

*Short Communication*

## Short communication on sustainable urbanism: A look at living in the centralities of Rio's suburbs

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**How the notion of sustainability could be included in Urban Planning and Project, especially concerning suburban areas? This article searches to contribute to this discussion based on the investigation of urban situations in the centralities of the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, confronting them with the inadequacy of instruments and tools included in regulation and plans of the Urban Public Policies. It identifies the impacts of historical processes and singular urban dynamics in the suburban areas. The paper also faces a technocratic vision of Urban Planning and an inappropriate traditional urban legislation that prioritizes efficiency in the metropolitan scale, emphasizing economic productivity instead of local problems attached to this portion of the Metropolis of Rio.**

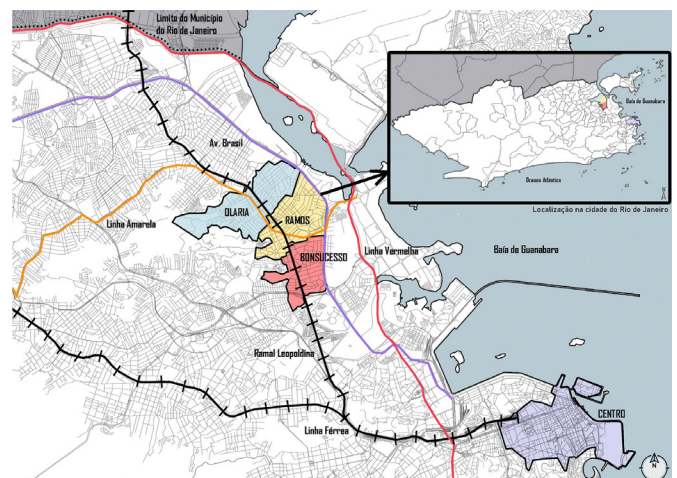
**Key words:** Sustainable urbanism, centralities, suburbs, metropolis of Rio de Janeiro

### ABOUT THE STUDY

The concept of sustainability is evaluated by considering the relevance of thinking about the environmental problems created by an accelerated urbanization in big Brazilian cities without a corresponding public policy of dwelling and without investments in infrastructure. So, for a sustainable urbanism, in Latin-America is essential to realize the interconnection between the multiple dimensions-social, economic, cultural, and environmental, and of governance-included in sustainability. In this regard, it is necessary to understand different urban realities expressed in territorial spatialities to identify local experiences that will potentially lead to auto sufficiency-matrix of sustainability (Acselrad, 2001). Furthermore, environmental conservation means also to fight for better urban conditions for local populations (Wezenaar, 1997; Rodrigues, 1999).

In order to investigate the complexities of the suburban area, the article brings the analyses of three centralities situated in the suburbs of Rio: Bonsucesso, Ramos e Olaria, which lies in a sequence throughout Leopoldina railway line (Figure 1). The option to study these three centralities was due to their classification as a whole, as the fourth more important regional sub centre in the Metropolis of Rio by the Strategical Plan of Integrated Urban Development of the Metropolis of Rio de

Janeiro. Although populous and not far from the Centre of the Metropolis, they also have been despised by the public and private sectors in local investments during decades, but they have recently received a metropolitan infrastructure that resulted in the expulsion of all types of local activities and of the people who manage them.



**Figure 1.** Map of Leopoldina region showing the suburbs of Bonsucesso, Ramos and Olaria, in the Metropolis of Rio de Janeiro (Source: author's assets).

The theoretical background brought by the article relies not only on an extended concept of sustainability, as mentioned,

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but also on the concept of centrality. Centrality is equally understood as a comprehensive notion that involves social and cultural contents apart from the geographical and functional ones (Villaça, 1998). The importance given to the centrality is due not only to its economic value, but also to the symbolic one expressed in spatial singularities resulting from particular processes and local dynamics (Krafta, 2008). It is considered the consequence of the inequality of urbanization in territories of big Brazilian cities, resulting in distinct environmental conditions, not always satisfactory, in their centralities. It is also evaluated the simultaneous attachment of the centrality to other distant centers or parts of the city, and to the nearest territories (Oliveira Júnior, 2008). So the diversity and hierarchy of the centrality encompass not only urban functionality to the Metropolis, but also affect “ways of life” identified with the local population’s appropriation (Serpa, 2011).

The multiple methodological procedures adopted by the research are shown in the article. They include the analysis of the public and private actions and their results to the integration of the suburban region to the Metropolis of Rio, by consulting and interpreting maps of Rio de Janeiro in different times; the investigation of morphological aspects of Bonsucesso, Ramos and Olaria, using historical documents and local cartography that shows particular processes, the changes of these centralities from rural to urban; the identification of the daily experience of the people who use and live in the area, by field observation of their social practices.

The article concludes with the research results, identifying the values to be considered in order to achieve sustainability in a centrality, usually absent in Urban Public Policies. It points out the need to recover a political vision that actually changes the interpretation of the ecological thought in a sustainable urban planning and project. This vision is sensitive to the social and spatial inequalities of the metropolitan territory, and includes the defence of the place and economic practices locally based (Escobar, 2005). It shows how essential it is to understand the logics inherent to daily ways of life in these urban situations; and to include local agents in the processes of planning and projecting. It also highlights the importance of exploring the notion of fragment-totality recognizing that the centralities have spatial interaction in multiple scales, comprising from the broad metropolitan to the micro local scales (Habracken, 1998). Even identifying challenges to deal-such as the informality, social vulnerability and precarious infrastructure of these urban situations-recognizes the openness of a new perspective for public acting when responding to local demands. Thus, preventing the loss of local culture, and advancing towards a desirable socio-environmental justice, benefiting sustainability.

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