Motionless Movement: The Brazilian urban crisis from the creation of the Ministry of Cities to the great protests of 2013

Roberto Andrés[1]

[1]*Urbanist, professor at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, editor of Piseagrama magazine and PHD student at Universidade de São Paulo.* robertoandres@gmail.com

Abstract: This article aims to investigate the period between the creation of the Ministry of Cities in 2003 and the great protests of June 2013 in Brazil. It looks for the connections between the greatest set of riots in the recent history of the country and the accentuation of the urban crisis, with special focus on the role (potential and real) of public policies in the transformation of cities. My main hypotheses are that, despite the economic growth and poverty reduction that took place in the period, some of the historical urban problems were accentuated; that the urban reform agenda built for years by popular movements, culminating in the creation of the Ministry of Cities, could, if implemented, have dealt with the structural problems of Brazilian cities; and that this mismatch between project and achievement contributed in a relevant way to bubble up the cauldron that exploded in June 2013.

Keywords: Brazilian cities; urban mobility; housing; urban policies.

Introduction

For thunder to form, we need clouds in the sky. In addition to water droplets, storm clouds carry inside them ice crystals, which bump into each other as the air turbulently moves around. The movement and the friction create an electrical field that turns the cloud into a large battery. The high voltage ionizes the air in the surroundings and forms the path of plasma that carries the electric discharge to the ground. None of this is possible if the sky is blue.

When the big rallies of June 2013 broke out in Brazil, a lot of people saw lightning in blue skies. Using the parameters offered by hegemonic social meteorology, they would ask: if the economy was doing just fine, if there was full employment, if poverty had been reduced considerably in the previous decade, if the political class was reasonably well evaluated in polls, if our international image took off – then why suddenly millions of people in fury paralyzed hundreds of cities in just a few days?

Still in the midst of the thunderstorm, literary and social critic Roberto Schwarcz (2013) summed up this mismatch: “In two weeks, the country that was believed to be working, that had knocked out inflation, included the excluded, put an end to extreme poverty, and become an international example was replaced by another country, a very worse one, in which public transport, education and health are a disaster and in which the political class is a shame, not to mention corruption. Which of the two versions is correct?”

Some would say that the sky hadn’t been that blue. People that were part of the social movements that helped organize the protests as well as independent analysts on the left came to demonstrate that Brazilian

society was quite mobilized; that the number of strikes had reached record highs in 2012; that many protests against high bus fares had taken place and been successful in previous years; that the social inclusion of the previous decade had disregarded key aspects such as urban displacement, pollution, quality of life, public spaces; that it was increasingly evident that World Cup spending would not contribute to healing the social and urban woes of the country.

In short, according to such analysts there was already plenty of raining and thundering here and there, and only those insulated in bureaucratic offices would not see it. One month after the marches, a collection of articles published in the book *Rebel Cities* (Maricato *et al* . 2013) sought to demonstrate what were the elements which, in their interaction, transformed the streets of Brazilian cities into explosive batteries: deteriorating urban life, exorbitant fares and precarious urban transport services, the resilience of poor public health and education, the eviction of thousands of people from their homes, rent inflation etc.

Also in the heat of June, philosopher Marcos Nobre (2013a) published his *Shock of Democracy: reasons for the upheaval,* in which he demonstrates how the mass rallies marked the end of a political pact which, for good or for worse, had organized Brazilian society during the New Republic, the democratic period that began with the end of the military dictatorship in the late 1980s. For the author, “the protests show that the functioning of the [political] system is in disarray with the streets. Society attained a degree of pluralism of positions and political trends that is not reflected in the shapeless mass of political parties.” Another philosopher, Paulo Arantes (2013), recalled the centrality of public transport fares for contemporary life in Brazil, stating that “through the tenuous thread of the fare the entire system is challenged – from the displacement of the labour force towards places of exploitation to the violence of the segregated city that marches towards ecological collapse”.

These and other analyses offered relevant interpretations of the social crisis that the country was experiencing, and some of them will be taken up later in this article, but it is possible to say that nobody had predicted protests of such magnitude. As stated by Marcelo Freixo (2013), a left-wing politician who had counted on a great social mobilization around his candidacy for the municipality of Rio de Janeiro in the previous year, “not even the most optimistic militants could have expected to see so many people in the streets and such desire for change in the air”. As the sociologist Leo Lynce (2013) put it, “we were all, without exception, taken by surprise, including those who called the protests".

It was evident that Brazilian society had become organized on many fronts, and movements such as Movimento Passe Livre (MPL) and the Popular Committees against the World Cup Impacts (COPACs) pointed to an increase in protests, but still it remains difficult to explain how some scattered clouds suddenly became one of the biggest storms the country had ever experienced. Most experts classified the protests as "spontaneous" in news coverage, opinion articles, academic essays, books and documentaries. But as British sociologist Colin Barker (2014) puts it, when analysts use the term "spontaneous" to define a social manifestation, what they usually mean is that they do not quite know what is happening.

This article seeks to address the relationship between the intensification of the Brazilian urban crisis during the country’s period of greatest economic prosperity and the protests of June 2013, which ended up closing such period. It also seeks to propose the hypothesis that the hegemonic tools used to measure social life, which emphatically concentrate on the economy, account to an analytical myopia that supresses concrete and urgent problems linked to urban issues such as mobility, public services, housing and the quality of public spaces – in short, the whole agenda of what is commonly called "right to the city" – which, sooner or later, have to emerge in some way.

Economy x Urbanity

In a recent article, former Minister of Education (in charge from 2005 to 2012), former mayor of São Paulo (in charge from 2013 to 2016) and the Workers' Party presidential candidate in the elections of 2018, Fernando Haddad (2017), asked the following question: “How to explain the explosion of discontent that took place in June 2013, expressed in the largest wave of protests since the democratic transition? Unemployment was still low; inflation, although under pressure, was at a bearable level and still below wage increases; public services continued to expand, and so did the rights provided for in the Constitution”.

The questions posed by Haddad four years after the demonstrations still point to thunderstorms in blue skies – or at least in skies with very few clouds. The country was undergoing a transition, ending a cycle of economic growth with poverty reduction to enter, from the middle of 2014 onwards, one of the biggest economic recessions in its history.

There are several ways of narrating this transition, and they depend on to the point from which to stand in the political spectrum. For political scientist André Singer (2018), for instance, Dilma Rousseff's first government (from 2011to 2014) made progressive economic choices that confronted the marked rentism of Brazilian society. Such choices aimed at favouring the productive matrix. Rousseff was, however, betrayed by the industrial bourgeoisie, became unable to sustain the main pillar (low interest rates) of her plan and saw her “new economic matrix” die before reaping its fruits. According to economist Monica de Bolle (2016), inversely, the Federal Government made a series of maladaptive actions. It sought to reduce interest rates and devalue the exchange in a biased manner, increasingly using public resources to (i) induce private investments, through tax exemption (ii) control inflation, by holding back public utility charges. Not only did the plan fail, it also caused great fiscal deterioration.

A more nuanced version of the story is told by economist Laura Carvalho (2018), who uses the image of a waltz in order to analyse the Brazilian economy in the 21st century: one step to the front, one step to the side, one step back. The step forward would have been given in the second term of Lula’s government (from 2007 to 2010), when the country took advantage of the favourable international context of high commodity prices to increase public investment and credit, boosting the economy and generating what Carvalho called "milagrinho brasileiro", “Brazil’s little miracle” – a reference to the so-called "Brazilian Miracle" of the military dictatorship, when the country's GDP grew on average 10% per year between 1968 and 1973 .

In the 2007-2010 “milagrinho”, the GDP grew at an average annual rate of 4.5%, inflation at 4.7%, public investment at 27.1%, and total investment at 9.1% (CARVALHO, 2018). For Carvalho, what made this virtuous path collapse was mainly the change in the nature of public spending: while during Lula’s second term public investments preponderated, Rousseff’s administration reduced investments to the extent that it amplified tax exemptions for businesses. The leading role was shifted towards private investment, which however narrowed – not because entrepreneurs staged a boycott, as proposed by Singer (2018), but because of a lack of demand and stock accumulation in companies. Without the previous inductive investments and with indebted households, the economy stagnated: one step to the side. The step back, in the author's view, would have been given with the fiscal adjustment that came in 2015, which in fact was unable to save the country from one of its largest economic recessions.

In spite of the differences in perspective between the authors mentioned, there is something in common between them: the idea that things were going well and then got distorted by a change of course. In any case, Haddad is right when he argues that in 2013 the country still had full employment and inflation was at a "bearable level” and below wage adjustments. GDP grew on average 2.3% between 2011 and 2014, and annual inflation was at 6.2% (CARVALHO, 2018). Such economic indicators would not fare badly in most places, let alone for a period that followed the 2008 economic crisis and a major economic downturn in countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece.

The question remains: if the economic indicators were still satisfactory and yet the country witnessed one of its largest strings of protests, are we not looking for the wrong indicators? What would happen if we were to add to the analytical history of the period indicators that rarely appear in public debate, but which tell a lot about the life of a predominantly urban society, such as time spent in traffic; the cost of public transport fares; health problems caused by air pollution; deaths and health problems generated by traffic accidents; the quality of public spaces and housing? Would the sky remain blue?

A brief history of urban politics in Brazil

To answer that question, we will briefly review the formation of Brazilian cities. Along with the industrialization that intensified in the middle of the 20th century, Brazil experienced an intense phenomenon of urbanization. According to data from IBGE, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the country saw its urban population increase almost sevenfold in 40 years, from about 12 million people (which represented 31.24% of the total population) in 1940 to more than 81 million people (67.59% of the total population) in 1980.

This great urban growth occurred within a specific process of peripheral capitalism, well dissected by sociologist Francisco de Oliveira (2013). For the author, the modernization of Brazil did not happen *despite* the maintenance of backward sectors, but *in dependence on* them. In the case of cities, the formation of new so-called “informal neighbourhoods” – which occupied idle land in the urban fringes, had self-construction as a predominant building method, and lacked services and public infrastructure – was the main form of growth absorption and served well the scheme of capital accumulation, since the costs of housing and public services did not need to be included in wages and taxes.

The great precariousness of urban peripheries was only to start being remedied with the resumption of democracy in the mid-1980s. Essential items such as pavement, water and electricity supply services were finally almost universalised in recent years. Still, most of the territory in Brazilian cities is still flooded with problems, ranging from poverty to lack of public spaces, from exacerbated violence to extreme urban immobility.

As the military dictatorship agonized, the Urban Reform Movement grew, bringing together popular and professional segments to propose an agenda of social and spatial justice for Brazilian cities (ROLNIK, 2018). The Urban Reform Movement was very active in the process of drafting the new Constitution in 1988, and managed to include two articles related to policies for cities in the letter. These articles were then regulated through an Act, known as the City Statute, promulgated in 2001. The Statute was to be seen as an international reference for progressive normative frameworks, establishing advanced instruments that aimed at the reduction of socio-spatial inequality and the improvement of the quality of life in Brazilian cities. When the coalition led by the Workers' Party won the elections in 2002, the Movement had yet another victory: the creation of the Ministry of Cities. The appointed minister was Olívio Dutra, who had been the mayor of Porto Alegre when the city implemented its well-known participatory budget, and he brought with him leading experts in the struggle for urban reform.

It is worth recalling the level of chaos and inequality in Brazilian cities at the beginning of the 21st century, a result of decades of authoritarianism and neglect. Such a context is well described by Ermínia Maricato (2005), a professor at the University of São Paulo who was then appointed Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Cities: "Chaos in collective transport; the decay of public regulation; growth of favelas at levels unheard of; lack of housing alternatives [...]; pollution of rivers, streams, lakes and beaches for lack of sanitation; civil war numbers in deaths related to drug traffic; environmentally fragile areas destroyed by the illegal occupation of riversides, hills, dunes, mangroves and water sources".

In this context, the Ministry of Cities came to "occupy an institutional void that is inexplicable for a massively urbanized country which has had in the past 50 years one of the largest urbanization rates in the world" (MARICATO, 2005). It came with a promise to heal historical ills in Brazilian cities and to promote social and spatial justice, supported by a progressive normative framework – the City Statute – and structured by a broad participatory process, organized in periodical Cities Conferences that branched into states and counties.

The promise, however, was not fulfilled. On the contrary, as Maricato pointed out in an article written some years later, "life in Brazilian cities has worsened a lot in the last years of the past decade" (MARICATO, 2013). The indicators that I propose to analyse would confirm such an assertion: increased time in traffic, costly bus fares, traffic accidents, air pollution, etc. How did this happen? How could a promise that seemed about to be fulfilled become its reverse?

The Ministry of Cities was led by Olívio Dutra and the team linked to the Urban Reform Movement only until 2005, when the Lula administration faced a political crisis and traded the control of the Ministry with a conservative party (ironically named Progressive Party), led by politicians who made their careers during the military dictatorship. It is thus possible to say that the urban agenda never really became a central agenda of the Workers' Party government. Even during the short period in which historical figures of the Urban Reform struggle had a say in the Ministry of Cities, little got off the paper. That period, it must be said, coincided with the fiscal austerity policies of the first Lula administration, and federal government investments shrunk 4,5% per year on average at the time (CARVALHO, 2018). Even if there were good ideas, they got little investment.

Starting in 2006, the federal government's economic policy changed, with a strong emphasis on public investment and a "developmentalist drive" (MARICATO, 2014). As soon as public funds began to flow, policies such as the housing program Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV) or the infrastructural Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), in addition to tax exemptions for automobiles, were implemented with a large volume of resources. They shared, however, almost nothing with the directives and regulatory frameworks achieved in previous decades. As Maricato (2014) put it, "we see a paradox. When the Brazilian state finally resumed investment in housing, sanitation and, to a lesser extent, urban transport […] living conditions worsen radically." In this article I discuss two elements of this paradox: housing and urban mobility.

Housing

It seems to be a consensus amongst urbanists that the MCMV program, which emerged in 2009 in response to the global crisis of 2008, was a policy intended to fight the economic recession, but not the housing deficit. Still according to Maricato (2014), the launch of MCMV in March 2009 mostly ignored the guidelines of the National Housing Plan, which had been developed by the same government. The logic of the program encouraged developers to build in the urban fringes, producing new neighbourhoods devoid of urbanity (ROLNIK, 2018). As can be appreciated in an extensive survey on the theme (WHITAKER, 2012), entire neighbourhoods emerged on the edges of cities, generating stigma, monotonous landscapes, and segregated territories: devoid of transportation, basic social services and commerce.

As the MCMV imposed a "planned socio-spatial segregation", a term coined by the architect André Luiz Prado (2017) in a study on housing estates on urban edges, it also had a major impact on escalating rents and real estate prices. It is pointed out by Ana Paula Ribeiro, Guilherme Boulos and Natalia Szermeta (2014), that although the MCMV reached the goal of building more than one million houses in 2009 and 2010, the housing deficit grew by astonishing 1, 5 million units in the same period. In a later review, Raquel Rolnik (2018) points out that "the MCMV has built more than 4 million housing units in seven years, but has

produced little effect on reducing housing needs. Research shows that the housing deficit has grown over the same period: from 5.8 million to 6.2 million units".

According to the authors, such a contradiction resulted from a lack of regulation combined with the excessive incentives given to construction companies, which were providing for a market with huge credit facility whist receiving subsidized loans from the National Development Bank (BNDES). These companies started to acquire more and more land and thus to control urban growth streams, speculating whenever possible and inflating property prices across entire regions. From 2008 to 2013, rents in São Paulo rose 195%. "Thus grew the housing deficit, shaped by an explosion in the cost of rents, even in the urban peripheries" (BOULOS *et al.,* 2014) .

As pointed out by Maricato (2013), "the heart of the urban reform agenda, the land reform, was neglected." This is true, and it is curious that this and other issues have continued to occupy the debates in the Cities Conferences – participatory spaces created by the first team of the Ministry of Cities. It seems that the participatory processes, which had a historical momentum in the governments of the Workers Party, had different degrees of incidence in the policies actually carried out. Larger programs with voluminous resources, such as MCMV and PAC, "ran outside" the participatory guidelines, along with other "armoured areas", as Anna Luiza Salles and Rosângela Dias (2013) pointed out.

Public policy researcher Sônia Fleury (2013) perceived a very direct relationship between such a "mobilizing yet at the same time centralising" model and the dissatisfaction revealed in the rallies of June 2013: "We created a democratic mechanism in 1988 that allowed society to have a very deliberative and participatory form of control over the State. And we kept activating it all the time – there have never been as many conferences in Brazilian history as during the Lula years. At the same time, however, the real power of decision was very far from such participatory spaces, and that gap kept growing. The organisation of the mega-events disclosed [...] how the decision-making process and the definition of [...] where the resources would go happened between the government and businessmen. This contradiction had to surface at some point. "

Urban mobility

Another policy designed to battle economic recession was the tax relief for cars, called “IPI Zero”, as of 2009. The Brazilian car fleet had grown almost 50% from 2000 to 2008 – an increase of about 10 million units in nine years. Large and medium-sized cities were filled with cars, and air pollution and noise, accidents, and slow traffic intensified. With IPI Zero, between 2009 and 2012 another 10 million cars and 6 million motorcycles were registered. Deaths in traffic jumped from 28,995 in 2000 to 44,812 in 2012, according to data from the Ministry of Health.

Health problems and deaths caused by air pollution also burgeoned. According to a study published by the Health and Sustainability Institute (SALDIVA *et al.,* 2017), coordinated by USP professor Paulo Saldiva, the total number of deaths caused by air pollution in São Paulo (11,200 in 2015) is higher than the number of deaths caused by traffic accidents (7,867), breast cancer (3,620), or AIDS (2,922).

According to the study, inhaling the air of the city of São Paulo for two hours is tantamount to smoking a cigarette. Diseases such as arrhythmia, heart attack and stroke represent 80% of the effects of air pollution, which is also a proven cause of lung and bladder cancers and is linked to half the cases of pneumonia in children. According to estimates by Saldiva (2012), a 10% reduction in air pollution in São Paulo could avoid the death of more than 100,000 people in 20 years and save around R$20 billion in health treatment costs.

Collective transportation was strongly impacted by a car-oriented policy. The exponential growth in the number of automobiles and motorcycles meant that many users gave up public transport – which increased traffic

sluggishness. Compensation however was made not with an improvement of the service (attractive fares, fleet improvement, exclusive corridors), but with disproportionate fare increases and precariousness. From January 2000 to December 2012, inflation rose 125%, but bus fares in the main Brazilian cities increased in average 192% (RIBEIRO *et al.* 2013).

Correspondingly, the average travelling time in collective transport also increased. In Belo Horizonte, the sixth largest city in the country, the average time spent in bus travels went from 42 minutes in 2002 to 62 minutes in 2012 (COSTA, 2012). Such an increase is a result of slower traffic, but also of a reduction in supply – a common adjustment made by bus operators in order to keep their profit margins even with fewer users –, a situation that is more critical in peripheral neighbourhoods, where the supply has never been sufficient to begin with.

The result is a vicious cycle explained in a chart drawn up by engineers and economists at IPEA, the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ribeiro *et al* . 2013). Such cycle is based on both the lack of investments in urban public transport and the incentives for the use of automobiles – which take the form of tax exemptions or road building and works. This leads to a reduced demand for collective transportation and the migration to individual motorized modes; which results in an economic and financial imbalance in public transport systems; which, in turn, is compensated by precarious supply and raising fares – feeding back the cycle.

These problems could have been faced with policies such as the ones proposed in the 2004 National Urban Development Plan as the basis for the 2005 Cities Conference. The document endorsed a regulatory reform in urban collective transport, aiming at "the adoption of transparent rules and the accurate assignment of responsibilities between public and private agents" (DUTRA *et al.,* 2004). The proposed regulation would structure municipal concessions, and aimed to "include in the contracts tools for efficiency control as well as for the participation of users in the evaluation of services." The creation of a consistent source of subsidy for urban public transport and of an industrial policy for the sector would also be proposed later in 2014 by a group of activists and technicians which included one of the members of Olívio Dutra's former team, economist João Luiz da Silva Dias (DIAS *et all.* 2014).

Without policies aimed at regulation, subsidy and incentive, collective transport followed its spiral of precariousness and overprice. Within a structure of land immobility, this path stretches towards the unbearable, as described by Bruno Cava (2013): "There are millions of vehicles crowded with resigned people and lost looks in the dead-time of daily transportation. We sit or stand, in any case compressed into the mass of similarly tormented mates. We wake up early to face this *via-crucis* and at the end of the day we just want it to end soon and to get home and take a shower so that we can start it all over again the next day. "

Even though public works based on individual motor transport did not enter the official discourse, the guidelines established by the Cities Conferences or the priorities defined by the National Urban Mobility Law, they were heavily present in Brazilian cities in recent decades. Such works were carried out with municipal, state and federal funding. They found their way into programs such as the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) for Mobility, which would often include works that privileged individual transport within large-scale projects such as the BRTs (Bus Rapid Transit: exclusive bus corridors with prepayment stations). An exhaustive study of the impact of road works on aggravating the crisis of urban mobility in Brazilian cities remains to be done. However, decades of research, especially in North America and Europe, have shown that increasing the supply of space for cars does not result in improved traffic, as new roads tend to saturate in less than ten years (DURANTON and TURNER, 2010).

While they do not improve traffic, viaducts, trenches and highways work very well to create urban scars, degrading pedestrian life and entire neighbourhoods, as Jane Jacobs (2009) has already pointed out in her studies of American cities in the 1950s. There is a heavy a burden of violence and authoritarianism in such works, which is well demonstrated by psychoanalyst Tales Ab'Saber (2015) in an analysis of the construction of

the “Minhocão” elevated highway in São Paulo: "Minhocão and the entire road complex that came along with it brought about an urban and mental catastrophe, with grin social effects, a ferocious cultural degradation and the overall imposition of a poorer life. It constituted a veritable conservative device, with profound biopolitical implications over the life in the city to come. A total spectacle, inside out. Only a real dictatorship could have built something like that. It is the living document of the real force of authoritarian desire. "

For the author, "only a real dictatorship could have built something like that", but the great works of engineering – from elevated highways to hydroelectric plants –, seem to have smoothly transited from the imaginary of the military dictatorship to that of Brazilian democratic governments. It should be remembered, for instance, that the series of viaducts built in Belo Horizonte, justified in the context of the implementation of a BRT system and the World Cup, was financed by the Mobility PAC program – against the principles of "prioritizing collective transport over individual transport" provided for in regulatory frameworks that were conquered with great struggle. The works dislodged slums, split neighbourhoods, cut hundreds of trees, and made pedestrian life more barren (ANDRÉS, 2016).

At the rallies of June 2013, Luiz Felipe Aniceto de Almeida, a 22-year-old attendant, and Douglas Henrique de Oliveira, a 21-year-old student, lost their lives in one of such viaducts, in the northern part of the city. They were fleeing police shots and bombs and fell from the structure, which "did not provide for pedestrians," as the construction engineer would later argue.

When, during the 2014 World Cup, just a few kilometres ahead one of the recently built viaducts collapsed, killing two people and injuring twenty-three (*a total spectacle, inside out*), our long history of aberration and violence only showed a more public face. What we saw on television was the product that perhaps best symbolized the enormous gap between the decades-long desires, constructions and efforts to implement urban policies that would promote social and environmental justice, and the conciliatory and regressive *realpolitik* in which the heirs of the dictatorship and hungry contractors dictate urban transformations: the debris of tons of concrete and steel, overpaid and, what is more, evidently useless, since a year after the disaster the traffic in that spot proved not to differ from other parts of the highway where the viaducts still stood (ANDRÉS, 2016).

Conclusion

The urban issues summarized here are only the tip of an iceberg of problems and impacts of economic activities that are not taken into the accounts of hegemonic indicators. The economy may continue to grow, we may control inflation and reach full employment, but life will be worse if that comes with and increase of time lost in traffic, accidents that kill lives, health problems originating from air pollution, rent pressure etc. If people are removed from their homes to give space to dubious infrastructural works, if cities lose trees and public spaces, if the grey of the highways degrades pedestrian life, if urban displacement becomes increasingly unviable, are better wages and full employment enough?

By posing questions along these lines, a number of economists have started to question the hegemonic methods and indicators used by Economics. This is not a trivial matter: the economy occupies a significant place in public debate, functioning at the same time as both the compass and rudder of governments. As early as the 1930s, none other than John Maynard Keynes (1961) considered that "the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else".

The economist Kate Raworth (2017) soundly recalls that “economics is the mother tongue of public policy, the language of public life, and the mindset that shapes society”. She argues that relevant changes in the economics approach are necessary if we are to seek a future with less inequality and the preservation of environmental

conditions on the planet. The author suggests that "GDP is a cuckoo in the economic nest", in reference to birds that lay their eggs to be hatched in the nests of others. She argues that GDP, the main metric in economics, was not created alongside with the discipline, but was introduced less than 100 years ago, occupying a space that was open due to the absence of concrete, measurable targets.

Not a few economists have criticized the use of GDP as the predominant metric for measuring progress. A report signed by Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz and Jean Paul Fitoussi (2009) proposed a "shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being ". Economist Ladislau Dowbor (2019) argues that "GDP measures the flow of money, not the attainment of ends." The classic example is that natural disasters and airplane crashes increase GDP, as they generate demand for environmental cleaning services, insurance activation, etc.

Raworth (2017) wrote an entire book on changes in the economics approach. Her main point would be to replace GDP, a linear and simplifying metric, with a donut – a graph in which two rings make up a space of action in which to 1) provide for the universalization of access to goods and resources and 2) guarantee the preservation of living conditions on the planet. "Below the inner ring – the social foundation – lie critical human deprivations such as hunger and illiteracy. Beyond the outer ring – the ecological ceiling – lies critical planetary degradation such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Between those two rings is the Donut itself, the space in which we can meet the needs of all within the means of the planet. "

A design of the donut proposed by the author that addressed elements related to city life could provide us with much more accurate indicators of social life. If it were for instance to be applied to the period of greatest economic and social development in the country's recent history, which Laura Carvalho (2018) called “the little miracle”, we would probably realize that the miracle was not that miraculous. We would have a graph in which the thunderous growth of deaths due to traffic accidents and air pollution, time lost in traffic, and the worsening quality of urban life would become evident. We would also see the environmental impacts caused by a certain ideal of development that marked that same period, such as emissions growth and water contamination.

An exercise like this is yet to be done and is meant to be a step in my ongoing research. In any case, simply envisioning an alternative form of visual measurement of economic and social progress allows us to return to the debate at the beginning of this article. Had there been a graphical system of indicators that took into consideration the elements discussed above, would the analysts of June 2013 still see thunders in a blue sky? Or would they see the storm clouds, heavy and dense from the accumulation of the massive energy of years of urban and environmental pressure?

Marcos Nobre (2013b) identifies the period of Brazilian democratization as a period marked by clashes with a conservative political system of locks and brakes that aims to immobilize social transformation and the penetration of democratic and progressive forces. The presence of such a system engendered a social and political dynamic in the past decades that he describes as “*immobility in motion”*.

Conversely, it would be possible to understand the dynamics of Brazilian cities in the period here discussed as a *motionles movement*. The very large public employment of resources and the substantive growth of access to goods had effects that reduced or even nullified possible emancipatory and life improving results. Huge real estate investment resulted in an escalation of the housing deficit; the boom of the liberating dream of automobiles resulted in increased transit time; the unprecedented intensification of participatory instances had no real impact on decision-making; hosting the World Cup only left a burden of more urban inequality and elitist stadiums.

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