted in 2011 by the federal government's Growth Acceleration Programme (PAC). We should also mention the old wagon factory conversion in Del Castilhos neighbourhood, resulting in the construction of the Train Museum and a large open and public leisure area, previously enclosed by walls and private.

Finally, there are the inactive industries characterized by the lack of urban social function. They correspond in absolute number to about 20 per cent of the total industrial remnants. The lack of function in these industries can lead to environmental and urban problems, opening the contexts in which they are located to urban decay and crime. However, they have great potential in terms of opportunities for urban transformation, as they are large areas served with infrastructure, especially of transport, and they are capable to compensate local populations for prejudices caused by their presence.

Most of the inactive industries in the railway suburbs of North Zone of Rio occupied areas between 2,000 square metres and 4,000 square metres. These dimensions are sufficient to house a community facility or a housing estate. However, there are two inactive industrial remnants the size of two large blocks, and five others half that size.

Despite being scattered in various suburbs, the inactive factories are concentrated in neighbourhoods less attractive for the real estate market and close to slums, providing

an opportunity to fill social and landscape gaps. These are areas inhabited by socio-economically vulnerable groups that need to increase their social and urban completeness. Also to be considered the absence of survey on taxes and labour debts of many of these empty factories, whose payment could be a lever for their reoccupation.

## Final considerations

As we verified, in suburbs of some of Latin America's largest cities, the legacy of developmental government policies is marked in urban form, landscape and their territories' daily life. The choice for a pioneering establishment of the industrial sector in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro has a social, environmental and urban impact to this day. The presence of old industries shows an expansion in the heterogeneity of forms, functions and ways of life, particularly associated with housing. The diversity is also in the different uses and social practices in public and private spaces, and in how different groups and individuals act.

The heterogeneity of ways of living and consuming in the railway suburbs is also an expressive result of the ongoing deindustrialization, especially referred to the conversion of old factories for new uses, whether by the private sector or by local populations. In addition to increase social differentiation in the suburbs, these changes brought an intensification of complexity in territorial relations due to the distinctiveness in the relationship with external flows and

interconnections by different social groups and individuals, related to the "geometry of power in the compression of the space-time" (Massey, 2000 [1991], p. 179).

The conversion of industrial remnants in the railway suburbs of the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro into shopping centres, residential gated condominiums and leisure spaces associated with global values are considered by the representatives of local collectives a weakening of mobility and control of former residents on their territories. There was an increase in the value of urban land and local consumption products in its surroundings, the impediment to viewing the hills due to the buildings' verticalization and a worsening of security with the closure of blocks by walls or closed gables. Local businesses were weakened, and competition in favor of investments increased.

In contrast, the industrial reconversion produced by the private sector was also mentioned in local residents testimonies as an offer of alternatives that provided the suburbs with new experiences, that is, "it includes an awareness of their connections with the wider world" (2000 [1991], p. 184), despite recognizing that they correspond to the interests of hegemonic groups. To be considered how the presence of different entities can constitute a force that shapes capabilities and how apparent differences can operate as guarantors of convergence (Escobar, 2018).

A distinct collection of ethical views and technical instruments does not necessarily constitute barriers. It can be configured as porous limits that intersect and end up bringing new capabilities and establishing the means to access a broader world. In

this scenario, the singular, the exceptional contrast, as well as the suburban social capital nourished by the concentration of labour in former manufacturing establishments and by worker organization practices (Silva, 2008). These specific attributes leads us to imagine a perspective of social action based on the capacity for local organization and collective intervention, capable of being taken to the 'rugosidade' ('roughness) conceived by Milton Santos (1980). It is also expressed in the actions of numerous suburban collective movements that have been working to deconstruct the derogatory and stereotypical image of a unique and ahistorical suburban feature, and to make other urban dynamics visible.

The actions of the public administration, which are based on a generic treatment of the northern part of the city despite the diversity that is currently taking place in the suburbs, are noteworthy. This treatment is reflected in urban policies aimed at increasing urban indices for building associated to investments in infrastructure, stimulating the real estate

market. By increasing the value of urban land, both have immense power in renewing suburban space. The presence of industrial remnants, especially inactive ones, offers opportunities for the State to focus on housing production, encouraging cooperative work, education, culture and leisure, in opposition to this neoliberal urbanism. The geographical, geometric and urban characteristics of inactive industries in particular, including their relationship to the territorial context, should be taken into account.

To conclude, it is worth remembering Ermínia Maricato's statement about one condition applied to the legacy of suburban industrialization:

[...] the absence of public control over land ownership contributes to housing shortage, territorial segregation, increased cost of infrastructure and services, increased violence, environmental predation, as well as imposing greater sacrifice on the poor population excluded from the city. (Maricato, 2019 [2015], p. 96)

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## Notes

- (1) The term '[...] urban majority' was first adopted by Simone and Rao in a 2012 article (page 316), and was later referenced in a 2022 article by Simone et al., explaining what the urban majority composition could be "[...] corresponding to the intertwining of poor, working-, and lower middle-class residents, the term referred less to specific identities than to a mathematics of combination
- (2) The discussions during the revision of the Master Plan of the city of Rio de Janeiro that occurred in public hearings and debates lead by the Commission of the Câmara de Vereadores do Rio de Janeiro (Rio's Council) in 2022 and 2023 are relevant examples.
- (3) The bibliography on the industrial legacy usually addresses problems related to heritage, focusing on examples of extraordinary industrial architecture.
- (4) Identified with the "Extended Capitalist State" as conceived by Gramsci (2020 [1929-1930]).
- (5) By complementing and updating data and information expected to be obtained through local actors' collaboration on an online digital platform, available from May 2024.
- (6) A huge investment in highways aiming to connect industrial centres to the internal market of all the country was part of the national developmental policy.
- (7) It was regulated by a municipal regulation numbered 6000/1937 known as the first Building Code of Rio de Janeiro.
- (8) The Avenida Brasil (Brazil Avenue) was inaugurated in 1946 and even today is the largest urban highway of Rio de Janeiro.
- (9) 1920-1970 Census (IBGE).
- (10) 1950-1970 Census (IBGE).
- (11) In the first decade of the 2000s, there was a decrease of approximately 15 per cent in the number of industrial establishments in Rio de Janeiro. Meanwhile, there was a reduction of almost 40 per cent in jobs in the industrial sector (PIA - Annual Industrial Research - IBGE).
- (12) For more information on the history of industrial zoning in Rio de Janeiro and its implications for the railway suburbs, see Albernaz and Diógenes (2023).
- (13) Built on lots of more than a thousand square metres
- (14) Minha Casa Minha Vida programme was created in 2009 by the federal government and implemented by municipal governments.
- (15) Occasionally they are used temporarily as car parks or for unstable and intermittent activities.



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