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The Emergence of Collectives of Architects

*and the Incorporation of Their Practices
in Institutional Projects in Recife Post
#OcupeEstelita*

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Although it did not achieve all the intended objectives, the #OcupeEstelita movement left a significant legacy in Recife, Brazil, including the relatively unnoticed inspiration for young architects to organize themselves into urban collectives. These groups sought to explore new forms of action and new territories through emerging collaborative practices such as tactical urbanism. The impact of these collectives' work led to the integration of their methods and members into municipal institutional projects, such as Projeto Parque Capibaribe (PPC) and Mais Vida nos Morros (MVNM). Through interviews with members of local collectives who later became involved in the mentioned institutional projects, we can assess the

motivations, conditions, limitations, and challenges of collaborative practices, as well as the risk of distortion of these emerging practices in addressing the severe infrastructure and urban maintenance deficiencies that characterize Recife.

- 1 Erik Swyngedouw, "Insurgent Architects, Radical Cities and the Promise of the Political," in Japhy Wilson, Erik Swyngedouw, ed., *The Post-Political and Its Discontents: Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 169–188.
- 2 Leslie Sklair, "Social Movements for Global Capitalism: The Transnational Capitalist Class in Action." *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 514–538.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.

1 Introduction

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the emergence of protest movements in various parts of the world. These movements identified that many of the local issues were intricately linked to global economic and political circumstances, such as the excessive commodification of daily life, the dominance of the free market and large corporations in local contexts, and the resulting socio-economic disparities generated by neoliberalism. At that time, there was a fervent belief that these movements could inaugurate a new emancipatory stance, based on the principles of democratization and solidarity.¹

However, after nearly a quarter of this century, we have noticed that in many global contexts, the streets and social media have been divided, if not co-opted, by new insurgents who have shifted the collective agendas in favour of individualism and meritocracy. This article analyses the impact of the first wave of insurgent movements in the city of Recife, Brazil, influencing the formation of groups advocating for the promotion of collective use of public spaces and the democratization of governance through the expansion of participatory decision-making processes.

The proliferation of political voices, characteristic of contemporaneity, results from the transition from a national-international context of capitalism to a transnational/global approach, as proposed by Sklair.² The current reality establishes new actors and hegemonies due to the loss of the centrality of the state as the primary decision maker in economic, political, and cultural-ideological spheres. Sklair suggests that the local effects of contemporary globalization increase the pressure on various actors who now share the responsibility for defining this new decision-making arena, including the state in its various political facets, along with capitalist corporations and the new social, cultural, and ideological representations of society.³

The construction of this new decision-making hegemony results from momentary convergences of interests among these actors. While capitalist corporations are seen as protagonists in this power dynamic, their current hegemony is based on relatively unstable foundations, which lead them to invest considerable resources, time, and energy in maintaining their influence.

Thus, one of the most important ideological actions of large capital is to persuade the general population that their businesses are intimately associated with the interests of society. It is no coincidence that large corporations carefully package their actions with advertising slogans that invoke values of progress and development. In general, they anchor their strategies in co-option, coercion, and even a certain fatalism. They combine the idea of consumerism with the vision of a city that offers unlimited opportunities, imposing a series of supposedly essential reforms to validate their actions and interests, or even prophesying chaos if their purposes are not achieved.⁴

- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Raquel Rolnik, *Guerra dos Lugares*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2019).
- 7 David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution* (New York: Verso, 2012).
- 8 Swyngedouw, *Insurgent Architects*.
- 9 Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2012).
- 10 Naomi Klein, "Reclaiming the Commons," *New Left Review*, 9 (May/June 2001).
<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii9/articles/naomi-klein-reclaiming-the-commons>
- 11 David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), 267.

According to Sklair, capitalist hegemony requires constant support, attention, and originality to sustain itself. They mobilize society through the endorsement of "experts," the mobilization of academic sectors, the co-optation of the press through advertising, and, notably in Brazil, through lobbying in the political environment through electoral financing.⁵

For Rolnik, the great paradox of neoliberal economic globalization is to simultaneously weaken and activate social forces of resistance.⁶ In opposition to the hegemony of large corporations, resistance movements organize themselves organically, without hierarchy, in networks of people with converging interests, albeit not always harmonious. As David Harvey points out, the protest movements have taken on an urban dimension, influenced by the impact of corporate actions on the deterioration of life in cities. Harvey argues that local struggles should focus on the conditions of daily urban life, subjective formation, and the political consciousness of marginalized groups, seeking to build community spaces to strengthen bonds of solidarity and achieve political and social development on a large scale.⁷ Swyngedouw saw in these insurgencies the possibility of a new emancipatory political stance to be developed experimentally, with multiple possibilities for unfolding.⁸

Badiou identifies recurring procedures in insurgent movements, based on the concepts of intensification, contraction, and localization. Intensification refers to the explosion of activities concentrated in an emblematic place that serves to maximize the enthusiasm of the mobilization, encouraging others to join in addressing the issues raised.⁹ Contraction operates through the collective union of heterogeneous individuals. As Naomi Klein defines it, a "movement of many movements" or "coalitions of coalitions." This union, in its diversity and in its way of being-in-common, forms a political actor that condenses and materializes into a political category to be considered by traditional governance spheres.¹⁰ Finally, localization produces intensity, unity, and public presence in front of society because political presence requires being located and active in a public space. Localization has the capacity to establish an existence and reveal an exposure for the possible popularization of the cause.

By opposing institutionalized forms of political organization, insurgent movements argue that current governance forums, such as parliament, advisory chambers, and meeting rooms, primarily serve the interests of an elite privileged class. As Graeber clarifies:

Essentially, the strategy is to create alternative institutions, based on horizontal principles, that have nothing to do with the government, and declare the entire political system to be absolutely corrupt, idiotic, and irrelevant to people's actual lives, a clown show that fails even as a form of entertainment, and try to render politicians a pariah class.¹¹

¹² Swyngedouw, *Insurgent Architects*, 170.

¹³ The result of successive landfills, the major one in the 1940s, the area called Cais José Estelita along the Pina River basin is located immediately south of the centre of Recife and was occupied by port warehouses and railway branches. It is located midway to the valued southern area of the city, formed by the Pina and Boa Viagem neighbourhoods. With the scarcity of lots with sea views in the south zone, this area began to be seen as being of interest to the real estate market.

Although the delegitimization of institutionalized political arenas has proven to be extremely dangerous in the developments of insurgent actions in the early century, the city, the polis, has become the spatial base of insurgent political action. They physically occupied the streets, squares, university campuses, and similar spaces. These movements played a fundamental role in inspiring various movements around the world.

After the characteristic excitement of these insurgent movements subsided, the question that Swyngedouw poses is: “Is there further thought and practice possible after the squares are cleared, the tents broken up, the energies dissipated, and everyday life has resumed its routine practices?”¹²

The #OcupeEstelita movement in Recife, Brazil, responded significantly to this question, as it constituted a relevant example of protest mobilization regarding urban planning and the allocation of strategic areas of the city. It also left numerous legacies, some of which have yet to be properly recognized, such as the encouragement of the formation of urban collectives that managed to influence their work in the public sphere, as will be presented below.

2 The #OcupeEstelita Movement and the Influence on Urban Collectives in Recife

At the beginning of the last decade, Recife found itself embroiled in an intense conflict when a consortium of real estate developers and builders unveiled the real estate project titled “Novo Recife.” This project proposed a radical transformation of José Estelita Wharf, envisioning the construction of twelve towers, each up to forty storeys high, exclusively designated for private use, effectively disconnecting the complex from its surroundings.¹³

The intervention area borders the preserved historical centre of Recife and a significant waterfront area (figure 1). These changes raised concerns about the alteration of Recife’s landscape (figure 2) and triggered the emergence of an organic movement formed by a diverse group of residents and professionals from various fields, including lawyers, urban planners, architects, artists, filmmakers, academics, and students.

This movement, known as #OcupeEstelita, drew clear inspiration from insurgent movements that emerged in other parts of the world and was concurrent with similar actions in other Brazilian cities, all advocating for increased public participation in shaping the future of their cities, such as *Ocupe Cais Mauá* (Porto Alegre/RS), *Ocupe Parque Augusta* (São Paulo/SP), *Ocupe Cocó* (Fortaleza/CE), and *Ocupe Golfe* (Rio de Janeiro/RJ).

The actions of #OcupeEstelita adapted to the different stages of the approval and implementation process of the Novo Recife project. Initially, the fate of the area was discussed behind closed doors and received minimal media attention. In 2008, the visibility around the future of Cais increased when it was announced that the land, owned by Rede Ferroviária Federal S.A. (RFFFSa), would be auctioned. The consortium that acquired the land provided vague information about their plans for the location but



Neighborhoods of Santo Antônio and São José (Recife historic center)

Pina river basin

Railway yard / José Estelita Pier

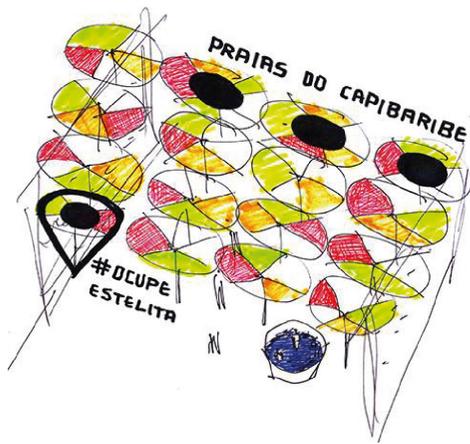
fig. 1 Location of the José Estelita Wharf. (Photo Credit: Hans Von Manteuffel).

fig. 2 Historic centre of Recife and José Estelita Wharf seen from the Pina Basin (Photo: Marcelo Soares_Direitos Urbanos).



emphasized the substantial investment they intended to make, which was celebrated by the municipal government.

The most active public resistance only began in 2012 when the Novo Recife project was unveiled, shocking a segment of society. A protest and festive event held on the boardwalk of the wharf marked the beginning



14 Klein, "Reclaiming the Commons."

of the mobilization, which extended, intermittently, until 2019 (figure 3). During this period, cultural events took place and land occupations were organized to prevent the demolition of existing buildings and the commencement of construction. There was also an occupation of sections of the adjacent railway line, where around 600 families without housing established themselves and continue to reside.

The motivations for occupying the wharf were diverse, reflecting the different purposes and expectations of those involved in the #OcupeEstelita movement. In addition to discussions about the real estate development and potential alternative uses for the land, intangible themes like memory, landscape, preservation, urbanity, and the right to the city permeated the debate. This multiplicity of perspectives illustrates the inherent paradox of protest movements, as pointed out by Naomi Klein.¹⁴

Looking back, we can identify that the #OcupeEstelita movement left a comprehensive legacy. Beyond representing a process of social participation in urban planning, it evolved into a cultural scene centred around urban themes, attracting globally renowned figures and becoming a reference point for social movements across the country. However, it is important to highlight the lingering sense of frustration caused by the defeat in the battle against the approval of the Novo Recife project, particularly among a generation of young people who were coming of age during the wharf discussions.

The debates regarding the fate of José Estelita Wharf serve as an example of the resurgence of urban-focused discussions among Brazilian society in recent years. The need to address specific urban issues over

fig. 3 Record of the participation of the Praias do Capibaribe collective in the first #OcupeEstelita event (Art credit: André Morais/Photo: Marcelo Soares, 2012)

- 15 Silvia Arango, “Una generación de arquitectos jóvenes latinoamericanos: Autorías múltiples y compromiso social,” in Ines Del Piño and Fernando Carrión, ed., *Arquitectura Latinoamericana Contemporánea: identidad, solidaridad y austeridad* (Quito: FLACSO Ecuador—Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, 2021).
- 16 Leslie Sklair, *The Icon Project: Architecture, Cities, and Capitalist Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 256.
- 17 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*.
- 18 Carol Pierina Linares Linares, “CO.LLECTIVOS ¿Entidad o Condición?: (re) significando a los colectivos como prácticas de la arquitectura actual” (master’s thesis, Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2018). https://issuu.com/carolpierina/docs/tfm___colectivos/78

the past decades, such as the redemocratization of the 1980s, economic stabilization in the 1990s, and equity concerns in the 2000s, has diverted the country’s attention from urban debates that had been taking place in the global north since the 1960s. According to Arango, this increased focus on urban themes in Latin America coincided with the emergence of a generation of young people who, organized in collectives, question their role as social actors and choose to act in the gaps left unfilled by the public and private powers.¹⁵ This generation makes a choice in the face of a dilemma highlighted by Sklair: “In a world dominated by capitalist globalization and framed by consumerism, the architect either plays this game or has to be content to work on the fringes (which some, even Pritzker Prize winners, happily do).”¹⁶

In the post-Estelita Recife, numerous groups formed by students and young architects emerged. Disenchanted with the limitations of conceiving only alternative realities, they decided to actively engage in transforming the realities they were immersed in. These groups, such as Arquitetura Faz Bem, AtelierVivo, Coletivo Massapê, CAUS—Cooperativa Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Sociedade, Eu quero nadar no Capibaribe, e você?, Oxe, minha cidade é massa, Praias do Capibaribe, Vaastu, and Vendaval Catalisadora de Impacto Social, are characterized by operating in the voids left by both the public and private sectors, representing a new generation of socially engaged urban questioners. The work of some of these groups will be presented below.

3 The Concept of “Collective” and Its Reverberations in Recife

The umbilical relationship that urban collectives have with insurgent movements makes them both follow very similar procedures, as identified by Badiou (intensification, contraction, and localization).¹⁷

Collectives stand out for their multidisciplinary and horizontal approach, challenging hierarchical structures and not depending on institutional representations such as companies, civil organizations, or social movements. They have a flexible composition with variable members and dedicate their time and effort in a non-monetary and immeasurable manner. They are open to other groups and communities, valuing participatory practices and listening to the individuals, movements, and communities they collaborate with. They operate within a network and are open to new connections based on converging values. In general, they adopt an activist approach, provoking reflections in society and creating tensions within the state by questioning actions and public policies. Their actions are immediate and specific, aiming to address local issues considered urgent by the collective members, filling gaps not addressed by public or private initiatives.¹⁸

André Duarte and Rodrigo Santos present a definition of urban collectives based on the concepts of community (Jean-Luc Nancy,

- 19 André Duarte and Rodrigo Ponce Santos, "A cidade como espaço de intervenção dos coletivos: resistência e novas formas de vida urbana," *Ecopolítica*, 4, (2012): 33–54. <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/ecopolitica/article/view/13059>
- 20 *Ibid.*, 215.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 221.

Roberto Esposito), singularity (Hannah Arendt), and subjectivation (Michel Foucault).¹⁹ This definition aims to understand the unique characteristics of the political mode of operation of these groups, which differentiate them from traditional forms of institutionalized political action. They argue that the notion of community is not established in advance by historical or pre-existing bonds, nor is it formed by the mere union of isolated individuals. It is the shared experience in instantaneous events that constructs the sense of community, established through a commitment to the other and by "sharing a common non-belonging, a common strangeness and singularity."²⁰

Singularity is established when collectives stand out and differentiate themselves from other actors through discourses and practices aimed at addressing an objective reality of the world. Distinction, through the combination of action and discourse, has the capacity to establish new political spaces of discussion with the potential for institutionalization in the future. Subjectivation implies exercises, discourses, and practices by which "a human being becomes a subject" and establishes "forms of resistance to hegemonic powers of normalization and control of conduct in the present."²¹

The combination of these three notions to characterize the phenomenon of urban collectives is summarized in the keywords: common experience, instantaneous events, discourse and practice, and transformation into subject. In a sense, these ideas are present in the accounts of the members of the Recife collectives that will be discussed here when they debate the motivations that led them to develop collaborative work and express the impulses, conditions, and forms of action in carrying out their work.

Many of the architectural collectives in Recife have their origins in universities and consist of undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as teachers or participants in academic extension activities. The reflective environment of Brazilian public universities, especially after the introduction of social quotas, has encouraged both students and teachers to seek an active social presence and to critique the reality around them.

Faced with limited resources for more structured interventions in public spaces, these groups have adopted approaches such as tactical urbanism and placemaking. Tactical urbanism involves local, temporary, agile, and cost-effective interventions aimed at testing solutions for public spaces while inspiring long-term projects. On the other hand, placemaking focuses on enhancing the value of places, considering their specific characteristics and encouraging active community participation in the design and revitalization of these spaces.

However, there are legitimate questions about whether these micro-urbanism actions have the potential to effectively transform the reality of the areas they intervene in, or whether, given the limitations on resources, they can pressure the government to take action.

22 Neil Brenner, "Is 'Tactical Urbanism' An Alternative to Neoliberal Urbanism? Reflections on an exhibition at the MOMA," in Doina Petrescu and Kim Trogal, ed., *The Social (Re) Production of Architecture: Politics, Values and Actions in Contemporary Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 113–128.

Despite being considered emerging urbanism actions, tactical actions are not necessarily opposed to institutional production. According to Brenner, the relationship between tactical and institutional actions can manifest in five distinct ways:²²

- Reinforcement: it fills gaps in governance and their socio-spatial consequences.
- Entrenchment: it internalizes the liberal agenda of reducing the role of public institutions.
- Neutrality: it occurs in interstitial spaces without causing disturbances.
- Contingency: experimentation, under certain conditions, contributes to subverting neoliberal programmes.
- Subversion: it interrupts the development-oriented discourse by incorporating social, democratic, and other intangible demands.

The work of the Coletivo Massapê is a concrete example of these dilemmas. Formed by then architecture students at the Federal University of Pernambuco, the group aimed to apply their academic knowledge to real-life situations. The goal was to complement their professional education by connecting academic theory with tangible changes in everyday spaces.

The group acted by being present in underprivileged areas of the city, seeking to identify demands that could be addressed through micro-urbanism interventions. The choice of these areas was related to the critique of elitist architecture and the realization that institutional interventions often did not fully meet local needs due to a lack of dialogue with the community.

However, due to a lack of training in participatory projects, the group developed its approaches spontaneously, resulting in interventions with varying outcomes. In some situations, the group could not fully engage the local community. However, over time, they understood that these difficulties were common in participatory processes, as each reality has its own dynamics and concerns that may differ from the collective's objectives.

Currently, the group seeks advanced funding for its actions to mitigate the precariousness that marked the beginning of its activities. Through a Caixa Econômica Federal grant, the Coletivo Massapê built a community garden associated with Rioteca, a publicly managed community library in the Santa Luzia neighbourhood of Recife (figure 4). Some years after this intervention, Rioteca's headquarters underwent a requalification process promoted by the MVNM project, with the participation of members of local collectives in an institutional context.

The collective AtelierVivo, in addition to seeking to generate social impact through the revitalization of urban spaces and public facilities, also aims to address gaps in the practical training of young architects. The group originated from the collaboration between an Australian architect, Michael Philips, and local professionals in Recife, with the purpose of



fig. 4 Booklet cover and photographic records of the implantation of the community garden in Santa Luzia, Recife (Coletivo Massapê, 2019).

providing workshops based on an approach they refer to as “Construction Site Pedagogy.”

AtelierVivo acknowledges the existence of a disconnection between the solutions conceived during the design process and the actual execution. According to them, this disconnection is influenced by various factors, including social divisions in Brazil, which often place a higher value on intellectual work compared to manual labour. The lack of direct involvement in the construction process often leads to solutions that may not be the most practical to implement. As a result, architectural design is frequently treated solely as a graphic representation, rather than being seen as an intrinsic step in the construction of an object or space.

To address this issue, AtelierVivo conducts workshops in which the group develops a collaborative process of conceiving and executing artefacts and spaces. During these workshops, critical analyses of the process are carried out with the aim of fostering a more active awareness of the relationship between creation and construction. The goal is for this awareness to be reflected in the future work of the architects involved, promoting a more effective integration between the conceptualization and execution of architectural solutions. One of the notable achievements of AtelierVivo was the revitalization of Peace Square (figure 5), located



fig. 5 Requalification of Praça da Paz in the Santo Amaro neighbourhood, Recife, (AtelierVivo, 2018).

23 Amanda Florêncio de Macêdo and André Moraes de Almeida, “O espaço público frente ao urbanismo tático: o caso das Praias do Capibaribe,” in *Anais do 1º Congresso Internacional Espaços Públicos*. (Porto Alegre, 2015), 19–22. http://inciti.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/O_espaco_publico_frente_ao_urbanismo_tat.pdf

in the Santo Amaro neighbourhood of Recife. This project was carried out as a university extension initiative by the Catholic University of Pernambuco (UNICAP).

The Praias do Capibaribe group is a collective dedicated to transforming urban space through art and ecocitizenship. Its primary goal is to re-establish the connection between the population and the rivers, as well as their banks, in a city that has historically neglected its water bodies. The collective was formed by merging two groups, “Eu quero nadar no Capibaribe, e você?” and “Vaastu,” along with other individuals who share the same environmental concern.²³

The group used to organize periodic events with the purpose of promoting the appropriation of riverside areas, incorporating them into a cultural programme. The aim of these events was to raise awareness among the population about the importance of rivers and encourage civic participation in building a more sustainable and inclusive city. Appropriating the riverbanks allowed for a deeper connection with territories related to river themes, including riverside communities and fishermen. During these events, artefacts such as inflatable bubbles and floating pools were created, providing participants with a simulated experience of enjoying the river (figure 6).



fig. 6 Events of the collective Praias do Capibaribe (Bernardo Teshima, 2014)

- 24 Klein, “Reclaiming the Commons.”; Harvey, Rebel Cities.
- 25 Duarte and Santos, “A cidade como espaço de intervenção dos coletivos.”

The actions of the aforementioned collectives aim to reconcile global agendas with emerging issues in Brazilian society, as discussed by Klein and Harvey.²⁴ These collectives share common characteristics identified by Duarte and Santos, including shared experience, the creation of spontaneous events, the integration of discourse with practice, and the transformation of individuals into active social subjects.²⁵

Based on the interviews conducted, it is possible to identify common motivations among the various collectives consulted. These motivations include reflecting on the role of the architect in a society marked by inequality, the desire to apply the knowledge acquired at the university to make a positive impact on communities, self-perception as social entrepreneurs collaborating with local leaders, criticism of the urban configuration of cities through practical actions, and a focus on the user as a central element in the design process.

To put these motivations into practice, the collectives engage in various actions, such as physically working in disadvantaged areas, getting involved with emerging opportunities and challenges during the process, working in response to unsolicited demands, collaborating with broader networks that share similar interests, mobilizing local stakeholders, adopting a knowledge-sharing-centred working method, creating alternatives

to the complex project-based urbanism model to address urgent issues, and developing intermediate artefacts that facilitate the discussion of relevant issues.

However, the accounts of the collective members also reveal common challenges. This includes the perception that communities have their own dynamics and concerns that do not always align with the collectives' objectives, the difficulty of dealing with disillusioned communities due to unfulfilled historical promises, the challenge of taking on roles and responsibilities that were initially outside their scope to meet the needs of the population, a lack of training to interact with people, working in precarious conditions due to insufficient funding, which highlights the commitment of those involved, the difficulty in accessing resources to implement their actions, and the perception that the value of their work lies in the process itself, something that is not always understood by all funding institutions.

The summary table (figure 7) organizes the challenges faced by the collectives during the development of their work. However, their practices have gained prominence and have been incorporated into institutional projects, as evidenced in the cases of PPC and MVNM, presented below.

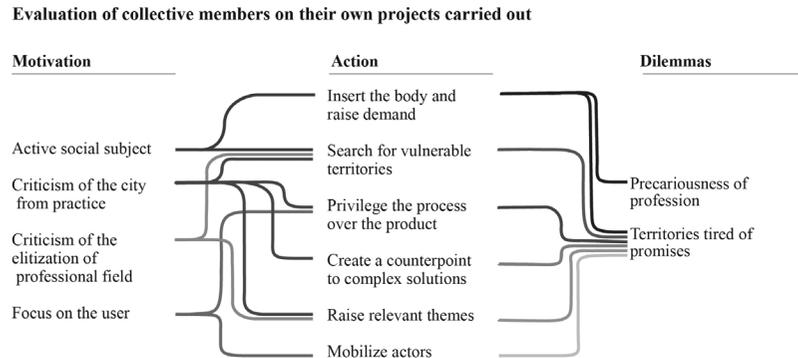


fig. 7 Summary table of the self-assessment by the members of the work carried out as a collective (author)

4 Parque Capibaribe Project (PPC) and Mais Vida nos Morros (MMNV) Embrace Collective Practices

The institutional projects of PPC and MVNM stand out as unique examples of initiatives developed by the municipal government of Recife. These proposals have incorporated innovative approaches to urban activation and prototyping in their efforts to revitalize specific areas of the city, which is relatively uncommon.

26 Circe Maria Gama Monteiro, Luiz Goes Vieira Filho, Roberto Montezuma Carneiro da Cunha, ed., *Parque Capibaribe: A reinvenção do Recife cidade parque* (Recife: Ed. UFPE, 2019).

PPC is the result of an agreement between the Municipality of Recife and INCITI—Research and Innovation for Cities, a multidisciplinary network of researchers coordinated by the Department of Architecture and Urbanism at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). The primary objective is to create a city plan, with the water bodies that characterize Recife as structuring elements. As an offshoot of this plan, the project aims to establish a linear park along the Capibaribe River, covering a 30 km stretch and encompassing forty-two neighbourhoods in Recife, benefiting approximately 445,000 people.²⁶

INCITI aimed to do more than just provide a service; they sought to expand methodological practices by integrating experts in collaborative processes. The presence of groups with experience in participatory urban revitalization allowed INCITI to prototype public furniture and equipment. This approach was designed to assess how the public engaged with these elements, providing guidelines for more enduring interventions in the future.

A concrete case unfolded in the Derby-Capunga neighbourhood, where an extensive process of diagnosis and intervention took place in an area approximately 500 metres from the Maurício de Nassau University, which would be responsible for funding the intervention as part of the mitigation measures for the implementation of its campus. This process culminated in the execution of an International Urban Prototyping Workshop (WIPU) (figure 8).

fig. 8 International Urban Prototyping Workshop (WIPU) carried out by Projeto Parque Capibaribe for an occupation test on the margins of the Derby neighbourhood, Recife (Olívia Leite, 2016)



27 Tullio Ponzi and Carlos Leite, “Urbanismo social com as cores do Recife,” *Revista Piauí*, November 26, 2021. <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/urbanismo-social-com-as-cores-do-recife>

The expansion of the university campus in a neighbourhood known for its residential and commercial character led to conflicts among residents, existing businesses, and the new population drawn to the university. This had visible impacts on public spaces, which began to be occupied by informal commerce and disorganized parking.

The workshop made it possible to address the needs agreed upon by the users of this area of the city. Additionally, it clearly defined the area of public domain along the riverbank, ensuring access and promoting public use of the Capibaribe. These achievements can be integrated into future interventions with a more lasting character.

The MVNM programme, launched in 2015 by the Executive Secretariat for Urban Innovation of the Municipality of Recife, aims to revitalize public spaces and infrastructure in communities located on the city’s hills. The project’s purpose is to value the residents’ leadership through tactical actions that promote urban conservation and reveal suitable places for community interaction.

Initially, MVNM was conceived as a preventive measure for civil defence against disasters and landslides in high-risk areas, involving the implementation of infrastructure for slope containment and stabilization. This is due to the fact that nearly 70% of Recife’s territory consists of hills, which were spontaneously occupied. These preventive measures were complemented by community interventions and engagement, inspired by examples of social urbanism in Colombian cities such as Medellín and Bogotá (figure 9).²⁷

fig. 9 Mais Vida Nos Morros interventions in Córrego Do Jenipapo and Vasco da Gama, Recife (Andrea Rêgo Barros, 2018)



A comparison between these two projects allows for reflection on the adoption of tactical approaches by a public entity, especially in contexts with significant infrastructure deficiencies. In the case of PPC, urban activation was used as a means to mobilize the population and anticipate future urban redevelopment actions in a specific area. Conversely, in the interventions of MVNM, it appears that the results achieved through tactical approaches were the ultimate goal of the redevelopment. This dilemma is expressed in the concerns of the collective members when they take on the role of institutional agents.

The motivation of the collective members involved in the institutional projects was fuelled by the perception that PPC and MVNM represented an opportunity to participate in institutional projects that aimed to overcome the stigma of public actions driven by top-down decisions that deviate from local needs. Furthermore, they saw the chance to operate within broader networks with greater funding potential, enabling them to influence complex processes and understand the challenges of public authorities in connecting with local realities. With such determination, they had the naive ambition to reform public planning structures.

However, as the work progressed, the members encountered internal obstacles within the public administration and realized the predominance of political opinion over technical decisions, which often silenced the voices of the latter. They understood that public authorities follow their own pace and timing. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the importance of urban redevelopment and maintenance actions, even though these actions only managed to reach a limited portion of daily public attention (see summary in figure 10).

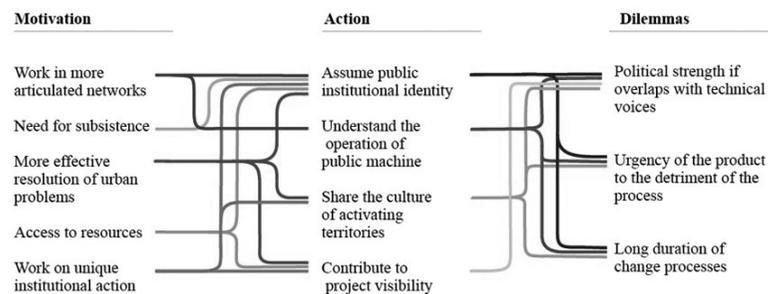


fig. 10 Summary table of self-assessment by collective members as part of institutional projects (author)

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In the past decade, Recife has witnessed the engagement of a young generation in the quest for change in Latin American cities characterized by deficiencies. Through collectives, these young individuals have questioned

the practices of architecture and urban planning, successfully integrating their processes into both public and private institutions.

The examples presented reveal different ways in which the practices of these collectives have been incorporated into institutional projects. We have observed that tactical actions have limited scope, given the specific context in which they are implemented and their experimental nature. Nevertheless, the emerging actions developed by these collectives can play a significant role in revitalizing institutional practices, provided they are executed with care to avoid misinterpretations regarding the role of the state in public services and urban planning.

When comparing the tactical actions of these collectives with institutional projects, it becomes evident that the inclusion of young architects and emerging practices has enabled the public sector to respond more promptly to infrastructure and urban maintenance needs. However, recent disasters, such as the heavy rainfall in the winter of 2022, underscore the need for continuous and sustainable efforts in requalifying underprivileged and vulnerable areas in Recife.

Effective resolution of issues in sensitive areas, such as conservation zones and areas of social interest, requires recognition of the complexity of these challenges. This demands the involvement of qualified multidisciplinary teams and access to appropriate resources. Otherwise, emerging actions, which have the potential to revitalize public action, may be discredited by the population, being seen as electoral or advertising strategies.