

GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution
to Chapter 4: Commoning**
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways
to urban and territorial equality*

Cultural Occupations: Common

Spaces. A report on the Occupation

Bloc's construction within the Municipal

Secretariat of Culture in São Paulo

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Cultural Occupations: Common Spaces. A report on the Occupation Bloc's construction within the Municipal Secretariat of Culture in São Paulo

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CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS

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CHAPTER

4: Commoning

SUMMARY

The Occupations' Bloc (OB) is an articulation from São Paulo's Cultural Movement of the Peripheries, in Brazil. Currently, the OB articulates 29 Cultural Occupations, 27 of which are located in peripheral zones of the city and 2 in socially vulnerable areas in the centre.

Cultural Occupations are common spaces where collectives and people who are responsible for their horizontal management develop cultural actions with the participation of the local community. Such actions take place in properties – mostly public buildings and/or public land – that were idle before being occupied. Besides complying with its social function, the occupying act has transformed empty spaces into places of collective and emancipatory cultural production, points of reference in their territories and cultural circuits in the city.

Even though the Cultural Occupations have a fundamental role in the promotion of rights in the peripheries, activating networks and organizing totally free activities for the socially vulnerable population, they are constantly criminalized and threatened by the State itself. Moreover, the process of selling public assets, linked to a broader privatization policy, has also directly threatened the occupations. Those are the reasons why, besides the political action of occupying idle spaces and providing common experiences, the OB claims actions of recognition and support from the local government. Such demands happen mainly at a municipal scale, more specifically through the Municipal Secretary of Culture (MSC).

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Sao Paulo's Peripheries and Commoning Pathways

"We understand PERIPHERY as a geographically identifiable urban space, home to the Brazilian working classes, the Black population majority, urban Indigenous people, immigrants, whose cultural traits are intoned by the heterogeneity resulting from a multicultural encounter (not always peaceful) marked by social inequality. Periphery, not by chance, a feminine noun in which the current history of numerous women is inscribed. Museum without roof or walls, places of ancestral expressions, traditional and innovative experimentations, whose geography is territory, identity mark and also a space of economic exclusion, with excess of police and absence of public policies that seek to resolve the consequences of a historical process of social brutality, inequalities and unjust distribution of wealth."

**Peripheral Manifesto for the Law to Foment Peripheries,¹
March 16, 2015**

For the Culture Movement of the Peripheries (CMP), *periphery* is also a political term, a place of resistance. In São Paulo's peripheries we have seen, since the 1970s and 1980s, together with the Basic Ecclesial Communities, trade unions and social movements, the struggle of people – mainly women – for better living conditions. A good example was the emblematic struggle of women against the high cost of living in São Paulo's South Zone periphery. The urban territory production itself was based on the struggle for housing, basic sanitation, schools, day care centres, among other fundamental needs for social reproduction. **São Paulo has a historical inequality in the distribution of resources and cultural infrastructure in the territory.² In this context, peripheral cultural movements claim to exercise, among other rights, the right to culture, claiming for having spaces near their homes that provide access and exchange of experiences to the diversity of people that live in the city.**

In a country where citizenship has been historically *mutilated*, as conceptualised by professor Milton

Santos,³ peripheral cultural movements stand up daily against the hegemonic project managed by big companies together with the State. They refuse the violent place of suffering and propose to think and produce other ways of living the city: of circulating, socialising, sharing experiences, registering and transmitting memories, creating and disseminating codes and technologies, cultivating food, relating to nature and imagining other worlds – collectively.

In face of the economic, social, political and now, health crisis, peripheral collectives have been creating common projects, opening pathways for resistance practices. These pathways value the history and the ancestral cultures of both the native people – who also resist in urban peripheries – as well as the people of the African diasporas. People whose history is marked by centuries of colonization through exploitation and imposition of compulsory labour and violence. Drums, songs, dances and conversations, always in circular movements, among other cultural experiences, contribute to the strengthening and to the organisation of the peripheries in different struggles.

1. In Portuguese the word 'foment' has been used in public policies to nominate actions that promote and foster cultural circuits such as the 'Municipal Programme to Foment Dance' managed by the 'Coordination of Foments' of the Municipal Secretariat of Culture. See: <https://www.facebook.com/MovimentoCulturaldasPeriferias/posts/1619762388237216/>

2. The public consultation booklet of the Municipal Culture Plan, published in 2016 assumes that even after the implementation of important equipment such as the Culture Houses and the CEUS, the distribution remains quite unequal, being necessary, "besides the expansion of the network equipment, [...] to articulate the existing ones with the collectives and cultural agents existing in the territory" (SMC, 2016, pp. 30). Another fact that reinforces this territorial inequality is in the maps referring to the resources allocated by the MSC between 2013 and 2014 by the subprefectures. Available at: <http://www.culturatransparente.org/website/distribuicao-geografica/>.

3. The concept of mutilated citizenship was developed by Professor Milton Santos in the book "O Espaço do Cidadão" [The Citizen's Space], in 1988.

“The drum is our organisational principle. With it we sing and, attentive, we connect to the ‘Axé’, ‘gingamos’⁴ for the end of the genocide of poor, black and peripheral populations, because wherever we are, we are in struggle! We extend utopia as a founding element of our generation in this pandemic journey of hopelessness.”

Quilombaque 15 Years Manifesto, June 8, 2020⁵

Commoning pathways that lead to encounters in various places, making them stage for action and struggle, in which the mobilisation scenario is the peripheries and the pockets of exclusion in the city. *Peripheral subjects*,⁶ through their praxis, seek an effective transformation of the bases which sustain unequal realities. They act in resistance networks to confront the capitalist mode of reproducing life. As an encounter of converging points of view that diverge from the status quo, they induce the formation of new sociabilities rooted in the collective coexistence that produces commons. Culture, in its innumerable manifestations, is established as the founding pillar of this struggle. Due to its own character articulating sensitive

and cognitive expressions, culture is configured as a creation dimension of spaces of intersubjective transformations. Thus, taken by this power, collective subjects occupy abandoned spaces and transform them into places of access to new realities, transforming the vital and social content of their surroundings. At first occupations for land and housing and, more recently, for art and culture. **Occupying is a political strategy that has effectively contributed to reducing inequalities, while providing collective experiences that radically confront neoliberal rationality. This is how Cultural Occupations are born. The network of articulation of these spaces is called Cultural Occupations’ Bloc (OB).**

Cultural Occupations, Commons and Commoners

The Cultural Occupations’ Bloc is an articulation group from São Paulo’s Cultural Movement of the Peripheries. Currently, the OB articulates 29 Cultural Occupations, 27 of which are located in peripheral zones of the city and 2 in socially vulnerable areas in the centre.

Cultural Occupations are common spaces where collectives and people who are responsible for their horizontal management develop cultural actions with the participation of the local community. Such actions take place in properties – mostly public buildings and/or public land – that were idle before

being occupied. Besides complying with its social function,⁷ the occupying act has transformed empty spaces into places of collective and emancipatory cultural production, points of reference in their territories and cultural circuits in the city.

Cultural Occupations are a reaction of residents to government’s neglect in peripheral territories, which is also reflected in the marginalisation of the culture produced in the peripheries. Each occupation arose from the articulation and struggle of residents in their districts. Most of them are in territories that lack

4. Both words ‘axé’ and ‘ginga’ come from Black Culture’s manifestations. Among many meanings, ‘axé’ expresses a sacred force, an energy and ‘ginga’ a body movement.

5. Quilombaque is a cultural occupation in the northwest of São Paulo articulated by the OB. More about this occupation on: <https://time.com/5915902/brazil-racism-quilombos/>.

6. The concept of peripheral subjects is developed in Tiaraju Pablo D’Andrea’s doctoral thesis “The formation of peripheral subjects: culture and politics in the periphery of São Paulo” (2013). Available at <https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8132/tde-18062013-095304/pt-br.php>

7. The social function of property is a principle expressed in Subsection XXIII of Article 5 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988.

cultural, educational and leisure equipment. Districts where the State presents itself in a more consistent way through police violence.

Among the occupied spaces are public buildings managed by municipal departments, Subprefectures, or owned by public companies – such as COHAB [Metropolitan Housing Company of São Paulo]. They are properties that have already served for public use and were abandoned, or that were built without ever being used for public policies. Through theatre, music, visual arts, poetry, literature, dance, sports, and other educational and cultural actions, Cultural Occupations have given a new meaning to experiences in these places. They have become spaces for leisure and culture that collaborate for identity building, promotion and guarantee of popular and peripheral cultural production.

Cultural Occupations are built daily from the actions organised by collectives of artists, cultural producers and cultural activists, *peripheral subjects* who work on the basis of the 'Sevirologia'⁸ technology, as taught by the griot Soró,⁹ and the 'nóis por nóis' principle.¹⁰ These are the people that make every day practical things happen, such as opening and closing the spaces, cleaning, organising, as well as curating and planning actions and projects such as exhibitions, film screenings, dance and theatre performances, as well as activities characteristic of Paulo Freire's *popular education* field. Many occupations also cultivate community gardens in which they articulate other cultural actions and socio-environmental engagement. These collectivities are also responsible for welcoming people who attend the activities – people of different ages, genders, social classes and from historical-social contexts

marked by ethnic-racial differences. They participate in the activities as educators, learners, spectators, but also as space builders, once they identify with the worldview, utopias and projects for the space and for the city.

Each Cultural Occupation is linked to its territory of action, to the specificities of the place in which it is located and has its own history and characteristics. **Therefore, the OB is composed of a diverse range of cultural spaces, which are articulated together around common political claims and principles, such as: collectivity, horizontality, territoriality and autonomy.** Those principles bring new experiences of organisation and constitute subjectivities different from those marked by capitalist reproduction, guided by individualism and competitiveness. They are ways of understanding and acting in the world that express political action based on solidarity and co-responsibility.

8. 'Sevirologia' is a term that refers to the technology of acting and creating solutions with little or none resources. More on: <https://usinadevalores.org.br/arte-da-sevirologia-nos-territorios-de-conflitos/>.

9. José de Souza Queiroz (Soró) is recognized by cultural movements as a griot of the peripheries. He was a popular educator, activist and consultant in knowledge management and human development. "Soró faithfully believed in the power of culture as a mechanism of transformation, social education and as a powerful libertarian tool". He was one of those responsible for cultural occupations in the North and Northwest peripheral zones, an important mobilizer of the CMP. More on: <https://almapreta.com/sessao/cotidiano/envolvidos-na-militancia-perifericas-griots-das-periferias-contam-suas-experiencias>.

10. "Nóis por Nóis" is a popular term that refers to autonomous political action, carried out by the *peripheral subjects* themselves. It is carried through collective actions, especially through art and culture, as a way of existing, resisting and opposing capitalism, racism and all forms of oppression. It is also an expansion of citizenship in peripheral territories, an insurgent action that amplifies voices and narratives suppressed by liberal representative democracy and by capitalist sociability itself



Periphery Insurgencies: The city we want. Seminar organized by the Cultural Movement of the Peripheries at Sacolão das Artes cultural occupation, expropriated in 2018
Source: Cultural Movement of the Peripheries

Clashes with the local government

Even though the Cultural Occupations have a fundamental role in the promotion of rights in the peripheries, activating networks and organising totally free activities for socially vulnerable populations, they are constantly criminalised and threatened by the State itself – represented by government entities that hold the ownership or administrative right of the occupied spaces. Between 2017 and 2018, three Occupations of the OB were persecuted and expropriated from the collectives responsible for their management.¹¹ Moreover, the process of selling public assets, linked to a broader privatisation policy, has also directly threatened the Occupations. **Those are the reasons why, besides the political action of occupying idle spaces and providing common experiences to peripheral subjects, the OB claims actions of recognition and support from the government. Such demands happen mainly at the municipal scale, more specifically through the Municipal Secretary of Culture (MSC).**

In general, the government of São Paulo is structured as follows: the legislative power is represented by the City Council, composed of 55 elected councilors, and the executive power is exercised by the Mayor, assisted by the Municipal Secretaries and Sub-Mayors. São Paulo currently has 26 Municipal Secretariats and 32 Subprefectures that manage 96 districts.¹² Like Municipal Secretaries, Sub-mayors are appointed by the elected mayor, under the strong influence of councilors and other figures with political power in their territories, such as pastors of neo-Pentecostal churches, for example. The Subprefectures were created in 2002 and were an attempt of the Municipal Government to get closer to the city's population in a more local scale, since São Paulo has more

than 12 million inhabitants.¹³ However, this experience has proven not to be very effective, as it will be observed throughout the text.



The public administration is made up of political positions and public servants, the vast majority of them hired through public service entrance exams.¹⁴ The political positions are under the influence of the mandate interests, which can vary rapidly even within the same term (4 years). Between 2017 and 2020, for example, for political reasons, São Paulo changed mayor twice and its municipal secretary of culture three times.¹⁵ At each change, there are new distributions of positions and institutional arrangements that directly impact the construction and continuity of public policies.

In the context of public policies for culture, these constant changes and discontinuities directly affect the dialogue between the movements and the municipal government – and this impact is even greater at the local level, in the Subprefectures. As these are positions that are part of the negotiation between the Mayor and the City Council,

Open theatre in the CDC Vento Leste Cultural Occupation in 2010
Source: CDC Vento Leste

11. The Cultural Occupations evicted were 'Sacolão das Artes', 'Alma' and 'Casarão Vila Mara'.

12. The Subprefectures were established by law in 2002. Among their purposes and attributions is "To act as inducers of local development, implementing public policies based on regional vocations and the interests manifested by the population". Available at: https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/upload/lei_13_399_1254940922.pdf.

13. Source: IBGE. Available at: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/sp/sao-paulo/panorama>.

14. According to municipal official data São Paulo has 121.195 public servants, 94% of them hired through the public service entrance exam. Available at: <https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/governo/gestao/servidor/index.php?p=22498>.

15. In 2018 the elected mayor passed the post to the vice-mayor in order to run and win the elections for state governor. This practice of using the mayoral candidacy as a political strategy to project power is recurrent in the party that has been in power in São Paulo's state for more than 25 years.

there are no technical criteria for choosing Sub-Mayors, and they are often assigned to people who have no representation in the territory they will administer. It is quite common for the Sub-Mayors to not even live in the territories they administer, which generates constant clashes between organised movements of the territory and the local administration. The main issue is that local managers (sub-mayors and chief of staff) often see public equipment as tools to create or maintain positions, strengthen their political party capital and thus increase their influence in the neighbourhood to re-elect councillors whom they are linked to or to launch new names in the institutional political scenario.

In order to correct this administrative distortion, one of the main demands raised by cultural movements at the 3rd Municipal Conference of Culture (2013) was the transfer of the Culture Houses (municipal public cultural equipment), which were linked to Subprefectures, to the MSC.

That demand came from the understanding that the dialogue with the central administration would be more effective than with the Subprefecture administration. The demand for transferring the Culture houses to the MSC was met and proved to be quite correct, with the Culture Houses returning to play a significant role, even if still very limited, in the city's cultural fruition, as opposed to the previous situation, in which they were used as political currency by local managers and often were abandoned and working precariously. This precedent contributed to the OB's strategy to also privilege the dialogue with the MSC instead of leaving each space to dialogue separately with the Subprefecture's administration. For this reason, and to be recognised as cultural spaces, one of the main demands of the OB is to transfer the ownership of the occupied public spaces to the MSC's administration.



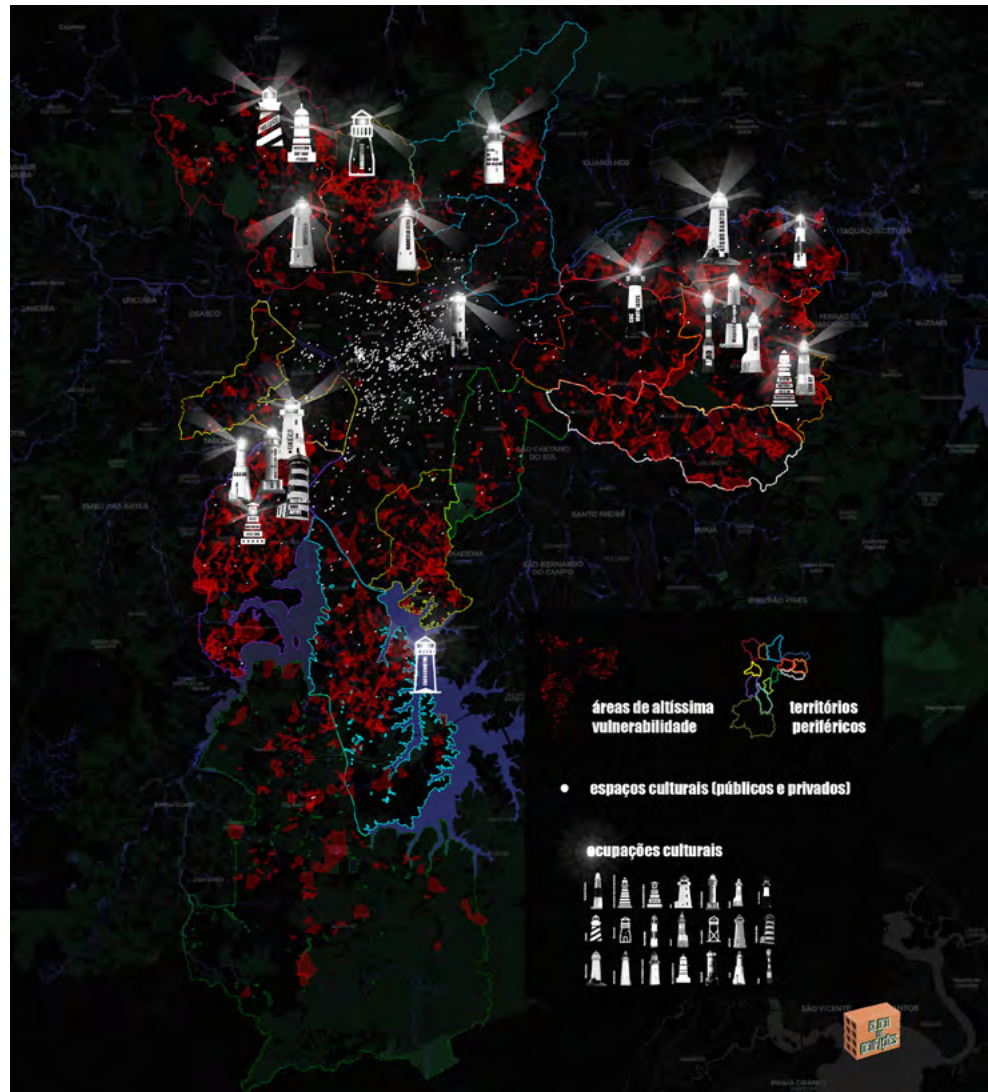
Mateus Santos Cultural Occupation, at Ermelino Matarazzo District, in 2019
Source: Movimento Cultural Ermelino Matarazzo

Nevertheless, transferring these spaces to the MSC neither guarantees safety to the Occupations nor that they will be immune to the political pressures of public managers. In 2017, for example, with the entry of a new Culture Secretary (which stayed from 2017 to 2018), cultural movements in the peripheries experienced episodes of authoritarianism and the dismantling of the already scarce cultural public policies. The episode experienced by the Occupation Cultural Mateus Santos, in Ermelino Matarazzo, in the East Zone, was a trigger for the cultural movements to decide to occupy the MSC building and ask for the resignation of the Secretary.

The episode involved a meeting between the Secretary and members of the Mateus Santos Occupation, in which the Secretary proposed a "partnership" with the Occupation, in which the activities developed by the collectivities would be considered official by the MSC. However, there would be none institutional support or financial transfer to the Occupation. In practice, the Occupation would be working for the MSC as a cultural equipment, but without any remuneration or guarantee. When the Occupation members denied the partnership proposal, the Secretary began to

verbally attack one of them and threatened him with physical aggression. “If I want to close the door and take you out of there, I can”, “legitimacy and nothing is the same thing” and “the mayor was elected, you weren’t” were discourses used by the Secretary evidencing the sense of ownership nurtured by some public managers. The meeting was being recorded and was widely publicised by the press and through social media.¹⁶

The common history of struggle and claims of the OB with the municipal government gained more expression in 2013, with the participation and elaboration of specific proposals for Cultural Occupations in the 3rd Municipal Culture Conference, with the 4th most voted proposal, which was to “Map and regularise idle public and private spaces to be occupied and revitalized by cultural groups, through the grantee of use, expropriation or relevant legal instrument.” In 2015, the OB developed the 1st Occupations’ Bloc Dossier presenting the situation of 12 occupations. In 2016, as a result of the OB’s active participation, Cultural Occupations were included in the Municipal Culture Plan¹⁷ and, in 2017, a specific item was created in the municipal budget for Cultural Occupations. However, the recognition in the Municipal Culture Plan and the specific allocation in the municipal budget were not sufficient to provide legal security and



to transfer public funds for Cultural Occupations. Any progress in this direction depended on the OB’s political pressure and the administration’s political interest in opening dialogue and institutional spaces for participation.

Cultural Occupations Map in São Paulo – elaborated by the Occupation’s Bloc and presented to the Municipal Cultural Secretary in 2019. The white dots are the cultural equipment in the city, in red the most vulnerable areas, where most of the population live, each lighthouse represents a cultural occupation.
Source: Occupation’s Bloc

Constructing from within the Municipal Culture Secretariat

In April 2019, after another change of the Secretary of Culture, the 2nd Cultural Occupations Dossier was presented to the Municipal Secretariat of Culture, with 20 occupations linked to the OB. The Dossier aimed to subsidise public actions and policies for recognition, legal security and financial support for

the spaces in order to guarantee their existence, autonomy and to strengthen their role in their territories.

The Cultural Occupations Dossier (2019) was produced autonomously and collaboratively by collectives, cultural agents and researchers linked to the OB, with data collected

16. More on this episode available at: <https://ponte.org/vou-quebrar-sua-cara-diz-secretario-de-cultura-de-doria-a-agente-cultural-da-zona-leste/>.

17. The Municipal Culture Plan is available at: <https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/cultura/relatorios/index.php?p=19964>.

through a form prepared and filled in by people involved in the Occupation's management. The document contains information such as the history of each Occupation, types of activities carried out, proposals for public policies and a comparative table of Occupation costs in relation to public cultural equipment. The production of the dossier, as well as the development of collective methodologies that consolidate documents, systematise information, maps, study laws, public budget, as well as other institutional political strategies, are instruments of collective action of the OB and the CMP. **In this sense, in addition to the daily work of each Occupation, the Bloc articulates a common repertoire of practices, experiences and knowledge that make possible a dialogue with the government in which arguments are carried incisively.**

After the presentation of the Dossier, throughout 2019, periodic meetings were held at MSC in which representatives of the OB and public workers from the city hall partici-

pated, among them the Coordination of Foments of the Municipal Secretariat of Culture and the Coordination of Culture Houses. During the meetings, two public tenders were written with the objective of establishing, in the short term, a bond between Cultural Occupations and MSC and the transfer of public resources. They were the Mapping and accreditation of Community Management of Formerly Idle Public Spaces in São Paulo and the Award for Cultural Collectives Responsible for the Community Management of Formerly Idle Public Spaces in São Paulo.¹⁸

The text for those documents was based on Law to Foment the Culture of the Peripheries (Law 16.496/16),¹⁹ conquered by the Cultural Movement of the Peripheries in 2016, which innovated by establishing criteria for the distribution of public resources that recognise the territorial dimension of inequality, allocating more resources for the most vulnerable regions in order to strengthen peripheral cultural production in the city.²⁰

"We claim from the State its counterpart, ensuring public policies that make our artistic and cultural practices not based on profit and exploitation; policies that foster mechanisms to guaranteed gratuity (...) in which the peripheries' subjectivity is not transformed into merchandise and that our productions are not hostages to universalised desires, nor our symbolic particularities catalogued as a currency for exchange."

Peripheral Manifesto, for the Law to Foment Peripheries, March 16, 2015

The Law to Foment Peripheries was created by peripheral cultural collectives, initially gathered around the East Zone Culture Forum and, later, the broader articulation that would be called the Culture Movement of the Peripheries. The period of studies, elaboration and struggle for the approval of the public budget and the Law was characterised as an intense process of learning and political strengthening of the collec-

tivities involved. The territory and the movement intensely educated those participating in this process of the periphery in the city's politics. In the *slow time*, marked by research and understanding of the political, economic and cultural scenario at different scales, the movement matured previous struggles and the text of the Law for over 3 years. In spite of the interference of the MSC and the councilors, the law carried

18. The public tenders' names were extensive due to political issues related to the term occupation. The tenders' official notices are available at: <https://www.capital.sp.gov.br/noticia/cultura-abre-chamamento-publico-para-gestao-comunitaria-de-espacos-publicos-ociosos> and <https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/cultura/noticias/index.php?p=28070>.

19. See: <https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/cultura/noticias/index.php?p=27841#:~:text=0%20Programa%20de%20Fomento%20C3%A0,nas%20periferias%20de%20S%C3%A3o%20Paulo>.

20. The public tender to foment culture at the peripheries divides the city into four areas based on data from the 2010 Census, carried out by IBGE. Area 3 included the peripheral districts in which more than 20% of households have an average per capita income of up to half a minimum wage, the equivalent today of R\$ 440. For it, 70% of the budget foreseen in the tender will be allocated, which must be released annually. Area 2 concentrates between 10.01% and 20% of their households with an income of up to half a minimum wage per capita, according to IBGE, and will have 23% of the resources. Area 1 are districts where less than 10% of the population has an income below R\$ 440, there is no budget forecast. But the so-called pockets of poverty in the central region, such will have access to 7% of the amounts distributed by the tender.

out an ethical content, committed to the peripheries and their *mutilated citizenships*. It was an effective contribution to the struggle for the construction of a democracy from the establishment of a popular power to decide and create paths for a different city. The first tender based on the law was launched in 2016, and since then it is reissued annually. Today, in 2021, it is in its 6th edition.²¹

The Cultural Occupations tenders' text defined what is community management in the OBs' terms, by recognising its relation with the territory and that, through cultural actions articulated in a horizontal and collective way, the community management gave new meaning to idle spaces of public property, guaranteeing its social function. Once accredited, Cultural Occupations can prove an institutional

bond with MSC, which has helped in eviction threats by other public entities. The accreditation also provides the possibility of transferring public resources and allowing the space to participate in a municipal program for shared management of public cultural spaces (yet to be developed).

The award tender was launched in July 2020, during the pandemic. In this context, even with restricted activities, Cultural Occupations continued to function as important spaces of support and articulation in their districts – carrying out emergency communication, health and social assistance actions and live streaming sessions. As a result, 15 occupations were awarded with R\$ 30,000. The payment came in late, in early 2021, after a political pressure by OB's social networks.

Learnings and reflexions on the process

To resume the OB's history and its trajectory of clashes and dialogue with the municipal government involves understanding the logic that has historically shaped the city originating its geographic, social and cultural inequalities. It is by contesting these inequalities that Cultural Occupations emerge, claiming other logics for organising the city, appropriating spaces, and seeing the world. Weaving utopias and realities in the construction of commons, escaping from the dichotomy of public and private. Through this pathway, valuable achievements and lessons were put upfront.

Given the innovative character that is still being experimented in the city, the Occupations are constant targets of demoralisation attempts by public authorities and other actors. They use the public-pri-

ate logic as an excuse to accuse the movement of using the public space for "private purposes",²² even though the Occupations are bonded to their territories, offering totally free activities to the community. It is possible to extract valuable lessons from the clashes between Occupations and the State, such as the understanding that public managers have about public equipment and the logic of the municipal government as owner of the city. It is interesting to note how the public-private categories seem to have dominated the mentality of public administrators and part of the population, as if it was a concept capable of explaining all the ways of living, coexisting and appropriating city's spaces. Speeches of the former secretary of culture (2017-2018) clearly reflect this thought. And it is also against this attempt

21. On the Law to Foment Peripheries, see Silvia Lopes Raimundo's PhD thesis "Territory, culture and politics: cultural movement of the peripheries, resistance and desired city" (2017). Available at <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-17042017-104001/pt-br.php>

22. See: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2017/10/1929575-nao-pode-haver-limite-a-arte-afirma-andre-sturm-secretario-de-doria.shtml>

of reducing the occupations' reputation that the Cultural Occupations stand up to, affirming the Commons not only as a utopian horizon, but also as a concrete, effective and ongoing possibility. **Thus, by asserting themselves as common spaces, which escape the public-private dichotomy, these Occupations put into debate the very concept of property which structures relations in the city. The common space has no property, does not belong to anyone, and belongs to everyone. It is the responsibility of the community itself, but also of the municipal government and those people around it.**

The accreditation and the award were both important achievements for the movement. They were actions of recognition by the MSC around the importance and legitimacy of Cultural Occupations. However, the accreditation is still insufficient to provide legal guarantees for the communities to remain in the spaces, and the award amount is still insignificant compared to what would be necessary to maintain and enhance these cultural spaces. Yet, the OB believes that a perennial policy is necessary, as it avoids the competition logic of public tenders. For this reason, in parallel to the construction of the public tenders, a Decree has been discussed within the MSC, to be signed by the mayor of the city. It will establish a set of criteria and guidelines for a model of shared management between MSC and the community, as well as the transference of the properties to the MSC administrative scope.

The political opening within the MSC and mainly the commitment and time dedicated by the Bloc were fundamental for the construction of the public tenders. Having as a precedent the Law to Foment Peripheries and the history of struggle of peripheral cultural movements were, undoubtedly,



factors that influenced the opening for this construction. Despite some clashes, the process strengthened the Bloc's relationship with public servants. **Considering the context of political inconstancy, the role of public servants in the continuity of institutional processes and in the opening of information of public interest is significant.** Furthermore, the dialogue channel with the MSC enabled some progress on the transfer processes that require institutional articulation – for example, contact with public companies such as COHAB and other Secretariats and Subprefectures. However, nothing has yet been signed as a guarantee and it is up to the municipal government to articulate and facilitate the negotiation of the condition of the properties that are owned by other government entities – such as the State and the Union.

The municipal government has difficulties in assimilating the common character of Cultural Occupations and invariably tends to frame spaces within bureaucracies and institutional categories. This difficulty has created a risk of capturing processes driven by the OB for other purposes.

Espaço Cultural Jd. Damasceno, the oldest Cultural Occupation from the OB, with 40 years of existence
Source: Espaço Cultural Jd. Damasceno

The current neoliberal management of the city of São Paulo, for example, has signalled shared management as a model of “destatisation”, since it would reduce the need for public employees to manage public equipment. Attempts to appropriate ideas, actions, common principles and political claims of Cultural Occupations sometimes appear in a veiled way. Some other times are more explicit, and have been a recurring feature in the relationship between the OB and the São Paulo municipal government, generating tensions from which some issues emerge. Most importantly, it is necessary to ask: is it possible to build a project or a public policy combining organisational logics that present themselves as opposites (State v. Cultural Occupations or Bureaucracy v. Self-management)? If it is possible to count on the State to recognise and strengthen spaces such as occupations, is the result a public policy that meets the interests of those who built it, or will its principles be captured, distorted, and equipped during the institutionalisation process to meet other political interests? What strategies to use in this negotiation relationship? What are the non-negotiable guidelines?

Questions like these were and still are frequent in the history of the relationship between the OB and the local government and certainly are for several other social movements.

Experiences such as the construction and implementation of the Law to Foment Peripheries over the past six years is an example of how popular incidence through institutional channels can offer significant advances, even within the limits of State bureaucracy.

It remains to be seen whether this kind of construction is still possible today, with the strengthening of an authoritarian and neoliberal government, or if it was reserved for another political moment, before the 2016 parliamentary coup, when

there was a rupture in the Democratic State that still reverberates in all governmental spheres of the country – from the federal to the local level.

In this context, the permanent struggle of the OB goes beyond the claims for legal security and proper budget allocation for those vital spaces for the city. It is also a dispute with the concept of public management itself, and how it should be thought as an effective sharing between the local government and grassroots, guaranteeing communities autonomy in decision-making. In this way, it seems possible to build public policies based on lived experience, in modes of organisation that are established autonomously, but that demand the recognition and the money that the State owes to the peripheral population. To ensure the process of commoning, it would be up to the government to recognise, guarantee the existence of and to strengthen initiatives such as cultural occupations and other political and cultural practices that oppose neoliberal logic, time and rationality.

Thus, the OB represents a mode of organisation that does not yet fit into governmental models, but which, through ways and loopholes of participation within and outside institutions, has been opening possible pathways for local governments to respond to territorial inequalities. To do so, it is necessary to design new institutional arrangements that understand and contemplate these modes of local organisation. In a context in which the State is equipped with political and ideological interests adverse to the common principles of Cultural Occupations, experiences such as those lived in these spaces are also an expression of the libertarian, democratic and popular nature of actions in which the community does not expect government tutelage or authorisation to act.

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 4 on “Commoning”, which focuses on the trends and pathways in relation to the governance, planning and provision of access to housing, land and basic services. The chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote approaches focused on collective action that contribute to urban equality.

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