

Insurgencies in the city: protest, urban planning and dreams for the city

Aldrey Cristiane Iscaro

*State, Labour, Territory and Nature Research Laboratory
Urban and Regional Research and Planning Institute
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
aldreycris@hotmail.com*

Urbanization has progressively constituted a primary site of endless capital accumulation, resulting in many forms of barbarism and violence on whole populations in the name of profit. In other words, the creative destruction has taken not only a physical toll but destroyed social solidarities, swept aside any pretenses of democratic urban governance, exaggerated social inequalities and has increasingly terror as its primary mode of social regulation.

Our proposition is based on the understanding that this urban crisis is the common ground of the everyday urban conflicts in which our cities speak, such as the protests that occurred in the United States, Egypt, Spain, Turkey, Brazil, Israel, and Greece. Planning theory and research have since long recognized the importance of the conflict. Contention and conflict around urban development policies and plans are recurrent features of urban life, and cycles of social mobilization and contention are important factors in shaping urban societies. In addition, research on urban conflicts has played a key role in urban policy studies.

By contentious politics we mean episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when at least one government is a claimant, an object of claim, or a party to the claim; and the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.

We understand protest as an unconventional method of intervening in a government's political decision-making. In fact, social movements employ methods of persuasion and coercion which are, more often than not, novel, unorthodox, dramatic, and of questionable legitimacy. Also, the protest uses indirect channels to influence decision-makers, police and plans. In this sense, a cycle or wave of protests is a phase of heightened conflict across the social system with intensified interactions

between challengers and authorities, which can end in political changes, reform, repression and sometimes revolution.

With regard to these observations, this paper aims to explore two of the recent waves of protest, specially the demands of the protests occurred in the Taksim Square and Gezi Park, in the city of Istanbul, Turkey and the protests entitled Fica Ficus - for a greenest Belo Horizonte, occurred in the city of Belo Horizonte, State of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Taksim Gezi Park is an urban park next to Taksim Square, in Istanbul, and it is the last green space and one of the smallest parks of Istanbul. In May 2013, a wave of demonstrations began, initially to contest the urban development plan for Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park, which were its demolition and the replacement of Taksim Gezi Park with a shopping mall and possible residence as well as reconstruction of the historic Taksim Military Barracks, which were demolished in 1940. The protests also spread to other cities in Turkey.

Fica Ficus – for a greenest Belo Horizonte was a cycle of protest that occurred in 2013, in defense of the ficus tree of the Bernardo Monteiro Street, in the city of Belo Horizonte, and of all over the ficus trees of the city. The protests began because these trees were sick and the municipality wanted to prune the trees instead of treat the disease of the trees.

For this analysis, we will utilize as methodology a bibliographical research, documents produced by the protesters and their network of supporters and documents and materials shared by the network of researchers of our research laboratory.

Our findings are that the territory, as such the squares, the parks, the streets and avenues were not only hosting the populations, but they were the political fact that drove the wave of protests, and these public spaces, moreover, were much more than a union of bodies, namely, they were the resumption of public sphere.

In addition, even though the first demands that drove these protests were about an environmental question, it was more than trees. They demanded an urban planning not only made of concrete and asphalt. They demanded a good care of the public spaces and their protection in relation to the economic interests. It was about the

management of the public spaces of the city, and, above all, the city management and planning and the right to the city.

Both of their demands for an alternative urban planning, as we can say, are insurgent planning practices, i.e., counter-hegemonic (they destabilize the normalized order of things), transgressive (they transgress time and place by locating historical memory and transnational consciousness at the heart of their practices) and imaginative (they promote the concept of a different world, both possible and necessary) practices. Additionally, to achieve their demands, they invent new spaces and re-appropriate old ones where they can invoke their citizenship rights to further their counter-hegemonic interests.