

# Schools, territories and cultural affirmation in urban peripheries in the South of Brazil\*

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the contemporary relationship established between schools and territories based on the experiences of school actors working in urban peripheries in the south of Brazil. Founded on the conceptual category of “urban-educational experiences” inspired by the sociology of experience, the study examines and problematizes the political views and sociocultural logics that are present in the pedagogical action of teachers who teach in primary education in schools located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. From the methodological viewpoint, data were built from interviews with 66 selected school actors and were complemented with the analysis of institutional documents. As for results, three analytical perspectives were identified: (a) schools as territories of cultural affirmation through pedagogical actions developed by teachers teaching in the early grades of primary education, who mobilize learning about the history and geography of municipal territories, considering urban contexts marked by inequalities, migration and intercultural encounters; (b) schools as active agents in processes of recognition of cultural heritage, particularly in urban contexts where there is no official heritage listing, registration or other similar governmental procedure; and (c) the school’s permeability to cultural practices developed by independent collectives and community associations dedicated to the political-cultural education of students in urban peripheries.

## Keywords

Schools – Territories – Urban peripheries – Heritage education.

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## Introduction

This article is a development of studies and research that we have been conducting about heritage education policies and practices in the last ten years. In several projects and investigations, we learned about, interpreted and analyzed educational actions connected to cultural policies or cultural heritage recognition programs whose pedagogical centrality was ambivalent, contradictory and plural<sup>2</sup>. Defining their education agendas based on their projects did not always seem possible to us, considering that Brazilian public policy does not institutionalize them properly, private-sector funding is uncertain, and even our intellectual tools are limited.

In studies carried out in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, we found a strong presence of cultural processes linked to Gaucho Traditions Centers (CTGs) and the high status of European immigration as the privileged identity-based narrative, but we also identified several social identification processes in circulation at the regional level, through education and sociocultural actions. In our interpretation, many of these experiences allow us to inquire about territorial belonging and the pedagogical and socio-spatial configurations of the city.

This article aims to analyze the contemporary relationship established between schools and territories based on experiences of school actors working in urban peripheries in the south of Brazil. The discussion proposed is founded on the conceptual category of “urban-educational experiences”, which is inspired by the sociology of experience elaborated by François Dubet and other theoretical developments in the sociology of education (DUBET, 1994, 2011, 2017, 2019; DUBET; MARTUCCELLI, 1996; SORJ; MARTUCCELLI, 2008; MARTUCCELLI, 2010, 2016, 2017), with an interest in examining and problematizing the political views and sociocultural logics that are present in the pedagogical action of teachers who teach in primary education in schools located in Rio Grande do Sul. At the same time, we extend discussions about the school as a sociological category, interpreting it in relation to its social surroundings (ALMEIDA, 2017), its dialectical potential to found the construction of fair schools and cities (DUBET, 2008, 2017; YÚDICE, 2016), and the political recognition of the cultural expressions that are present in Brazilian society (ABREU, 2015).

From the methodological viewpoint, data were built from interviews with selected school actors working in the state, and complemented with the analysis of institutional documents, as described in the following sections.

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**2-** We refer specifically to the following research projects: *Políticas de educação patrimonial no Sul do Brasil: mudanças político-institucionais e agenciamentos culturais* [Heritage Education Policies in the South of Brazil: Political-institutional Changes and Cultural Agency Processes] (FAPERGS, 2012-2014), *Educação patrimonial nas políticas brasileiras de escolarização* [Heritage Education in Brazilian Schooling Policies] (CNPQ, 2013-2015), *Educação patrimonial: atores, políticas e identidades* [Heritage Education: Actors, Policies and Identities] (CNPQ, 2017-2020) and *Políticas de educação patrimonial e experiências urbano-educativas no Rio Grande do Sul* [Heritage Education Policies and Urban-Educational Experiences in Rio Grande do Sul] (FAPERGS, 2018-2021).

## Given the “end of the city”: by way of contextualization

To examine the contemporary relationship between schools and territories, we had to start from a broader sociological diagnosis about the current transformations in urban forms and their main theoretical interpretations. According to Carlos Fortuna (2009), the last decade brought us an inescapable paradox. On the one hand, humanity became, for the first time, predominantly urban, considering that in 2007 about 72.2% of Europeans and 78.3% of Latin Americans were concentrated in cities (in 2005, about 84% of Brazilians lived in areas defined as urban); on the other, the same historical time was marked by countless conceptual frameworks and perspectives that announced the exhaustion of the urban condition and the “end of the city” (FORTUNA, 2009), in view of a wide range of “crises” – environmental, sanitary, political and economic. How to generate policies that ensure quality of life for all, now that we are all urban? How to consolidate processes to tackle inequalities and injustice when theorizations reiterate the incompatibility between reality and ideal or utopian cities? How to analyze cities as a context of production of human life and quality of life?

In the past decades, given these issues, the concepts of city, urbanism, urban, territoriality, territories and urban territories gained centrality in social sciences and humanities research (BRENNER, 2010; BRENNER; SCHMID, 2016; FORTUNA, 2009; HAESBAERT, 2014, 2019; LIPMAN, 2013; TELLES, 2015). Despite their plural and sometimes diverging theoretical origins, these discussions, on the whole, make evident a wide range of reflections about urban forms, and outline the contrasting, heterogeneous, expansive and multiple settings that we generically denominate as a “city” (TELLES, 2015).

The argument of Professor Vera Telles shows the multifaceted dimensions of urban territories and challenges us to define other theoretical categories, considering that the binary oppositions used in our diagnostic approaches – center/periphery, rural/urban, exclusion/inclusion, within/without – decline in their heuristic potential. Besides, it is worth highlighting the impossibility of assuming a substantive notion of City (singular, capitalized) as opposed, in a classical view, to rural, traditional and community. For this reason, it is important to problematize what we have conceptualized as urban territories and their cultural, social, political and economic projects, since thinking about such issues today requires selecting other, new conceptual frameworks. This reflective section aims to delineate some sociological features that configure today’s urban forms, mainly in order to highlight the settings in which the relationship between schools and territories has been taking place.

Telles (2015, p. 20) reiterates complementarily that “[...] the city is not just a context, but an arena where conflicts take place”, since its experienced spaces, structures, social relations and processes are produced through social and political agency. As epistemological developments that steer and found the debate about the social production of urban spaces, Brenner and Schmidt (2016) say that urban and urbanization should be interpreted as theoretical categories, since “urban” does not correspond to a universal form, but to a historical and sociological process. They say that the socio-spatial dimensions of urbanization are polymorphic, variable and dynamic and should be studied based on

their effects of concentration and extension, since urbanization has become a planetary phenomenon that produces constant differentiation.

From the discussion above, it is relevant to retain the understanding of urban phenomena and urbanization as socially produced and the pertinence of elaborating a new vocabulary for studying these themes. This debate exceeds the intellectual and technical activities of architects, urbanists, engineers, sociologists, anthropologists, economists or public agents, and highlights the need for “[...] a new lexicon of urbanization processes and forms of territorial differentiation [...] in order to grasp the unstable, rapidly changing geographies of early-twenty-first-century capitalism” (BRENNER; SCHIMIDT, 2016, p. 334).

A conscientious exam of contemporary urban forms also requires collating the contradictory interfaces between urban policies, citizenship and culture. In the 21st century, “crisis of cities” is an idea that predominates in urban policies and projects (JACQUES, 2004; VAZ, 2004; JEUDY, 2006), which entails the emergence of interventions whose goals can be summarized in verbs like “to revitalize”, “to repair”, “to correct”, “to intervene”, “to renovate” or “to pacify”. According to Jacques (2004), there is the predominance, in our country, of “urban spectacularization” projects in which cities become large sceneries for real estate developments, while also producing new geographies of centrality, expulsion and marginality (SASSEN, 2006). Particularly in the Brazilian case, this urbanistic movement has intensified processes of gentrification and expulsion of poor black populations from the areas they inhabited, which reinforced the persistence of class and racial inequality in the implementation of public policies for cities, thus accelerating the displacement of people towards peripheries and aggravating social exclusion. Ermínio Maricato (2009) defines such structural dynamics typical to Brazilian societies as “territorial exclusion”.

As elaborated in the analytical contribution of Carlos Fortuna, it is not just a matter of changes in urban forms, including those changes that allow the hypothesis of the “end of the city”; it is mainly a matter of transformations in every cultural expression that a city comprises. In order to address the encounter between schools and territories, we must seek the “non-city” (FORTUNA, 2009, p. 94), “[...] urban areas in downturn or abased, as historical-monumental landscapes, spaces in decay and in ruins, the neighborhoods, the marginal zones, the vacant lots and the generalities of (sub)urban landscapes”. Likewise, Michel Agier (2015) suggests thinking about the condition of “out-of-place people” and the policy of precarious spaces, in which he summarizes his ethnographic experience in refugee camps and migrant settlements. Therefore, cities and urban forms must be collated not only with fixedness and stability elements, but also with their heterogeneities, instabilities, displacements, mobilities and peripheries<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, it is important to reflect about the ways in which the territory asserts itself as an analytical referent in studies about education, policies and citizenship on a global scale. According to Barroso (2013), the local space has taken on a “mythical” position in the context of political actions for education in the last two decades.

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**3-** According to the UN International Migration Stock (2019), the number of international migrants totaled 272 million people in 2018, a significant increase of 51 million compared to 2010 data. In relative terms, it corresponds to 3.5% of the world's population.

The local is viewed at once as the place of application, participation, interdependence and concurrence, in the confrontation between such distinct logics as those that try to preserve the state's role and action, through the territorial contextualization of policies and through encouragement of its modernization, and those that aim to demean it, from a neoliberal perspective. (BARROSO, 2013, p. 14).

Barroso (2013) still emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the various meanings, logics and intentionalities present in territorialization, but also the importance of examining whether this rhetoric (democratic involvement of communities, recognition of territorial resources and greater decisory power at the local level) is compatible with governments' political action. In the Brazilian case, Pedro and Stecanela (2019) report that since the 1988 Constitution there is an ambivalent presence of the idea of educational territory<sup>4</sup> in our legal framework. They reiterate that this idea plays a key role in the articulation of proposals of school reorganization and of new forms of learning, and is associated with cross-sector approaches and the concept of a well-rounded education, though in a discontinuous way. The Programa Mais Educação [More Education Program] (2007-2016), which is configured as a public policy that promotes a well-rounded education, was clearly based on a logic of pedagogical affirmation of territories, thus coming close to the idea of an educative city. However, most of the well-rounded education policies and practices that concretized this tendency are carried out at the municipal level, and it is worth highlighting those policies and practices that involve a pedagogical occupation of areas of the city in combination with artistic interventions and cultural affirmation in peripheries.

This concise sociological diagnosis provides us important foundations to collate the social and pedagogical character of the schools-territories dyad in Brazil. Despite the distinctions above, in the following sections of this article we adopt a perspective on territory that is anchored in social actors' cultural and identity experience and in the social and political relations (the power dimension) that inform their multiple relations (HAESBAERT, 2014).

## **Urban-educational experiences: theoretical foundations and methodological paths**

We can see in studies of sociology of education a tendency towards inflections to the individual level of life in society. The processes of singularization of individuals (MARTUCELLI, 2010, 2016, 2017), their social and school experiences (DUBET, 1994; DUBET; MARTUCELLI, 1996), the biographical models and standardized individualization processes (BECK, 2011), the reflection and the construction of post-traditional societies (GIDDENS, 1991) or the relationship between socialization and individualization (SETTON, 2016) are conceptual discussions that illustrate this intellectual orientation. Despite assigning centrality to the individual, these authors and their theories cannot be said

**4-** It is worth highlighting that the notion of educational territory comprises various analytical perspectives and variants of political interpretation. Oliveira and Saraiva (2015) provide an explanation about its emergence as a locus of educational policies for populations in poverty and social vulnerability in Brazil.

to converge or to have many interpretations in common. However, one can observe a sensitive concern with social actors' singularities and a cognitive attention to geographic scales closer to individual experiences and practices.

The notion of "urban-educational experiences" that we developed is analytically derived from the concept of experience (DUBET, 1994), recreating it in order to think about territory and cultural heritage. According to Dubet, it is a concept that refuses the classical conceptions of action that used to identify totally the social actors and the system through "strong" socialization processes. In the last few years, a relative separation seems to predominate between actors and system, considering the crisis of various institutions that used to converge to form human socialization (e.g., the state and the school); besides, a decline has been observed in the conceptual approaches that defined "social beings" based on their integration into a stable and predefined society<sup>5</sup>. The concept of experience makes clear that actors adopt multiple logics of action rather than single programs in the construction of their social life, and their actions are not identifiable with social roles in a unilateral way.

The sociology of experience seeks to understand actions endowed with meaning and how such meanings are built. Dubet (1994) reiterates the heterogeneity of the social and cultural principles that guide human conduct, and he explains that social identification (identities) arises from a permanent work, a "commitment of the self". Given the incompleteness of our socializing processes, the social experience is marked by two contradictory phenomena: the perspective of personal subjectivity (evident in the understanding of experience as a "way of feeling") and the constructivist perspective of experienced realities (derived from the understanding of experience as a "cognitive activity").

[...] actors do not live in immediate adherence or pure witnessing, since they always rebuild some distance from themselves. The reflective work is all the more intense when individuals find themselves in situations that are not totally codified and predictable. (DUBET, 1994, p. 106).

In our view, "urban-educational experiences" can be interpreted through the sociocultural processes through which social actors produce their identification and belonging (ways of feeling) and build the urban realities they inhabit (cognitive activities). The ways in which social actors engage in pedagogical actions can highlight important dimensions of these experiences, since by problematizing their (urban) territories and outlining them pedagogically, based on an intervention, they inquire about themselves (experience) and the socio-spatial conditions of the city. Such conceptual orientation highlights the various contradictions and dilemmas that constitute the contemporary urban condition and the policies that inform collective life in cities – interpreted as polymorphic, variable and dynamic (BRENNER; SCHMID, 2016).

This is a qualitative methodological construction (WELLER; PFAFF, 2013) that recognizes the production of knowledge through an interlocution between the researcher and the interviewees, and the interview is assumed to be a reflective experience for both.

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**5-** For a broader discussion of this process, see Tiramonti (2005), Setton (2005) and Dubet (2006).



Based on the construction of narrative data, the researcher was able to understand the logics in the production of the meanings assigned by the actors to the processes they experience (KAUFFMAN, 2013) and to the conditions for their social action (DUBET, 1994). In the course of this analysis, we considered that “[...] the investigation of the material should be active and productive” (KAUFFMAN, 2013, p. 120), since the object is permanently rebuilt and results from the contradictory and continuous movement of hypothesis formulation aimed at understanding the investigated reality. From the operational perspective, we followed experiences of school actors working in urban peripheries in Rio Grande do Sul. By school actors we understand every individual who has a professional or personal relationship with an education institution: teachers, school managers, municipal managers, students, their families, volunteers or community leaders engaged in some school-related project. In the project’s broad context, the school experiences are selected based on the following criteria: (a) time in existence of the activity, institution or project; (b) link with a community project; (c) consistency in educational propositions; (d) educational activities and communication with school and non-school experiences; (e) the school’s socio-spatial location.

In this analysis, we will collate data from an interview instrument used with 66 teachers working in municipal schooling, mainly those who teach in the early grades of primary education. We prioritize the reports and accounts of those teachers because they have the curricular responsibility for teaching about municipal territories. All interviews were recorded and their contents were transcribed.

Complementarily, we conducted the following: (a) reading and analyzing institutional documents that guide schools’ pedagogical action (municipal curricular guidelines, municipal territory guidelines, pedagogical frameworks); (b) photographing the investigated activities during visits to schools; (c) searching local newspapers, magazines or official websites for information about the investigated processes; and (d) collecting institutional material that publicized projects or institutions engaged in some way in the studied phenomena.

## **Schools and territories: analyses of experiences**

I think it’s important... it’s something that involves a lot here in our reality, those with grandparents of Italian descent, but I wonder, why not the others? Why not work on the other cultures, other migrations? Why that’s not looked at as much? There’s much about Italians, but now that the school is opening up, we’re also talking about the Swedish, with a museum, we’re also talking about Africans, blacks came over here, to our city, how they were received... and those of German descent, there’s much less said about these groups, but we say something about them. Farroupilha is not just the result of Italians! (Isaltina, a teacher in the early grades in Farroupilha, RS).

I think that, for the future, what we need is people who are qualified to understand and serve different cultures. Like I always say, we’re discriminated against even in a glance, even a word can hurt a person. That’s why I always say that we, as teachers, educators, we need to know the cultures to work with them. (Konhko, a Kainkang teacher in São Leopoldo, RS).

The cultural, social and economic transformations seen in the beginning of the 21st century required transformations in terms of public policies and pedagogical actions with a similar orientation. Such changes accompanied social metamorphoses on various scales, particularly the intensification of struggles over identity-related demands of actors, collectives and organized movements; cultural massification and a strong presence of international media, considerably related with the digitalization of communicational forms (YÚDICE, 2015); transformations in the cultural semantics of international organizations and agencies; the public emergence of new collectivities who figure as new rights-holders (ABREU, 2015); and the strengthening of new meanings assigned to heritage and to the recognition of cultural heritage. In the Brazilian case, the milestone in this transformation was the Programa Cultura Livre [Living Culture Program], under the political leadership of Gilberto Gil, which allowed for greater plurality in the agenda of educational and cultural policies (SILVA, 2013, 2014, 2015).

Given these political and intellectual facts, in the last four years we carried out an intensive immersion in following heritage education policies in the micro-region of Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, with interesting dynamics of recognition of cultural heritage. We found that heritage education is much more a pedagogical practice carried out by teachers and school communities than a category capable of mobilizing projects, programs or another form of governmental policy, even in cities that have heritage listing or other official procedures. We define heritage education as a sociopolitical tool for intervention in collective life, to the detriment of its classical definitions associated with awareness raising or literacy about heritage and culture (SILVA, 2017). Inspired by the thought of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2001), we affirm that:

[...] heritage education operates not only in the sphere of conservation of so-called heritage of a given social formation, but it produces, reproduces and auto-reproduces social and pedagogical processes that form society itself and, through it, its heritage. Thus, much more than safeguarding, heritage education produces the local. (SILVA, 2017, p. 29).

This fact redirected our investigation efforts and drove us to learn about and analyze the engagement of social actors in projects and policies aimed at cultural education and heritage education in urban contexts. The experiences we followed revealed characteristics of these space-times: they are predominantly instituted by school actors' individual agency, and seldom by projects at the school or education system level; they occur in public schools and are mainly conducted by teachers who teach in the early grades of primary education, third and fourth grades, when the city or the municipal territory becomes school content; they are capable of dialoging with diversity themes, but are countered by conservative school dynamics and unequal, unfair and discriminatory social contexts; while they recognize the need to overcome the official framing of memories (POLLAK, 1989), they report limits to establishing intercultural communication in our school experiences.

The accounts of Isaltina, who teaches in the early grades in Farroupilha, and of Konhko, who taught at a Kainkang school in São Leopoldo, which figure as epigraph



to this section, are markers of this sociocultural perspective. In the case of the former, Farroupilha is one of the cradles of Italian immigration in the state, and the municipal curriculum orientation presents the city from a unidimensional perspective, a common phenomenon to the entire region (SILVA, 2020). Through the celebration of Italian traditions, there is a territorialization of educational actions and a promotion of municipal cultural heritage, but this discussion eclipses the physical and symbolic presence of other collectivities, other origins and other roots. Isaltina is a fourth grade teacher, and her questions need to be contextualized in a multicultural class, not least because of the presence of immigrants, migrants and refugees in her classroom, such as northeastern and Amazonian Brazilians, Senegalese and Haitians. How to discuss the municipality's history and geography without producing a monocultural narrative? How to teach humanities in the early grades, considering multiple contextualizations, senses of belonging and identities? How to teach about "the city"?

The latter account is even more emblematic. Josme Konhko Fortes was a community leader and an important Kaingang educator in São Leopoldo. Konhko was the first indigenous student to graduate from Unisinos, but sadly he died in May 2020, a few months after earning his degree in Pedagogy. His account reveals the challenges of intercultural communication in the contemporary school, not only by problematizing the precarious position assigned to indigenous identities in Brazilian society, but also by highlighting that the school needs, in addition to valuing identities, territories and heritage, to intensify intercultural processes by dissolving monoidentities, as proposed by Néstor García Canclini (2006).

The two accounts move us to further reflection about the relationship between schools and territories, in connection with three analytical perspectives.

### **Schools as territories of cultural affirmation, identification and cultural learning**

So, the first activity I did was to think with them whether all schools are the same all over the world. Then I selected images of several places to work with children and open space for Lucas to talk about what it was like in Haiti, what was different about their school, what was the same, and the children could also talk about their experience in schools here, and there were students who came from state schools. So, they could talk about what was the same and different. And at the same time, the images I brought helped them widen their thought and repertoire about what schools could be like. That day, I also worked with vocabulary from the Haitian school, how to say "teacher", "student" and "material". (Ana, a teacher in Porto Alegre).

In the school there are more than 50 foreign children, considering Haitians, Senegalese and Venezuelans. When they arrived in Brazil, the UN helped out for a while, until they were adapted. Leaving their country is not being easy for them, many are facing hardship. (Maria, a teacher in Porto Alegre).

The excerpts above are rich in evidence that the relationship between schools and territories is currently in displacement. Imagining a school that educated for citizenship was correlated with

a single meaning of territory and national identity, which allowed the school to take on roles of reproducing the state's symbolic order. The school was an important symbolic marker of cultural standardization, both in its political and its curricular and knowledge selection dimension (DUBET, 2011), and it reinforced monoidentity and monocultural presuppositions (CANCLINI, 2006; SILVA, 2015).

When a school serves 50 students from different countries, for a number of reasons, as it has been occurring in the Porto Alegre metropolitan area, its pedagogical practices become anchored in different territorialities. According to data from the 2019 School Census, 23.7% of municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul have students who are international refugees, totaling 2,302 students – 444 of whom are in Porto Alegre (OLIVEIRA, 2020). The work of teachers in the early grades (which concentrate most of enrollments) is affected by this new reality, and indeed the teaching of humanities is now being problematized in a number of ways. Which history to teach? Which geography to teach? How to discuss the municipal territory as a single “territory”, mainly in the third and fourth grades of primary education, when the city becomes an object of knowledge?

In the last decade, studies about the teaching of humanities in primary education have been exhibiting significant transformations in its cultural, territorial and identity aspects (GORZIZA, 2017). Pereira and Gomes (2019), in researching about the production and circulation of culture through the boundaries of the Xakriabá indigenous school, in Minas Gerais, identified the existence of culture teachers – indigenous teachers who are responsible for reinventing the school's place, a place of circulation of their culture and of “culture”. Their experience shows new frameworks and new cultural representations present in the encounter between schools and territories, and rediscusses to some extent the role of the school as an active territory of cultural and identity affirmation. It allows us to discuss the universal meanings that are present in the reproduction-oriented logic that constitutes traditional interpretations of the school, since “[...] each Kakriabá school, as a social construction that, even immersed in a wide-ranging historical movement, is always a local and particular version of that movement” (PEREIRA; GOMES, 2019, p. 5).

From this perspective, each school recreates (or cocreates) territorial and identity relations that provide possible conditions for pedagogical action, now reinforcing a semantics that re-signifies memories and cultural traditions, now intensifying marginalization and social inequality processes. The classroom becomes an environment open to more or less democratic meanings, and one of the factors that most influences the effectiveness of a pedagogical action are teachers' previous experiences or their community engagement.

“The girl from the Dominican Republic came to my class in the middle of the term, and I had no training to receive her, they simply told me that I'd have a student, and they put her in my classroom the same day”. Thus Julia, a teacher, begins her account on how the school finds the new territorial delineations in her classroom. How to conduct cultural transmission in unstable territories? How to pedagogically consider the urban-educational experiences produced in particular experiences in periphery communities? How to begin a class with a Dominican student in the early grades of primary education?

Even if she had suitable training and a track record in social projects, various pedagogical dilemmas still laid ahead for Júlia's pedagogical practices in Porto Alegre. Territorial and global geopolitical transformations became inscribed in her work environment. What cultural elements is she to found her initiatives on? How to relate her professional activities and the (new) cultural elements effervescing in the territories?

Konhko, Isaltina, Ana, Maria and Júlia are teachers teaching in the early grades in Rio Grande do Sul whose experiences and track records reveal plural and contradictory pedagogical logics and principles. Contextualizing and problematizing their pedagogical actions, their agendas, their affirmation, their senses of belonging and their territorialization are challenges to pedagogical studies in the 21st century.

### **Schools as active agents of recognition of cultural heritage**

Ana is a teacher of humanities in a state school located in Vila Cruzeiro, in the south of Porto Alegre. She has been teaching history, sociology and philosophy for 20 years in the periphery of the state's capital, and has developed several pedagogical projects informed by understanding of the role of the black population in Brazil and in Rio Grande do Sul.

The most conventional notions of cultural heritage show little sensitivity to African-Brazilian and indigenous heritage. It was not until the turn of the 21st century that these populations began to demand state recognition of their cultural expressions as cultural heritage (ABREU, 2015). Nevertheless, the teacher started several actions aimed at a pedagogical presentation of the history and culture of these collectivities, based on the premise that "Africa is viable as a process of knowledge", as she stresses in her account. In 2010, she started the Tomando Consciência [Growing Aware] program, which aimed to redirect her school's curriculum ("in an African-centered way"), affirm the cultural diversity present in the school's surrounding area and in the municipality, and produce reflection-conducive environments in the classroom. This pedagogical action was initiated in the beginning of the second school semester, discussing various possibilities of answering the question, "Black person, what is your face?", and it culminated in the Black Awareness Week, in November. Participants conducted research and held fairs and exhibitions about the lives of black young people and women from a periphery perspective, encompassing experiences that reflected about black youth in the poorest areas in the state's capital.

According to the teacher, "the student knows that they are excluded", but it is necessary to produce new senses of territorial belonging, and the school can enable pedagogical experiences capable of affirming and recognizing identities, territories and heritage anchored in diversity. Vila Cruzeiro is home to many black and indigenous people, however, until 2005, the school's curriculum and pedagogical practices had little dialogue with these populations, and school drop-out was common among them. From then on, various processes took place at the institution, in particular the curriculum reorganization based on Laws No. 10639/2003 and No. 11645/2008, which enabled the inscription of "Africa" in humanities teaching plans. Ana highlights that her teaching of history develops an African-centered core, because she believes in the affirmation of African-centered

education and cultural heritage. To enhance their discussions and the education of her students, she establishes various partnerships with community-engaged intellectuals and higher education students, with the Levante Popular da Juventude, the UFRGS' Coletivo Negra-Ação and other political-cultural collectives in the city. In a previous work (SILVA, 2018), we found the affirmation of schools' active role in heritage recognition processes, since school actors become heritage recognition agents in Brazilian municipalities, particularly in the ones that lack listing or registration procedures by official heritage agencies, in order to avoid the "social death" of much heritage (VALECILLO). There is a potent intertwining between heritage, identities and senses of belonging that contextualize citizenship relations and the valuing of cultural manifestations and expressions. While on the one hand, the implications between territory, community interests and identities cannot be ensured, on the other, they underpin contextualized pedagogical processes and local development dynamics that mobilize community actors (FERNANDES, 2015).

### **The school's permeability to cultural practices developed in the territories**

The margin produces it, but that's not recognized as heritage in itself, but even though that production is immaterial, slam is something really present in Caxias. [...] Periphery folks predominate in the hip-hop movement, it has really caught on in the school and it does a lot of grassroots work. [...] The Caxias periphery is where you see an outpouring of culture, you have graffiti, slam, singing is really booming lately. (Cláudia, Caxias do Sul).

In our field activities in the region of Caxias do Sul, we identified another perspective that needs to be considered in analyzing the relationship between schools and territories. There is a key relationship with independent cultural collectives and social organizations dedicated to the cultural education of students in urban peripheries, with a more or less systematic connection with the school agenda. Such relationship, in the scope of our investigation, allows us to understand the "non-city" (FORTUNA, 2009), i.e., those marginalized individuals, groups or cultural expressions that make evident the unfair logics of contemporary cities, and to address sociocultural logics that are present in schools' pedagogical action.

Originating from rap and other elements of global culture, slam is a cultural expression that represents the voice of collectivities residing in urban peripheries; it consists in "battles" of rhyme and spoken word poetry. It arrived in Brazil in the 2000's, through the work of Roberta Estrela D'Alva with the ZAP! Slam (ZAP being the acronym for Zona Autônoma da Palavra [Autonomous Word Zone]) in the city of São Paulo (NASCIMENTO; MOREIRA, 2020).

In slam there are a few simple rules to join the spoken battles: the poetry must be auctorial, memorized or read on spot; up to three minutes long; no costume, scenery or musical instrument allowed; five judges are picked at random from the audience, who will grade performances from 1 to 10; the performer with the highest grade wins. (NASCIMENTO, MOREIRA, 2020, p. 120).

According to the authors, there are estimated to be around 150 slam communities in Brazil. With a language of equality and empowerment, slam can also be interpreted as a political education tool, since its agenda highlights themes like feminism, negritude, LGBTQIAP+ people, traditional communities, anti-capitalism, etc. In Porto Alegre, the Slam das Minas was created in 2016, followed by Slam Peleia and Slam RS.

What interests us here is how this way of expression allows its participants to narrate their own experiences. In Caxias do Sul, we met the Slam das Manas, in Parque Getúlio Vargas, a group of college-educated women living in this periphery area and engaged in cultural projects. From our contact with them, we understood that periphery, like the notion of territory, must be collated as a cultural and identity construction whose meanings are linked to pedagogical expressions and political and socioeconomic conditions. Their narratives express the idea of city as arena, as discussed by Vera Telles (2015).

[...] what we try hard is for people to understand that slam cannot be brought to school only as entertainment. It must be adopted as a continuing project. A few spaces are already opened to this type of language, the kids are already proposing this type of didactics with history teachers, who realize that the kids understand what they're experiencing, that they are able to question and write about it. How many disciplines can you identify in slam?! If you check it out in practice, there are so many stories... In slam, you're thinking about geography, Portuguese, you can work on several topics! (Cláudia, Caxias do Sul).

[...] it is a form of education that is much more ancestral, with its roots coming from Africa. Hip-hop has a strong influence on slam, and there's no denying that there is something that makes us believe in orality as a way also of education, of teaching, but in an education founded on the stance of those who are not usually heard and now believe they can speak up. This basis that underpins slam presents itself as another possibility of educating people, since they come to believe that they have something to exchange. We believe in education as an exchange, rather than a one-way movement, it comes from the student and from who is teaching them. It is through this orality that this education takes place [...]. (Polliana, Caxias do Sul).

The school can become a permeable space to the cultural narratives of territories, problematizing and expanding conceptions of cultural heritage, and becoming anchored in learning created and mobilized by school actors in its surroundings. Our cities are constituted by plural, heterogeneous and contradictory experiences that cannot be reduced to items displayed in a predetermined collection, as Néstor Canclini (2015) puts it in his arguing for the “decollection” of cultural manifestations. Decollecting implies an attitude of epistemological, political and sentimental openness to other cultural expressions, without necessarily searching for authenticity or forms of essentialism, but recognizing the plural fabric of life, culture and the school. Decollecting is recognizing other temporalities and spatialities and pedagogically aiming at other and new senses of territorial belonging.

## Final considerations

We centered the arguments presented in this article in the concept of urban-educational experiences. Such methodological choice required us to compose a mosaic of actors, situations and educational experiences in which we found the production of a contemporary relationship established between schools and territories. The experiences of school actors working in urban peripheries in the south of Brazil highlight logics, interests and perspectives of action in the pedagogical field.

We identified that, in periphery contexts, the school can be an environment of cultural affirmation, capable of countering the single meanings of culture, memory, heritage and nation. The school, in relation to its surroundings, is interpreted as an open space of plural narratives, and an affirmative field for heterogeneous democratic demands (DUBET, 2011, 2017, 2019).

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