Already a key component of sustainable development policies, the alleviation of inequalities within and between countries also stands as a policy goal, and deserves to take centre stage of the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed during the Rio+20 Summit in 2012. The 2013 edition of A Planet for Life represents a unique international initiative grounded on conceptual and strategic thinking, and – most importantly – empirical experiments, conducted on five continents and touching on multiple realities. This unprecedented collection of works proposes a solid empirical approach, rather than an ideological one, to inform future debate. The case studies collected in this volume demonstrate the complexity of the new systems required to accommodate each country’s specific economic, political and cultural realities. These systems combine technical, financial, legal, fiscal and organizational elements with a great deal of applied expertise, and must be articulated within a clear, well-understood, growth- and job-generating development strategy. Inequality reduction does not occur by decree; neither does it automatically arise through economic growth, nor through policies that equalize incomes downward via blind taxing and spending. Inequality reduction involves a collaborative effort that must motivate all concerned parties, one that constitutes a genuine political and social innovation, and one that often runs counter to prevailing political and economic forces.
rio de Janeiro is geographically compressed into a narrow strip between sea and mountains, which strongly determines its physical expansion and population growth. The extensive modernization of the country, which began in the twentieth century and intensified in the 1930s, means that the city has grown through two competitive processes of territorial occupation. The boundaries of the city were stretched by the construction of mass housing settlements in previously suburban areas (Santos and Bronstein, 1979). These speculative and largely illegal projects have left the new owners in a precarious situation both legally and socially (Fisher, 2008; Gonçalves, 2010; Magalhães, 2010). The fragile nature of ownership rights in these areas was accompanied by a limited or non-existent supply of public services, the new owners finding themselves obliged to pressurize public agencies to acquire these services (see many references, among which: Ribeiro, 1982; 1997; Ferreira dos Santos, 1979). It was in this way that the peripheries of Rio were established, and they today remain characterized by countless forms of illegality and a limited number of public services. Their management has been entrusted to a new dedicated administrative body (the “município”, one of the three levels of the Brazilian federation). Despite their demographic weight and the many conflicts that have beset them, these mass settlements have never figured prominently on Brazil’s public agenda.

In parallel, spaces within the conventional inner urban area that had been neglected because of high construction costs, started to attract the interest of the population and then of small developers. Gradually, the property market began to incorporate these spaces, which had previously been regarded as unsuitable for construction. Despite the lack of an organized collective movement, buildings that were erected by the people with the support of small informal entrepreneurs and some branches of formal activity began to be established on these areas within the heart of the urban space. These buildings became the subject of growing interest from conventional developers, due to the emergence of new construction technologies and new ways of valorization.

While the two processes have coexisted since the 1940s, the issue of favelas has eclipsed that of the suburbs in public debates. This is partly explained by historical reasons, but also by the evocative use of language, and in particular, the powerful imagery conveyed by the word “favela”.

A historical representation

Three main stages can be distinguished in the evolution of the concept of favelas and therefore, in the way that the authorities have approached the issue of government intervention in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

When favelas appeared in the early 1920s, despite the beginning of industrialization, the city was still essentially a colonial warehouse. At that stage, favela inhabitants were not yet sufficiently organized to have any influence on policies that might affect them. Their physical presence in the city was subject to access restrictions. Considered simply as insalubrious squatter settlements, as slums that should be eliminated and as a health and aesthetical problem, favelas were only of marginal interest to councilors. In the early 1930s, with the election of Getúlio Vargas as President, a new era of industrialization began, based on the idea of import substitution. While modernization
programmes began to be launched in Rio de Janeiro, the situation and the fate of the favelas moved into the public arena, with profoundly different ideas emerging on the policy responses that should be designed.

Following the end of the Second World War and the re-democratization of the country in 1945, two forces favourable to the favelas appeared. “Developmentalism” was the new dominant ideology of that period, which caused high economic growth accompanied by an increase in the demand for labour, which thereby strengthened the political power of workers. The two most important political forces of that time — the church and the communist party — were diametrically opposed. The debates and conflicts between the two were particularly apparent in the favelas, where they fostered a vast public grassroots movement. In this way, these physical locations became a symbol and the favelas entered into the public sphere, first through inhabitant associations, and then through the federation of these groups. With local variations (clientelism, revolutionary radicalism, reformism), the political emergence of the favelas was enhanced by the strong economic and demographic growth of the city. This trend towards inclusion and political normalization extended into the 1970s; eventually being brought to an end by the crisis that followed the first oil shock.

Public debate on the favelas centred on the productivity of migrants (which was criticized for being low or zero) and how they fitted into the city, i.e. mainly through the so-called informal economy. After a short period during which the State claimed it was making changes to urban governance, the military took power in 1964.
and the debate on favelas changed. Political organizations suffered severe repression. The only question still debated was housing. Two opposing interventions were proposed: “remoção” – the displacement of people to the outskirts of the city; and “urbanization” – the improvement of urban facilities and buildings in areas occupied by favelas (Machado da Silva, 1967, 2002; Lima, 1989; Fisher, 2008). All conflicts around issues of social cohesion, including those relating to the favelas, were only able to grow within the narrow repertoire of the claiming of rights.

With the economic crisis of the 1970s, the issue of favelas changed in the way it was perceived. It became part of the fight against the military government and the refusal to submit to violations of civil and political rights – a fight that was partly sustained by the middle class victims of repression. Then, in the 1980s, the government used the preservation of public order as an excuse to renge on the acquired rights. A “discourse on urban violence” then emerged (Machado da Silva, 1995, 1999, 2010a, 2011) that emphasized the risks that city inhabitants had to face in daily life. Crime and violence were no longer considered as interstitial but as everyday realities that were increasingly making invasions into all areas of life. This discourse endowed the notion of the favela with an evocative and powerful symbolism. Violent crime and its daily repression by the police became the central, and relatively autonomous, subject of public attention.

The violence began to be decentralized with the emergence of various forms of private police and armed criminal groups. The government received criticism for its inability to control areas that fell under the influence of drug traffickers. Militarization was increasingly regarded as the only way to preserve public order on a daily basis (Leite, 2001), profoundly transforming the perception of the favela as a collective problem (Machado da Silva, 2008).

In 2008, a policy to maintain urban order, which received

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**Figure 2: A political focus on violence**

Over the past 15 years, Rio’s annual homicide rate has significantly declined, even though the national rate has continued to increase and the absolute number of homicides per year remains very high: in 2010 there were 1,535 homicides in Rio de Janeiro and 49,932 in Brazil.
full public support, began to be implemented in Rio. This approach, which is still militarized, involves Pacifying Police Units (UPP) which are designed specifically for intervention in the favelas. This approach seems to have reduced the number of deaths caused by armed clashes between rival drug traffickers, and between traffickers and the police, although the homicide rate had already been in decline well before the implementation of this policy. It is worth noting, however, that these results have had little impact on the perception of violence by the city’s inhabitants. In 2010, the UPPs were strengthened by the “Social UPP” state scheme (which was a way to acknowledge the brutal nature of the conventional UPP). The aim of the Social UPP is to promote access to full citizenship for the people living in favelas.

From the word to the socially invented representation

Historically, the word “favelas”, which describes interstitial inner periphery settlements and examples of uncontrolled development in Rio de Janeiro’s urban area, has been associated with specific social groups, a certain type of architecture, along with a number of physical and ecological characteristics. It also refers to a type of economy, or socio-economic and politico-cultural processes. This characterization, in the choice words of Valladares (2005), is a socially invented representation that is continually renewed. However, this depiction has not developed as a myth, as suggested by Valladares, but rather as a key reference in the evolution of urban forms. The term has territorialized the debate on the city’s social integration problems. The strength of the favela does not lie in its ability to embody a reality that is both nearby and concealed. Instead, it comes from its ambiguous semantics and its polysemy, which give it the virtues of a political arena and the weapons of an object of struggle. ■

REFERENCES


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The case studies collected in this volume demonstrate the complexity of the new systems required to accommodate each country’s specific economic, political and cultural realities. These systems combine technical, financial, legal, fiscal and organizational elements with a great deal of applied expertise, and must be articulated within a clear, well-understood, growth- and job-generating development strategy.

Inequality reduction does not occur by decree; neither does it automatically arise through economic growth, nor through policies that equalize incomes downward via blind taxing and spending. Inequality reduction involves a collaborative effort that must motivate all concerned parties, one that constitutes a genuine political and social innovation, and one that often runs counter to prevailing political and economic forces.