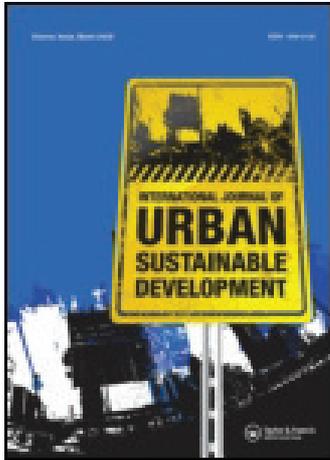


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The legacy of inequality and negligence in Brazil's unfinished urban transition: lessons for other developing regions

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The legacy of inequality and negligence in Brazil's unfinished urban transition: lessons for other developing regions

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Compared to other developing countries in Asia and Africa, Brazil experienced an early urban transition. Cities, especially large ones, already concentrate most of the country's population and economic activity. However, an underlying structure of inequality persists in urban areas, reflecting a historical reluctance to accept urban growth or to steer markets and planned developments towards meeting the housing needs of the poor. This continues to hinder the day-to-day functioning of the cities and the expansion of their economies. Recent attempts to overcome this legacy with democratic and participatory processes have encountered difficulties, but have achieved some notable successes. Both past negative experiences and recent policy efforts in Brazil are useful in re-orienting urban growth in other countries that have just begun their urban transition.

Keywords: Brazil; urbanization; demographics; urban transition; social inequality; urban planning

1. Introduction: the lessons from an early urban transition

This article describes the social and demographic trajectory of Brazil's urban transition. Demographically and economically, Brazil's urban transition is almost complete; 84% of its population live in urban areas and 43% of those live in metropolitan areas of over 1 million. More than 90% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is produced in a large and diversified urban system. Yet, Brazil's cities and their inhabitants still face stiff economic, social and environmental challenges, reflecting two interrelated factors: a historically rooted and enduring structure of social inequality and a historic failure to foresee, accept and plan for massive urban growth.

Inequality came over on the boats with the highly stratified social system of the Portuguese colonizers. It was fortified by huge land grants that

spawned a feudal landholding system, as well as by the adoption of slavery. Over the centuries, it has been reproduced through the social structures and cultural patterns underlying the various colonial, imperial, republican, military and democratic regimes. Only recently has inequality shown signs of abating.

Solidly entrenched in the Brazilian makeup, an enduring framework of inequality created an elite whose power resided in land and other resources and who failed to grasp the significance and inevitability of urban growth processes, or to respond constructively. Pervasive social inequality and the failure to accommodate the massive and inevitable urban growth fostered the spread of severe shelter poverty and social disorganization, as well as the fiscal inadequacy and environmental degradation that mark so many of today's cities. These problems make it difficult for the country

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to take advantage of its early urban transition and to exploit the full potential of urbanization for development.

The history of Brazilian urban growth is intertwined with its major economic, social, political and demographic transformations, especially in the last century. Policy-makers have actively engaged with the urbanization process, with some success. But, as they have never really come to terms with the scale of the urban population growth, other national and class interests have been allowed to dominate the policies shaping urban development, both directly and indirectly.

Brazil's historical urban transition has lessons for the present, both for Brazil and for many other parts of the world. Brazil still faces significant growth, especially on the periphery of large cities, and some old problems persist. Many other countries, especially Asia and Africa, are currently in earlier stages of their urban transitions. Most of these countries are also failing to come to terms with the scale of their urban growth and are facing similar consequences.

Latin America's recent transition provides a more meaningful comparator than that of developed countries. Just as the demographic transition (wherein mortality and then fertility rates declined) in the 'developing world' has been faster and larger in scale than that in the 'developed world', so the urban transition is proceeding at a faster pace, on a greater scale and at lower levels of per capita income in developing countries than occurred in the already urbanized world (National Research Council 2003, chapters 3 and 4; Cohen 2004). The urban population of North America and Europe took two centuries, from 1750 to 1950, to increase from 15 to 423 million urbanites and from 10 to 52% urban; by contrast, the number of urban people in less-developed countries is expected to grow from 309 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2030, while the proportion urban increases from 18 to 56% (UNFPA 2007, p. 7).

The trajectory of urbanization in Brazil holds many parallels and lessons for other countries that are currently undergoing rapid urban growth. Reflections based on this narrative, including both

the account of failed policies of the past and the innovative but partly unproven policies of the present, should help policy-makers in countries facing similar challenges deal more successfully with their own urban transitions. The intention of this article is to provide the basis for such reflections with a broad-based case study of urban growth and urbanization within the trajectory of Brazil's overall development pathway.

The next section of this article reviews Brazil's urban growth trends, with a focus on the last 70 years. This is followed by an analysis of the implications for present-day social and environmental conditions. The final section of this article reviews Brazil's urban development policies, including some recent policies that are generating considerable international interest. The article concludes that Brazil would have done much better to accommodate urban growth and to address its inequalities earlier. It also concludes that addressing urban inequalities through democratic and participatory processes is difficult and context-dependent, but does matter.

2. The stages of Brazil's urban transition

From an international vantage point, the most striking feature of urbanization in Brazil, along with several other Latin American countries, is its early and rapid urban transition, in comparison to most other developing countries. By 1950, Brazil already had a level of urbanization (36%), comparable to that which would only be attained in the year 2000 by Africa (36%) and Asia (37%) (United Nations Population Division 2012). At present, Brazil has a larger share of its total population living in towns and cities than most European countries.

A generous definition of 'urban' areas in Brazil might be said to exaggerate its level of urbanization. Indeed, the administrative seat of any municipality is officially considered as 'urban' in Brazil, regardless of size. However, this is not consequential since the proportion of the official urban population living in small towns is small and decreasing.

A large majority of Brazilian urbanites live in a big city, and many in huge cities. As of 2010, 63% of urban inhabitants lived in a city of at least 100,000 people, and 43% lived in a metro region of 1 million or more. The country's urban transition is real and substantial.

2.1. Rapid urban growth, 1930–1980

In the first few centuries of Brazil's history, its politics, economics and settlements were outward-oriented. The dispersed and changing riches that the interior regions yielded for exploitation by the Portuguese colonizers, together with defence concerns and the dominance of the landowning classes, led to the creation of disconnected cities, scattered along the coastline and containing a very small share of the country's population. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the abolition of slavery, the active promotion of immigration from Europe, the modernization of productive processes and the emergence of new relations of production in a vastly successful coffee cycle in the state of São Paulo helped to create a new growth pole which would set the stage for a rapid urban transition.

The economic crisis of the 1930s and the consequent debt crisis triggered a switch to import-substituting industrialization. Despite political discontinuities, the import substitution model was reinforced throughout the entire 1930–1980 period and led to profound social, economic, political and demographic transformations. Decreases in mortality yielded a surge in population growth and displacement. Migrations flowed preferentially towards more dynamic regions, and the Southeast – including São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro – showed the fastest growth. But changes affected the entire multi-nucleated system left from colonial days. The upshot was the rapid transformation of a rural/agricultural nation into an urban/industrial one. However, this extraordinarily rapid transformation left profound scars on Brazilian urban society, many of which could have been avoided had a different approach to urban growth been adopted.

Although data on urban formation in earlier periods are sketchy, there was clearly a considerable urban growth between the first two censuses of 1872 and 1940. The vigorous industrialization process after 1940 provoked an increased demand for labour that promoted further migration and urban growth. An estimated 3 million migrants, equivalent to 10% of the 1940 rural population, moved to towns and cities during the 1940–1950 period. The number of cities having at least 20,000 inhabitants rose from 53 to 82. The level of urbanization rose to 36% in 1950.

The factors underlying urban growth were reinforced in the post-war period. Continuing mortality declines, in the face of constant high fertility, led to new highs in demographic growth rates; these hovered just below 3.0% annually from 1950 to 1965. High rates of natural increase caused an upsurge in the Brazilian population, from 33 million in 1930 to 70 million in 1960. The rural population had higher fertility rates, generating more potential migrants to the cities. The agrarian structure inherited from colonial times involved a strong concentration at both extremes of the land tenure scale, in latifundios and minifundios, both of which were conducive to out-migration under a regime of high natural population growth.

Meanwhile, Brazil was re-structuring its economy, modernizing communications and transport and improving its infrastructure. Central planning was strengthened and used to promote import-substituting industrialization. National automobile production was prioritized, and a massive road building programme was initiated. Rural–urban differentials in wages and lifestyles amplified the attraction of the cities, resulting in the migration of some 7 million people to towns and cities in the 1950s – equivalent to 21% of the rural population at the beginning of the decade. Meanwhile, the number of cities having at least 20,000 inhabitants rose from 82 to 147, and the level of urbanization rose from 36% to 45%.

Table 1 presents the summary information on changes in the level of urbanization and in rates of urban and rural growth for the 1940–2010 period. Using the official definition of 'urban', this

Table 1. Percentage of total population living in urban areas, and annual growth rates of the urban, rural and total population: Brazil, 1940–2010.

| | Urban at start of period (%) | Rate of population growth | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | | Urban | Rural | Total |
| 1940–1950 | 31.2 | 3.9 | 1.6 | 2.4 |
| 1950–1960 | 36.2 | 5.2 | 1.6 | 3.0 |
| 1960–1970 | 44.7 | 4.7 | 0.6 | 2.9 |
| 1970–1980 | 55.9 | 4.2 | –0.6 | 2.5 |
| 1980–1991 | 67.6 | 2.6 | –0.7 | 1.9 |
| 1991–2000 | 75.6 | 2.5 | –1.3 | 1.6 |
| 2000–2010 | 81.1 | 1.6 | –0.7 | 1.2 |
| 2010 | 84.4 | – | – | – |

Source: IBGE, Demographic Censuses.

table shows striking urban growth throughout the 1930–1980 period, and, especially, in the 1950 and 1960 decades.

Along with spectacular improvements in transportation, a mood of arrogant optimism favoured the integration of previously isolated regions during the military regime (1964–1985). Geopolitical considerations also stimulated the occupation of open spaces, including attempts to colonize the Amazon region – where most of the new population actually ended up concentrated in urban areas, despite the agricultural pretensions of the settlement schemes. The communication sector also saw dramatic improvements and the far corners of this vast country were linked by telecommunications, bringing the bright lights of the bigger cities into the imagery of less-developed regions, further motivating potential migrants.

Such pull factors were reinforced by rural push factors. The introduction of Green Revolution technologies to modernize agricultural production was supported by subsidized credit. However, the logic of bank loans implied possession of a legal deed to the land and inevitably privileged larger commitments. Larger farmers were guaranteed financial gains through such loans. This stimulated land purchases and land takeovers, not only for the mechanization of production, but also for purely speculative purposes. These measures did

modernize agricultural production and had a positive impact on industrial production, partly through the increased demand for agricultural machinery and chemicals. But, small farmers – squatters, sharecroppers, tenants and small owners – who made up the large majority of agricultural producers, received only a small share of the subsidized credit and were pushed off the land in droves.

In short, Brazil telescoped three processes, each of which had taken much longer in Europe and North America, in the span of a few years: a mechanical revolution, a chemical revolution and a demographic revolution. The country had very little by way of agricultural machinery prior to 1960, but the creation of an industrial base combined with subsidized credit for its purchase rapidly changed that deficit. The same is true for the introduction of Green Revolution's chemical package of fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides. Either one of these two revolutions would have, by itself, generated considerable out-migration; but the combination of both the mechanical and chemical transformations at a time of intensified population growth yielded massive out-migration, rapid urbanization and rapid urban growth.

Estimates of rural–urban migration show a rapid progression in the size of such flows throughout the 1940–1980 period: from 3 million in the 1940s, to 7 million in the 1950s, 14 million in the 1960s and 17 million in the 1970s. One characteristic of these migration flows that became accentuated throughout the period was the higher rate of female out-migration from rural areas, especially among younger age groups. This process resulted in a 'masculinization' of rural areas. As of 2010, urban areas had 93 men per 100 women, while rural areas had 111.

A defining characteristic of Brazilian urbanization during the 1930–1980 period was the rapid growth of cities of all sizes, and the emergence of even larger cities at the top end. The number of localities having 20,000 or more inhabitants increased at a steady pace from 53 in 1940 to 867 in 2010. Settlements having less than 100,000 inhabitants have systematically made up around 80% or more of the total number of cities throughout

the entire period under analysis, but their share of the total population has fluctuated around 20–22%. At the other extreme, larger cities have made up a small segment of all cities, but their share of the total urban population has grown. As of 2010, 15 metro areas having at least 1 million inhabitants accounted for 53% of the population found in localities of 20,000 or more inhabitants.

From a policy standpoint, a key fact is that government opposition to urbanization increased over the period. A variety of explicit measures, from roadblocks and fiscal measures to colonization programmes and integrated migration policies, were attempted to retard or prevent urban growth. The swell of migrants arriving in the cities generated increasing hostility by officials within the cities, without any evident impact on the overall rate of urbanization. As described in more detail in later sections, this hostility not only supported official policies of exclusion, but also an anti-poor urban policy environment, making it difficult for migrants to secure not only land and housing but also environmental services, suitable laws and protection through the rule of law.

2.2. Deceleration of the pace of urban concentration after 1980

The trend towards ever-increasing numbers of additional urban dwellers and increasingly large cities was so firmly entrenched in the Brazilian landscape after a half-century dominated by these processes that the results of the 1991 Census – which showed a large decline in urban growth rates during the 1980s, especially in the largest cities – took the country by surprise.

However, as shown in Table 1, a remarkable drop-off in rates of urban growth and concentration did occur at around this time. The reduction was particularly significant from the 1970 to 1980 decade but persisted in the following decades. True, the increase in the number of cities as well as in absolute numbers of urbanites on the periphery of many larger cities, as will be shown below, has continued to be impressive. But the frenetic pace of urbanization and concentration which had

characterized the previous five decades clearly declined from the 1980s onwards.

The three main factors accounting for the abrupt reductions in urban growth rates were rapid fertility decline, the impacts of the profound economic crisis that began in the late 1970s and the broader secular process of de-concentration of economic activity from the dominant pole of São Paulo.

2.2.1. Fertility decline and the components of urban growth

As shown in Table 1, urban growth rates were greatest when natural increase was at its highest in the 1950s and 1960s and dropped even more rapidly than the overall population growth as the latter declined. In recent decades, the trajectory of urban growth rates shows a convergence with those of the total population.

Brazil has experienced a remarkable fertility decline over the last 45 years. Its total fertility rate (TFR) fell from a high level of 6.3 in the mid-1960s to a below-replacement level of 1.8 in 2010. Without benefit of a widespread family planning programme, Brazil's trajectory to below-replacement level fertility in Brazil surpasses that of several countries that have had aggressive family planning programmes. Implicit rather than explicit policies are deemed to have had the largest impact on this spectacular decline (Martine 1996). The reduction occurred during a period of far-reaching social change that covered both periods of rapid economic growth, as well as of economic and political crises. Institutional changes in the areas of health and security, as well as of communications, served to catalyse other key influences. Rapid urbanization itself was a major factor that accelerated many other traditional determinants by reducing the incentives for large families and increasing disincentives to unlimited reproduction (Martine *et al.* forthcoming).

The rapid fertility decline affected urban growth in two ways. First, although fertility rates remained higher in rural areas, they eventually did decline significantly in all regions and parts of the

country; this helped to reduce the stock of potential rural–urban migrants. Second, the decline was responsible for reducing rates of natural increase in urban areas – not only of the native population, but also of the migrants, whose influence is significant because of their higher patterns of fertility and their disproportionate number in reproductive age groups. It is estimated that rural–urban migration figured as the primary source of urban growth during the 1950–1980 period, with its contribution slightly above 55% in all three decades. However, this has declined considerably since, with natural increase in the urban areas themselves now accounting for over two-thirds of urban growth, despite the natural increase having declined considerably.

2.2.2. *The lost decade and its sequel: economic crisis and urban growth*

Brazil experienced extraordinary economic growth during the 1968–1974 period. The abundant flow of cheap international capital prompted the military government to borrow heavily in order to improve the country's infrastructure and to integrate its farthest regions. However, the steep hike in international interest rates after the second oil shock, at the end of the 1970s, undermined Brazil's economy. Industrial expansion was curtailed, financial speculation became rife, inflation soared and Brazil was plunged into a lengthy recession. Over the 1980s, Gross National Product (GNP) growth averaged 1.5% per annum – lower than the average annual population growth. The decade was marked by unemployment and poverty. During the 1983–1993 period, the country changed its currency five times and repeatedly substituted finance ministers, who promoted nine different economic stabilization programmes. This succession of negative trends and futile stopgap measures earned the 1980s the name 'The Lost Decade'. The larger metropolises, more dynamic in previous years, were the most affected (Januzzi 2001, pp. 18–27). This economic downturn coincided with, and speeded up, industrial de-concentration from São Paulo, as discussed in section 2.2.3 below.

The crisis, which lasted well into the 1990s, transformed the structure of social and

geographical mobility. The constriction of employment opportunities in the larger and traditionally more dynamic cities had an impact on the preferential direction of migration flows. Smaller cities began to drain off some of the migratory movements that previously had been focused on the nine largest urban agglomerations or metropolitan regions (MRs) (Targino and Figueiredo 2001). Significant return migration flows from the Southeast were also registered. Alternatively, the 1980s witnessed new and important movements of people out of Brazil and these continued to intensify, especially to North America, Japan and Europe, until the recent global crisis.

2.2.3. *De-concentration from the São Paulo growth pole*

The economic ascendancy of São Paulo state and of its capital had been clearly reflected in demographic concentration during the 1940–1970 period. In that era, the state of São Paulo had a faster urban growth than the rest of the country and its cities accounted for exactly half of the country's increase in urban population. The MR of São Paulo, in turn, accounted for more than two-thirds of the state's urban growth in that period, despite the relatively developed urban network that the state had already established. At the peak of regional concentration in 1970, the state of São Paulo, with only 2.9% of the national territory and 19% of its population, accounted for 39% of the country's GNP and 58% of its industrial production – 78% of which was concentrated in its MR (Diniz 2002b, p. 248).

Although unperceived at the time, a gradual process of industrial de-concentration from the São Paulo MR had begun in the late 1960s and was intensified in the 1970s. São Paulo's relative contribution to the country's GNP fell for the first time between 1970 and 1980. This was not reflected in population figures, and the state of São Paulo increased its share of national urban growth to 56%, with 55% of that growth being concentrated in the MR of São Paulo. However, the relative economic decline continued, and between 1970 and 2000, the MR of São Paulo saw its share of national

industrial production fall from 43% to 25% (Diniz 2002b, p. 256).

In retrospect, such changes can be attributed to a combination of geopolitical and economic factors. The expansion of the economic frontier towards the Centre-West and Northern regions began in earnest during the 1970s. Geopolitical reasons had prompted the military government to offer subsidies aimed at occupying and integrating different regions by creating and protecting industrial zones in them. Entrepreneurs took advantage of these incentives to establish subsidiary plants in different parts of the country (Diniz 2002a, 2002b). Substantial industrialization of hinterland cities was facilitated by investments in inter-city transport and telecommunications (Feler and Henderson 2008, p. 3). Increasing dis-economies, reflected in growing infrastructure and administrative problems in Sao Paulo, may also have been involved in some of the entrepreneurial decisions to move out. The growing power of labour unions in São Paulo's industrial district and, later, the impositions of environmental controls probably contributed to making other sites more appealing (Martine and Diniz 1997). As a result of the ensuing changes, the perimeter of the dominant pole was extended, but its mechanisms of administration and control actually increased (Lencioni 2008). A significant part of this extension occurred to regions within the State of São Paulo: cities such as Campinas, Sorocaba, São José dos Campos and Santos suddenly made huge economic and demographic steps (Diniz 2002a, 2002b).

The demographic implications of these changes were only perceived when the 1991 Census results were published. In effect, the demographic relocation lagged behind the economic relocation, and the policy response lagged even further behind. Just as there was surprise at the especially rapid population growth of Sao Paulo in response to its economic success, there was surprise that this growth moderated following the success of other urban centres.

This twofold lag in the policy response to spatial changes in economic concentration almost certainly imposed burdens, not only on economic enterprises but also on the low-income people

competing for employment away from newly emerging growth centres. At least in principle, it should be possible to achieve more equitable growth by bringing the policy shifts more in line with the demographic shifts, and the demographic shifts more in line with the economic shifts. In practice, the different patterns of urban growth tend to be ignored until after their consequences are being felt.

2.3. Recent patterns of urban growth and concentration

Analyses of the Census data for the 2000–2010 period suggest both the persistence of urban growth trends that had been observed since the 1980s as well as some changing patterns. First, as shown in Table 1, the rate of growth in urban areas continues to decline, accompanying the decreased rhythm of the total population. Second, the flow of rural–urban migration continues to decrease – from 9.5 million in the 1990s to an estimated 6.0 million in the 2000–2010 period. Third, the locus of urban growth has shifted somewhat from the Southeast towards other regions, especially the more recently occupied Northern and Centre-West regions: This reflects the declining share of industrial value added in the Southeast region (from 81% in 1970 to 62% in 2005), as well as the expansion of the country's economic frontier. Fourth, as shown in Table 2, despite decreasing rates of urban growth,

Table 2. Changes in the number of cities and in the share of urban population by city-size category, 2000–2010, for Brazilian cities of 20,000+ inhabitants.

| Size of cities | Number of cities | | Urban population (%) | |
|----------------|------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| | 2000 | 2010 | 2000 | 2010 |
| 20–50 | 437 | 542 | 11.8 | 12.7 |
| 50–100 | 171 | 171 | 10.7 | 9.2 |
| 100–500 | 102 | 125 | 18.7 | 17.8 |
| 500–1000 | 6 | 14 | 3.8 | 7.2 |
| 1000+ | 15 | 15 | 55 | 53.1 |
| Total | 731 | 867 | 100 | 100 |

Source: IBGE, Demographic Censuses.

the number of cities (i.e. localities of 20,000 or more inhabitants) continues to grow (from 731 in 2000 to 867 in 2010).

The relative share of middle-sized and metropolitan cities in urban growth processes has come under considerable scrutiny in Brazil during the recent decades. It is generally argued that middle-sized cities are growing in importance, particularly in recent frontier regions (Motta and Ajara 2001; Motta and da Mata 2009). At the national level, however, this is not borne out by the data in Table 2, which portrays the share of the urban population in different size categories and, if anything, highlights growth in cities of 500,000 or more people.

The surge of new metropolises accounts for the continued pre-eminence of larger cities. The original nine MRs had been defined by public decree during the military dictatorship in 1967. The 1988 Constitution gave individual states the right to create and define their own 'MRs' on the assumption that this would create a more propitious financial and administrative framework for urban decision-makers. Considerable heterogeneity resulted as 29 additional MRs were created, based on widely diverse economic and geographical criteria as well as population size. In order to focus only on the role of undisputable larger metropolis, our analysis considers as MRs those that congregated at least a million people in 2000. These include the nine original MRs (Belem, Fortaleza, Recife, Salvador, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Curitiba and Porto Alegre) plus six recent MRs (Brasilia, Manaus, Goiania, Campinas, Vitoria and Santos).¹

Altogether, these 15 MRs congregate 69.4 million people, equivalent to 36% of the country's total population, and 53% of its population in urban localities of 20,000 or more inhabitants. They are responsible for half of the country's GNP and 54% of its industrial production. During the 2000–2010 period, they experienced a total increase of 7.7 million people or 36.5% of the total increase in the country's population.

A marked pattern of metropolitan growth is its 'peripherization'. As shown in Table 3, the central cities of these larger metropolis are growing at a reduced pace in comparison to their peripheral areas. This should not be confused with a process akin to the suburbanization that has occurred in North America. In Brazil, the 'suburbs' are called peripheral areas, a reference both to their geographic location as well as to the social condition of their residents who, with the exception of a few gated communities and other enclaves, are generally composed of low-income residents. Since the 1970s, the core municipality of each MR – which had generally been responsible for much of the city's key economic activity and housed the majority of its more affluent population – has been growing at a diminished pace. Meanwhile, the peripheries or suburbs of the MRs have grown at a rapid pace as poorer people, both migrants and natives, have flocked to outlying districts in search of cheaper housing. This trend was intensified during the last decade.

Given the social characteristics of these peripheral areas, they have been dubbed 'urban frontiers' (Torres 2004). These regions continue to receive migrants and to grow at high rates because they

Table 3. Population increase in core and peripheral municipalities of original and recent MRs, 2000–2010.

| Class of MR | Absolute increase, 2000–2010 | | | Rate of growth, 2000–2010 | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | Core | Periphery | Total | Core | Periphery | Total |
| 9 Original MRs | 2,402,687 | 3,012,470 | 5,415,157 | 0.81 | 1.28 | 1.02 |
| 6 Recent MRs | 1,279,803 | 1,294,084 | 2,573,887 | 1.89 | 2.19 | 2.03 |
| Total 15 MRs | 3,682,490 | 4,306,554 | 7,989,044 | 1.01 | 1.46 | 1.21 |

Source: IBGE, Demographic Censuses.

represent an escape valve for the poor; as could be expected, these are the areas that struggle with precarious infrastructure, shelter poverty, tenure insecurity, inferior services, transport issues, environmental conflicts and violence (Torres 2008). An income gap of 56%, on an average, between core and peripheral municipalities in the nine original MRs sums up the discrepancy between conditions in the two areas as well as the kinds of social challenges which still have to be met (Torres 2002, p. 150). The importance of these differentials in the rates of growth and in household incomes between nuclear and peripheral municipalities is hard to overstate.

3. The social, environmental and economic penalties of urban exclusion

A salient feature of urbanization in Brazil – as in most other developing countries – has been the massive growth of unplanned and ‘informal’ neighbourhoods housing the poorest urban dwellers in inadequate conditions. Low-income people constitute the largest social segment in urban growth processes, and as land prices rise in response to this growth, are also the most likely to be displaced, with limited compensation. Despite the size and vulnerability of this contingent, they have historically had to fend for themselves in tough housing markets, or in extremely insecure and marginal sites. The majority of poor people, whether migrants or natives to urban areas, ultimately find their way into the labour force and contribute to the economic growth of the city, but rarely end up in decent housing. Chronic and expanding ‘housing shortages’ are endemic to urban growth processes, leading to the multiplication of inadequate makeshift dwellings in inappropriate places and to the ubiquitous favelas. Larger cities, because they attract more people and because land is particularly valuable there, have a disproportionate share of favelas: according to the 2010 Census, 89% of favelas were in the 20 largest cities and three MRs – São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belem – had 44% of all favelas in the country (Observatório das Metrópoles 2012).

The spread and persistence of Brazil’s favelas is consistent with a society’s tolerance of inequality (Ferreira 2011), which takes not only the form of income inequality and unequal access to formal employment, but also of unequal access to water, sanitation and the rule of law. While both policy-makers and the public media decry the social, environmental and aesthetic problems associated with the growth of favelas, very little has ever been done to accommodate their residents in more suitable locations, allowing them to pursue their livelihoods more efficiently and improve their living conditions. More often, ideological and political opposition to urban growth has reinforced the obstacles the lower-income majority face getting adequate housing.

A major part of this conundrum stems from the manner in which the growing value of land, under the combined influences of rapid urban growth and speculation, is appropriated within the dominant power structure. Faoro’s classic analysis of the relation between the concentration of economic and political power at the service of the acquisition of greater patrimonial holdings in Brazilian society reveals how private interests have taken over the actions of the public sector in cities (Faoro 2001). Land, especially urban and peri-urban land, is a prime commodity in patrimonial power and the object of intense speculative practices within public/private collusions. In the context of this struggle for land among the rich and powerful, there is no planning ahead for the land needs of the politically weak and economically disadvantaged. Moreover, employers benefit from having a cheap labour force that fends for itself in terms of housing and infrastructure and does not rely on public subsidies. Several Brazilian authors have discussed the functionality of both auto-construction in housing and of cheap labour in the depreciation of labour force costs during the process of industrialization (cf. Maricato 2006; Martins 2011).

At the same time, infrastructure investments, governed by the interests of a public sector commandeered by private interests and the real estate market have been concentrated in middle- and upper-class residential areas. Thus, the majority

of investments in residential construction in São Paulo are located in areas where population is decreasing (Torres *et al.* 2007). Another striking indicator of the prevalence of speculative activities is the high number of unoccupied dwellings in the central sections of many large cities. According to the 2010 Census, 6.1 million dwellings were unoccupied throughout the country; this is a larger number than the official figure on the national housing shortage. Another 3.9 million dwellings were used occasionally: Together, the unused and occasionally used dwellings amount to 15% of the total number of existing dwellings in the country. This increases land and housing prices in the formal sector, putting more pressure on the informal housing system.

Maricato (2006) observes that overlooking the needs of the largest social contingent results in the ‘gigantic illegality’ and duality that mark the urban land tenure system in Brazil. One part of the city is the object of abundant and detailed legislation, while another part is a legal no-man’s land, subject to irregular occupation and apportionment, as well as to the invasion of environmentally protected areas where poorer segments of the population struggle to find residential space. In the MR of São Paulo alone, some 2 million people reside in off-limits environmental protection areas and 110,000 residences are located in areas at risk (Bonduki 2011).

In most cases, it was only after slums had been in existence for several decades, and after politicians perceived advantages in ‘solving’ the problem of informal settlements, that concrete action has been taken. These actions have become less ruthless over time, as social movements, political participation and reduced growth rates have motivated politicians to look beyond the advantages of transforming these central eyesores into prime real estate by shunting favela residents out to the periphery. However, the many intermediate solutions aimed at improving informal settlements have never been pursued vigorously, enabling them to keep up with the demand for lower-income housing (Smolka and Larangeira 2008).

The idea that it might be cheaper, more effective and fairer to prepare for inevitable growth rather than to try to correct for deficiencies after the fact has almost never made political headway. An example from the City of Curitiba, generally considered to be a bastion of good social and environmental practices, reveals the futility of relying solely on *post hoc* approaches. There, a recent study identified 13,136 households on irregular sites, representing some 2.8% of the city’s total population.

To resettle all these families in new subdivisions with basic urban infrastructure and 27 m² houses would require an investment equivalent to almost twice Curitiba’s entire revenue from 2005 property taxes, that is, approximately US\$183 million. This same amount, if spent on new serviced land, would accommodate from 30,000 to 50,000 families on plots of 250 m². (Smolka and Larangeira 2008, p. 112)

More generally, the World Bank (2006, Vol. 1:52) estimates that ‘extending and upgrading a standard package of urban services to informal settlement costs three times the amount for low-end formal-sector development’.

Part of the problem is that, especially where poorer residents have little political voice, official standards and policies on service provision are designed more to exclude the poorest than to improve their living environments. Feler and Henderson (2008) argue that generally

discouraging entry into the most desirable cities involves formal sector housing restrictions – such as minimum lot size zoning, building height restrictions, and frontage requirements – which drive up the total cost of a house and make these locations prohibitively expensive for poorer in-migrants. (p. 2)

Their research found that, in addition to such restrictive measures, many municipalities in Brazil were intentionally and successfully withholding services, including water supplies, from certain types of homes to deter poor migrants. In effect,

the failure to take a proactive approach to the housing needs of the poor can reflect a more or less explicit effort to obstruct the settlement of poor people, especially migrants.

To make significant headway against this trend would require three initiatives that are difficult to implement in a society marked by inequality. First, the tyranny of high standards, such as those prohibiting the sale of small plots, would have to be avoided. Second, distorted urban land markets would have to be regulated efficiently, protecting vulnerable people from the abusive practices of rapacious developers. Third, in a related move, the public sector would need to take a proactive stance with respect to future land needs for the poor. Most cities have land in good locations that could be built up, but that is being held in speculation. Taxing increases in land values, resulting either from public investments or from the redefinition of land uses towards more profitable ones, could be used to make more land available (UNFPA 2007, p. 41).

As it stands now, irregular occupations have an unintended but important role in the land markets. Favelas often sprout up in distant peripheral areas and function as pioneer fronts in the urbanization of such areas, promoting an increase in land values. Later, expulsion of residents and other mechanisms of relocation push these people out to new frontier expansion fronts, reproducing their pioneer intervention, while the market appropriates the benefits left behind.

Unplanned and un-oriented rapid urban growth, wherein a substantial segment of new urbanites are forced to settle in inadequate areas, also creates environmental problems and fosters the degradation of local natural resources, such as land, water and vegetation. The precarious housing conditions which the urban poor have to endure accentuate environmental health problems, particularly in those settlements where basic services such as water and sanitation are not provided (Satterthwaite and McGranahan 2007, p. 27). Thus, inattention to the housing needs of poor residents lies at the root of many of urban Brazil's social and environmental problems.

Such social and environmental shortcomings reduce the functionality of a city. The spontaneous but sprawling haphazard settlement patterns that typify the invasion of urban lands by poor people make it physically more difficult to put basic infrastructure into place, including roads and pathways that would facilitate the free movement of residents. The sprinkling of such settlements in the internal margins of the city can create hurdles for the design of effective mass transportation and increases the costs of implementing it. Continually adjusted improvisations that ineffectually attempt to accommodate the increasing flow of people and vehicles through the narrow winding streets that bypass these sprawling settlements not only consumes economic resources, but contributes to energy waste and pollution.

In today's globalized world, generating a stable investment climate that stimulates private sector investment and business development is as important at the local as at the national level. 'Slums' are bad for business. The dwellers of informal settlements make important economic contributions, but inattention to their collective needs can trigger a series of effects that ultimately undermine the ability of a city to achieve economic and social development. For instance, they can undermine land markets, push up land prices and increase the difficulties of providing infrastructure and services (Smolka and Larangeira 2008). This affects the ability of the city to attract investments, to create jobs and to generate a better financial base for implementing improvements in the city. Remedial measures, as noted earlier, are much more difficult and expensive. Taking a proactive approach to inevitable urban growth – composed in large part by poor people – would increase the city's medium- and long-term perspectives while allowing its workers to benefit from what the city has to offer.

4. Urban policy and planning in Brazil

Despite our depiction, in previous sections, of Brazilian urbanization as a largely un-oriented and uncontrolled process, the country has a long and

varied history of attempted government intervention in spatial distribution, through urban policy in particular. Explicit Brazilian government efforts to intervene in population redistribution on a larger scale began in the 1930s. Regional and urban planning expanded under the military regime which took over the country in 1964. The stimulation of economic activity in outlying regions and the reduction of migratory movements to the main cities of the Southeast were primary objectives of such efforts. Despite such initiatives, migration to these large urban centres continued to increase, in both absolute and relative terms. Unable to stem the flow of urban-wards migration, the government turned its attention to 'organizing' urban growth.

The military regime (1964–1985), imbued with a high regard for technocratic planning, created agencies to deal with urban planning and lower-income housing. The regime intended to eradicate existing slums and curb the growth of new ones by constructing large numbers of standardized dwellings for the poor on the outskirts of cities. It promoted the formulation of municipal master plans (MPs) that would address a wide range of social, economic, physical and institutional aspects of urban areas across the country. In these enterprises, the voices of the poor were seldom heard (Moreira 1989, p. 2; Villaça 1999; Ferreira 2007, p. 57). Moreover, the lack of affinity between the technical teams and the politicians often ended up making these plans irrelevant.

Improving conditions in larger metropolitan areas remained a major problem and a National Commission for Metropolitan Areas and Urban Policy was created in 1974 within the then powerful Ministry of Planning. Results were again limited and compromised by the interests of dominant interest groups. The attempt to strengthen medium-sized urban nuclei in order to reduce both the proliferation of small cities and the expansion of Southeastern metropolitan cities was short-lived and ineffectual. An even more ambitious attempt to control population distribution was made by an inter-ministerial task force which, between 1973 and 1979, worked on the design of a comprehensive internal migration policy for the

country. However, proposed solutions ignored the importance of 'implicit' policies on population distribution: the decisions that affect the transfer or allocation of resources and that impact on the spatial allocation of economic activities and, therefore, on job opportunities and migration.

The creation of an inter-ministerial council for urban development in 1979 also failed to generate significant momentum for re-organizing urban growth. Moving away from top-down approaches, the discussions of the period increasingly called for greater social participation. In 1985, when the military stepped down and a democratic government was elected, the urban policy agency was again reformulated, incorporating the objective of greater participation. Two articles in Brazil's new Constitution of 1988 focused on the key issues of the social function of urban land, and on squatters' rights, have had considerable impact, as has the injunction that such rights be enacted through MPs at the municipal level (Souza 2001, p. 2).

Since then, urban policy has become a centrepiece in the country's efforts to make democracy a working reality and to combat entrenched social inequalities. Such efforts have led to bold innovative practices that created great expectations and have been replicated in other countries. The core of the new democratic approach to urban planning in Brazil is the 2001 'Estatuto da Cidade' or City Statute (Cities Alliance and Ministry of Cities, Brazil 2010).

The implementation of the City Statute presupposed a combination of socially oriented regulation and democratic management. Popular participation in urban planning would be achieved when civil society organizations and private initiatives took part in debates, public hearings, conferences, popular amendments and participatory budgeting.

Popular participation gained increasing support from emerging agendas on both sides of the political spectrum. On the right, neoliberal influences were actively dismantling the corporatist authoritarian state while ushering in the 'miracle of the markets'; within this model, free speech and democratic participation would circumvent the need for State intervention. Meanwhile, the centre-left

was focusing on the re-invention of democracy in Brazil, also defending local government and a participatory ethos in decision-making. Each of these forces promoted and legitimized their own brand of citizen involvement in public decisions while accepting the other's right to participate and to promote participation (Caldeira 2007).

This confluence of interests did not, however, resolve the political issues involved in engaging very diverse groups in urban affairs. Moreover, the allocation of authority and resources among federal, state and municipal entities was often blurred and the institutional framework for urban policy was unclear. The creation of the Ministry of Cities by the Workers' Party that took office in 2003 helped to give form and direction to urban policy and planning (Maricato 2007), but did not reconcile all of the contradictions.

Both before and even after the Statute of the City, problems emerged in the course of efforts to implement MPs with a high level of participation. A first problem stemmed from the fact that historically rooted inequality, low levels of political participation, high levels of illiteracy and a succession of populist and authoritarian governments were not a propitious context for participatory planning. Villaça (2005) concluded that MPs were ineffective because of the 'violent inequalities in economic and political power' that characterized the debates about urban policy and management. More generally, when popular participation was mandated into the formulation of MPs, the existing imbalances between the political and financial clout of different social sectors naturally wove their way into the negotiations (Souza 2001). Discussions were ostensibly carried out in 'town hall' types of meetings, but other fora, linked to the media and the judiciary, tended to be much more decisive.

Another problem was that MPs were confused in the minds of some participants with zoning efforts, which typically involve the preservation of the rich minority's interests (Villaça 2005, pp. 45–48), while others had the notion that they would provide a forum in which to address a plethora of traditional and comprehensive social problems, including education, health,

security, employment and other issues well beyond the mandate or capacity of the MPs or indeed of local action. Indeed, problems, such as sorting out land issues, dealing with sprawl and peri-urbanization, guaranteeing access to a permanent source of water, dealing with wastes and, more broadly, attracting investments that will generate employment and social welfare are all questions that require a regional approach, particularly in large urban agglomerations.

Both Caldeira (2007) and Villaça (2005) describe these processes and problems in some detail with respect to the design of the MP in the municipality of Sao Paulo. Evidently, only a very minute proportion of the 10 million people in this municipality could be heard or even represented in public debates. Moreover, since the overall objectives of the discussion were couched in terms of general principles (reducing urban sprawl and socio-spatial inequality) rather than in those of the concrete issues that interested local neighbourhoods, it was difficult to maintain popular interest at a high pitch.

Three well-defined interest groups surfaced. In the end, all three were successful in their respective quests, with the unanticipated result that inequality was formally recognized: the less affluent areas of the city now have formally accepted lower land-use standards. From an optimistic perspective, this recognition acknowledged reality, and created a better basis for addressing these inequalities over the long term. From a pessimistic perspective, it entrenched these inequalities and made them more difficult to overcome (Caldeira 2007, p. 3).

Despite such limitations in the application of The Statute of the City, considerable social progress has been made through attempts at planning and managing cities through the popular participation it supports. The Statute of the City in Sao Paulo, for instance, has generated considerable debate on social justice and on the plight of the urban poor in the country's most powerful city. For the first time, the rich and powerful found themselves obliged to defend their interests explicitly in public debates rather than behind closed

doors. Low-income citizens obtained legal rights to the land they occupy within the centre of the city, preventing their unceremonious expulsion at the whim of future urban managers, as had happened in the past. They received public support, not only for their housing and infrastructure needs, but also to ensure that their other wants and needs would be heard through political representation. Areas devoted to low-income housing have become 'Special Zones of Social Interest' (ZEIS) and are protected from real estate speculation. Ten years after its enactment, the City Statute still generates controversy (Fernandes 2010, p. 68).

Efforts to address the housing deficit also continue to face serious problems. The *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My Home, My Life) programme was instituted in 2009 by the Federal Government with the object of providing 2 million dwellings to lower-income sectors. Administered by the Ministry of Cities, the programme stimulates partnerships between federal, state and local governments as well as with social movements and the private sector. Although the programme is running on schedule, it has come under criticism (Observatorio das Metrópoles 2011). It is alleged that new housing is being offered in peripheral areas that are unconnected to existing transport or employment opportunities and often lack basic services. These locational problems are linked to the perennial problem of land. It is alleged that the programme actually intensifies land speculation, since more the government funds are invested, the greater the increases in land values (and no mechanism has been put in place to ensure that this increase in value goes to the target population or is recouped by the public sector). In short, even the democratic government of the Workers' Party may find it difficult to overcome the accumulated vicissitudes of a social structure that has never prioritized the needs of the largest social contingent in urban growth.

Another manifestation of the democratic approach to urban management that has received considerable international interest is 'participatory budgeting'. This refers to the direct participation of civil society in defining priorities for the allocation

of the municipal budget. This process was not legislated in the Constitution but arose out of more decentralized democratic processes. Nevertheless, this approach, originally attempted in two smaller cities of Brazil's southern region in the 1970s, at the height of the military dictatorship, has since been utilized in more than 200 cities in Brazil as well as in many other countries.

The most consistent experience with participatory budgeting is that which was initiated in the city of Porto Alegre by an elected mayor from the Workers' Party in 1989, and which has persisted for the better part of two decades. There, part of the municipal budget is put up for public negotiation between the municipal government, social movements and the citizenry, concerning the needs and priorities of the population in 16 administrative sub-regions. A series of scheduled meetings are held every year in each sub-region, during which the mayor's office gives an account of expenditures, and the representatives of civil society offer their views on the identification of priorities for the coming year (Jacobi 1999; Souza 2001).

A World Bank-sponsored analysis of the Porto Alegre experience indicated that an impressive 20% of the municipality's population had participated in some way in these discussions. According to this study, the maintenance of such participatory mechanisms over a long period generates important redistributive impacts for the poorest segments of the population. On the downside, the report suggests that this process has had little benefit for improving fiscal performance (World Bank 2008).

It is clear from Brazil's experience that neither the formulation of socially guided MPs nor participatory budgeting processes constitute a panacea for urban problems. But this was even truer of traditional urban planning tools. The enactment of democratic procedures such as participatory MPs and participatory budgeting presupposes an organized civil society as well as an informed and interested citizenry. Such characteristics do not spring up overnight. It is no coincidence that the more effective participatory efforts witnessed so far have taken place in the Southern region of Brazil, where

literacy levels as well as political consciousness and mobilization have historically been higher.

Urban management in large and heterogeneous cities is complex under the best of circumstances and resists perfect solutions. What has been achieved, in at least some cities, has contributed to the formation of a more enlightened citizenry, to the reduction of clientelistic practices and to the provision of an effective voice for the poorer segments of the population. More can be done. Effectual democratic participation depends not only on mobilizing the population but also on improving the quality of the information publicly available. The fully mobilized and informed society may be a somewhat misleading mirage, but incremental improvements can make a substantial difference, and should provide the basis for further improvements.

5. Final considerations

Rapid urban growth is one of the most influential processes affecting social, economic, political and demographic trends in the twenty-first century. Economists rightly laud the successes of cities, and the importance of working with rather than against the urban transition (World Bank 2009; Glaeser 2011a, 2011b). It is also important, however, to learn from the experience of countries that have experienced an early urban transition like Brazil and respond more constructively to the social and environmental challenges of urban growth.

Up to the present, policy-makers have largely limited themselves to reacting to urban growth. Such an approach is grossly inadequate. Well-oriented and under conditions of proper governance, urbanization can be a significant boon for poverty reduction, population stabilization and environmental well-being. With pernicious politics, however, massive urban growth in impoverished and highly stratified countries can perpetuate avoidable poverty, stimulate enormous slum growth and result in costly ecological deterioration.

Although this article reveals that the trajectory of the urban transition is shaped by contexts,

conjunctures, cultures and complexities, the Brazilian experience offers important lessons that countries at an earlier stage of their urban transition can build on. Brazil's ambivalent and obstructionist approach to the urban transition has imposed considerable and preventable costs on its people. Severe and continuing challenges have resulted from the failure to address persistent inequalities and to take a proactive stance towards urban growth.

A similar inattentiveness to the needs of the poor majorities that are swelling the cities of the developing world can be observed in many Asian and African countries, where the scale of upcoming urban growth will inevitably multiply the needs and opportunities. The proportion of developing countries that have adopted policies aimed at retarding urban growth has soared from 44% in 1976 to 72% in 2009 (United Nations 2010, table 16). Such increasingly negative attitudes towards urbanization, especially in countries that are currently experiencing the fastest growth rates, misapprehend the challenges and opportunities of urban growth and, if they persist, will result in increasing poverty and environmental degradation.

Rather than attempting to prevent inevitable urban expansion, as Brazilian policy-makers have done, the leaders of the urbanizing world must embrace it and plan for it. Accepting that the poor have a right to the city is a critical first step; preparing ahead for the land and housing needs of the poor, within a constantly updated vision of the sustainable use of space is a necessary follow-up. The most effective way to achieve this is to provide land and services for the poor before the fact, rather than to apply remedial schemes that are much more costly to both poor city dwellers and the city itself (UNFPA 2007).

As concerns urban governance, the Brazilian situation provides both political and administrative lessons. Addressing inequalities through democratic and participatory processes is difficult and context-dependent (with this context including legal shifts), but can have a significant longer-term influence on the incorporation of poor people into the citizenry as well as relieving poverty.

Addressing inequalities in a 'planned' manner is important not only for disadvantaged groups but also for society as a whole. Addressing inequalities earlier while accommodating urban growth would have served Brazil, and its individual cities, much better than the discriminatory efforts to prevent the settlement of poor people, especially migrants.

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Note

1. Again this list is somewhat arbitrary and may differ from other existing lists. For instance, some would consider Santos and Campinas to be a continuation of the São Paulo MR.

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