

The power of naming: IBGE's commitment to Brazil's favelas and urban communities

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THEMATIC ARTICLE

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Abstract In January 2024, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) announced the adoption of the term “favelas and urban communities” to refer to different popular territories in the country. Formed from specific geographical, historical and cultural processes, these territories have been marked by stereotypes and stigmas related not only to their material conditions, but also to their populations. The nomenclature “subnormal agglomerations”, in force for approximately four decades, was changed after deep institutional reflection and dialog with social actors. The aim of this article is to discuss the process of changing the official nomenclature, taking as a starting point the process of constitution of these territories in the social imagination, and the challenges inherent in the change made by the Institute. The aim was also to point out the mechanisms of power underlying discursive constructions, especially when they come from state institutions such as the IBGE. It was concluded that the position taken by the agency met the historical demands of the social groups linked to these territories and represented the assumption of a political commitment by the Institute towards these actors in order to fulfill its institutional mission.

Key words Discourse, Political commitment, IBGE; Favelas, Urban communities

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Beyond a name: discourse of authority and taking a stance

The Brazilian State's interest in data capable of depicting social reality dates back to the nineteenth century. In the years following independence, the process of building imperial institutions was countless times permeated by the need, and absence, of information capable of supporting political decisions of different hues. Despite attempts made throughout much of the century, the first national statistical survey only occurred in the 1870s.

In the demographic census of 1872, the State turned its attention to a set of phenomena no longer conceived in the domain of individuality, but rather from a population perspective. It was, therefore, the emergence of biopolitics as a way of governing, insofar as a series of mechanisms for standardizing and regulating life, through the population – understood as a scientific, political, and power problem – were consolidated as a national problem¹.

Now, biopolitics as a form of government will be interested, above all, in elements capable of what Foucault¹ called “making live”, in order to guarantee the permanence of the community: hygiene, public health, medicine, demography, fertility, mortality, etc. From the perspective of biopower, the State was responsible for implementing rules and guidelines whose priority focus was to prolong the life of the community, this new entity that emerged in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century: the population.

The balance between different elements was what, in this sense, guaranteed the maintenance of collective life. Control of epidemics and diseases; the adaptation of housing to health codes; the appropriate disposal of waste; the pertinent relationship between individuals, through their bodies – all of this, from an integrated conception, became the focus of the State's attention and an object of measurement, through statistics. In such a broad way of managing life, in order to guarantee its continuity, the legitimization of death could only occur through one means: racism¹.

This aspect is interesting, as it articulates, at the same time, different elements for understanding the “favela problem”, such as the Social Sciences have dedicated themselves to investigating. It is no coincidence that the first actions of the Brazilian State in relation to a comprehensive statistical survey were carried out on the eve of the abolition of slavery. At that time, the state administration needed to understand the composi-

tion of Brazilian society, especially in relation to the classification of color or race. According to Gouvêa and Xavier², the category

[...] ‘black’ was used to designate African, black, and Creole people. The name ‘brown’ characterized the crossing of the African race with other races. The name ‘cabocla’ should be understood as an indigenous race or even as a mixture between whites and indigenous people.

In the following census, in 1890, there was little variation in relation to the aspects analyzed. The changes were largely related to the ways in which the survey was carried out, since the adoption of the republican governmental system and the secularization of the State were responsible for reducing the Church's role in the data collection process³. In turn, in relation to the investigated questions, the most significant change occurred only in the 1900 census, when the question related to color was removed.

Thus, while the country was experiencing a significant change in its population composition, with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, the Brazilian State chose to silence the color or race profile of the population. Such a measure, however, cannot be understood separately from the whitening ideals that were circulating in the social body at that time. In the writing of men like Silvio Romero, Nina Rodrigues, João Batista de Lacerda, and Oliveira Vianna, for example, the miscegenation present in society was understood as an obstacle to progress – which would be resolved by the gradual whitening of the population⁴.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the racial issue was, at the same time, an ideological and practical problem, due to the large contingent of former slaves and their descendants – for whom legal emancipation arrived without any prospects of citizenship. From this perspective, race or color and housing issues overlapped. Amid the first impulses of urban expansion and industrialization, a significant part of the population was considered inadequate and inferior to be incorporated into the ethos of modernity that was being announced.

The construction of avenues, the widening of roads, and the demolition of hills, icons of republican modernity, directly affected the spaces intended for housing the poor population, mostly black and brown people. Eternalized in the collective imagination by the novel by Aluísio Azevedo⁵, the tenements in the central region of Rio de Janeiro, at that time the Federal District, were understood as synonymous with unhealthy con-

ditions, degradation, and immorality; Therefore, they were chosen as the priority targets of state action during the urban reforms carried out in the first years of the last century.

The eyes of the public authorities were also directed to the buildings erected on the city's slopes. The capital of the republic, under the command of mayor Francisco Pereira Passos, carried out its own census in 1906. Although the term "favela" did not yet designate a specific census sector, there was already clear mention of "Morro da Favella" and others of a similar tone, with clear mention of its buildings and their unwanted inhabitants⁶.

From the beginning, conceived as contrary to the principles of civility and progress, favelas were treated in institutional discourses and in the press in a negative and stereotypical manner. In the 1930s, when the Rio de Janeiro Building Code was published, the construction of new favelas and the renovation or improvement of existing ones were strictly prohibited⁷. Dens of alcoholics, harlots, prostitutes, vagrants, and witches, such territories were redefined from time to time as harmful symbols of the worst things that could happen in cities⁸.

During the same period, the National Statistics Institute was created. In 1936, the Brazilian Geography Council was incorporated into the institution and gave rise to what is today the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Thus, the body was born during the Vargas government, as a symbol of the Brazilian State's effort to build knowledge capable of supporting the art of governing. The focus of its activity, famously, was the aforementioned collectivity – the population.

The first census conducted by IBGE was in 1940, but favelas were only included in the survey in the following decade. Until then, investigations into such territories were the responsibility of the Federal District's City Hall – first by the Department of Social Assistance and then by the Department of Geography and Statistics. In 1948, the city of Rio de Janeiro carried out the first census of favelas, considered a problem for the city and, consequently, for public administrations at different levels. Under the command of IBGE, in 1950, the national census took place and favelas were incorporated for the first time in investigations throughout the country.

In the favela census carried out in 1948, by the city hall of Rio de Janeiro, racism became blatant. Favela residents were conceived as backward and incompatible with the modernity idealized for

the country. In turn, during the 1950 census, this perspective gave way to an understanding focused on the living conditions of the resident population, mostly made up of black or brown people; and the characteristics of the households. The focus, then, was on the harsh reality experienced by these groups in relation to the housing situation, education, employment, income, and access to public services⁶.

Thus, since the middle of the last century, IBGE has made significant efforts to portray popular territories throughout Brazil. It is important to highlight, however, that the organization took its first steps under Vargas' *Estado Novo*; and it was still strengthening institutionally when Brazil faced the civil-military coup of 1964. Policies aimed at demolishing popular buildings were implemented in Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s and took effect at a national level during the dictatorial government⁹. In national surveys, the impact was felt when the term "favela", used in the 1950 and 1960 censuses, gave way to the terminology "exceptional urban agglomerations" under the authoritarian government, and the question of race or color was removed from the census questionnaire in 1970¹⁰.

For the 1980 census, there was a new change in the nomenclature, and the designation adopted was "special urban clusters". Still in the middle of this same decade, a new change occurred. This time, popular territories were called "subnormal agglomerations" – a name that persisted from the 1991 Demographic Census to the 2022 Census. So many changes can only be understood if the assumption underlying the terms used is considered. In one way or another, they were all based on reiterating the absence and homogenizing perspective¹¹ of favelas and similar territories.

In reality, this central parameter is not exclusive to the IBGE, having guided, over time, several classifications and concepts developed by a range of institutions across the planet, including the concepts of slum or informal settlements of the United Nations. It is estimated that around one billion people currently live in slums and informal settlements around the world. A number that may still be underestimated given the difficulties in capturing this data in different countries and the dynamic nature of the formation and dispersion of these territories. This is a world that already had, in 2021, 56% of its population living in urban areas, with this rate projected to rise to 68% in 2050¹².

This way of apprehending and acting in relation to popular territories in Brazil was predom-

inant, from the state's point of view, for much of the last century. And, in the social body, only in the 1980s, amid the redemocratization movements, discussions about the need to urbanize these spaces and ensure citizenship for their inhabitants achieved even greater visibility¹³. The production of urban space carries with it contradictions that are expressed in the formation, in the same cities, of territories equipped with infrastructure, public services, equipment, and security of tenure, alongside others where the supply of these elements is non-existent, incomplete or precarious. However, it was precisely this condition that, over decades, caused the populations living in these spaces to develop their own logic and ways of organizing life, configuring diverse identities and social relationships based on other presences, such as collectivity and creativity.

It is possible that the term *favela* – coined from the reality of Rio and endowed with pejorative views in its genesis – is not sufficient to incorporate all the ways in which different populations, in different regions of the country, understand their territories of [r]existence. However, it is necessary to meet the desires arising from the process of resignifying the epithet, now taken as an affirmation of a positive socio-territorial identity, which took place in recent decades. The groups residing in these places – *favelas*, communities, villas, stilt houses, *mocambos*, among other names and situations observed in Brazil – refused to remain under the “sub” designation; they claimed their role as actors in their own history.

Power manifests itself through different mechanisms that, together, make up control devices¹⁴. Speeches are some of these mechanisms, because naming is exercising power. The IBGE is a body belonging to the State apparatus. And the State is not neutral and never has been. After nearly four decades using the same nomenclature, the Institute assumed the institutional commitment – and the political decision – to no longer contribute to stigmatizing perspectives regarding populations and territories, repeatedly disseminated in the social imagination. As an institution of the Brazilian State, the Institute has undertaken the responsibility inherent to it: portray the Brazilian people – with data, but also beyond that; from the identity that these groups claim. Perhaps this is in fact the path to building a democratic State – the beginning of effective citizenship, which was denied to this population and their ancestors.

Favelas and urban communities: a political and epistemological turn

The previous section showed that producing statistical and geoscientific information about *favelas* and urban communities has never been a simple task, beginning with the construction of the parameters and concepts that should guide the classification of these territories. As seen, the search for an essentially technical category that would account for Brazilian historical and geographic diversity resulted in the elaboration of the subnormal cluster concept, in force from 1991 to 2024 in census surveys and population counts carried out by IBGE. However, there were several questions directed at the Institute, especially following the release of the results of the 2010 Demographic Census, referring both to the role of the concept in the (re)production of stigmatizing narratives – the consequences of which are experienced daily by the populations of *favelas* and urban communities, regarding the hindrances that the concept and its parameters can impose on the production of information itself, resulting, for example, in the underreporting of these territories and their residents. It is, therefore, a *concept-obstacle*¹⁵.

Criticisms of the concept are based on the legal and normative framework linked to the right to housing, understood as a fundamental human right since the Universal Declaration of 1948. In Brazil, the right to housing is provided for in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which also deals with the social function of property and the instrument of adverse possession, in articles 182 and 183, regulated, in turn, by the City Statute (Law no. 10,257/2001)¹⁶. It is important to highlight the expansion of the notion of the right to housing towards the right to adequate housing, expressed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, in force since 1976 and ratified by Brazil in 1991. Guaranteeing the right to adequate housing means guaranteeing the “right to live, wherever, with security, peace, and dignity”¹⁷.

Given this normative framework, *favelas* and urban communities must be understood as territories whose centrality is not found in irregularity, informality, illegality, or subnormality (in the sense of being below the norm), but rather the struggle of their populations to guarantee their right to adequate housing, aligned with the principles of the city's social function and urban property. Furthermore, even though these are territories where State action has not historical-

ly been guided by the guarantee of this right and which, therefore, present a variety of deficiencies, must they continue to be defined by denial, that is, by what they are not?

These representations reduce favelas to the “condition of precarious, illegal, unfinished, disorderly, and unsafe territories: the underside of the city”¹⁵. Its residents, therefore, are seen as people “without rights” or with rights different from all other citizens. Furthermore, the struggle of the populations of favelas and urban communities to guarantee the right to adequate housing, together with some specific public and private interventions, has developed urban initiatives that have been transforming these territories over the past few decades, thus illustrating the need to update the concepts that are meant to represent them.

It is noteworthy that concepts here are understood as social constructs that, therefore, materialize choices and values. “Our interpretations are never uncommitted and neutral, but also a form of implication/recreation of/with the world”¹⁸. Cruz¹⁹, inspired by Deleuze, proposes that concepts should be understood as devices that work along three main lines: visibility/enunciation, force, and objectification. The first focuses on reality insofar as it indicates what should be visible and stated and what should be kept in the shadows, therefore inaugurating new perceptual capabilities about reality. The line of force, in turn, tears apart “the chaos of the real, instituting realities, classifying, hierarchizing visions and divisions of the social world”. The lines of visibility/enunciation and force, together, establish the line of objectification, which is nothing more than a lens for reading the world, for understanding and intervening in reality.

*This implies seeing concepts as analytical tools, but also as ethical-political devices for intervention in the world. In this sense, when we produce or use a certain concept, we will not be carrying out a mere cognitive operation, but at the same time an ethical and political epistemic action*¹⁹.

Gonçalves⁶ indicates the strength of the subnormal cluster concept by emphasizing its role in reinforcing the “idea of a hierarchy between favelas and other neighborhoods in the city”. Furthermore, the pejorative bias of the concept, when extending from physical characteristics to the population residing in these territories²⁰, intervenes in reality, operating politically and promoting discriminatory actions.

Favelas, *bastees*, *kampungs*, *slums*: their existence – and persistence – in the cities on the pe-

riphery of capitalism (as well as in the ghettos and *banlieus* at its center) permanently challenges the universalist efforts of urban planning utopias. In all these cases, there is an association between a spatiality marked by the logic of life in contexts of scarce resources and a sociopolitical condition: *outcast*, marginal, or out of order. The very choice of terms to designate this spatiality – in English, *slum* (synonymous with criminal, swindler), or, in Portuguese, “subnormal agglomeration”, used by IBGE, our official demography body – not only carries a condition of otherness, but it also clearly expresses this discriminatory Gestalt²¹.

Given the set of issues summarized in the paragraphs above, the IBGE started to reflect on the need to change the concept of subnormal agglomeration in the early 2000s. Initiatives such as the establishment of a Working Group in 2003 and the discussion of the topic in expanded meetings on statistical and geoscientific production, such as the WG Favelas and Similar, which operated from 2003 to 2005; the Second National Meeting of Producers and Users of Economic, Social and Territorial Information, the Fifth National Conference on Statistics (Confest) and Fourth National Conference on Geography and Cartography (CONFEGE), held in 2006; and the Third National Conference of Producers and Users of Statistical, Geographic and Environmental Information (INFOPLAN), held in 2016, placed on the agency’s agenda the need to promote this change, especially after the release of the results of the 2010 Demographic Census.

In the context of this operation, IBGE formed a new Working Group, composed of technicians from different areas of the governmental body, whose objective was to support the improvement of research and reformulate the subnormal cluster nomenclature in time for the new name to appear in publicity materials concerning the Census results. In addition, the group was given the task of rewriting the criteria that currently guide the classification of these territories, seeking to address the questions raised in the previous paragraphs, that is, aligning the concept with the understanding of the populations residing in these areas within the scope of the right to adequate housing and the social function of the city and urban property.

The GT’s actions were based on the consensus around the need to change the concept. However, there was equally a consensus that this process would require the support of other actors. Thus, the group organized the **1st National Meeting of Production, Analysis, and Dissemination of**

Information on Favelas and Urban Communities in Brazil, held in Brasília, DF, Brazil, from September 25th to 29th, 2023, with the objective of *collectively reflecting on the representations constructed by the IBGE regarding Brazilian favelas and urban communities, considering the possibility of suppressing the use of the nomenclature “subnormal agglomeration” in the bases and promotional materials of the 2022 Census, replacing it with another that can also serve as a starting point for the future reformulation of the concept, aiming to prepare new studies*²².

Prior to the meeting, the GT invited some actors involved in the topic to form a consultative group with the more immediate objective of assisting IBGE in the task of conceptual review. The aim was, therefore, to build within this collective an initial proposal for a new nomenclature and new wording of the criteria to be made available for debate as well as expanded consultation during the national meeting.

Some points from the debates held within the scope of the consultative group deserve to be highlighted, having been central to the review carried out by the IBGE. Firstly, the unrestricted acceptance of the resumption of the term “favela” is highlighted, following a growing movement of affirmation and resignification of these territories, in light of the paradigm of power.

For decades, the favela was understood as something to be abolished from the city which, in turn, was seen as opposition to the favela. Gaining expression in the urban landscape – especially in Rio de Janeiro – from the 1920s onwards, the favela appears as a relevant social issue in the 1940s, being considered, however, an [...] urban “cyst” needing to be extirpated. A “disorganized” agglomeration with a “disintegrated”, “promiscuous” social environment, without “hygiene”, the favela in the early 1940s gained the outline of plans and projects that would be the “final solution” of a dominant ideology, a dream of the media officials and the city: “to put an end to the favela”²³.

The ideological conditions were in place so that, from the 1960s onwards, removals became systematic as a form of state intervention in these territories. In the 1980s, neoliberalism broke out, resulting in the worsening of the housing crisis and violence, as well as the impoverishment of the middle classes²⁴, thus consolidating the presence of favelas in the Brazilian urban landscape. In this context, classic studies of urban sociology from the late 1970s and early 1980s – such as those by Leeds and Leeds²⁵, Valladares²⁶ and Oliveira²⁷ – contribute to removing favelas from

anonymity and “a condition as an undesirable byproduct of Brazilian urbanization”¹⁵. However, it was only in the first decade of the 21st century that favelas began to be seen as “territories for re-inventing the city”²⁸, when several popular movements and researchers began to question the paradigm of lack and the favela-city division²⁹.

At the same time, new social movements have emerged on the public scene, bringing demands associated with the right to the city, and affirmative action policies implemented since the 2000s have enabled young people from these territories to access universities and public positions, based on the need that technical-scientific knowledge is increasingly constructed from the territories and the people who produce them on a daily basis, which implies the review of concepts, representations and methods that reproduce stigmas and/or are not recognized or accepted by populations of these territories. This amalgam of processes has given new meaning to the favela as the place of “daily affirmation of living and inventing the city, as a shared human work”¹⁵, being recognized and appropriated by the IBGE in the reformulation conceptual on screen.

However, indispensability was highlighted, considering that, in the new nomenclature, the favela should be accompanied by a complement, a concern that is linked to the notion that the term in itself is a polysemic and complex concept, understood based on distinct analytical keys that, roughly speaking, are related to the different conceptions we have of the city³⁰. Furthermore, the term “favela” is not unanimously recognized throughout the Brazilian territory, having greater expression in the states of the Southeast region, especially Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and still being embedded in stigmas and stereotypes in different regions of the country.

In meetings held prior to the meeting, however, the consultative group refuted the term “urban communities” as a complement to “favelas”. In addition to addressing the polysemy and fluidity of the community, the debates pointed to its euphemistic character, associated with the concealment and non-assertion of the favela. It is, however, a conception of the term that is frequent in sectors of academia and social organizations in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Our study highlights that the sociological concept of community can be interpreted through a perspective associated with the construction of identities of resistance in the face of predominant social trends³¹. If favelas and urban communities are read as territories of struggle to

guarantee the right to adequate housing or, ultimately, the right to the city, the concept of community, even considered strictly from a sociological point of view, adheres to the questions posed to the IBGE to reformulate the subnormal cluster nomenclature. The relationship between the term community and the concealment of the favela, in turn, results from the stigmatization of the term favela itself, a process that has lasted for decades but that has been challenged by several actors in recent years, as seen above.

In any case, as alternatives to complementing urban communities, the terms popular territories and popular settlements were proposed by the consultative group. The term popular territories was well-accepted; however, the group understood that it could generate misinterpretations due to its scope, as there were several popular territories in Brazil, with characteristics that were often considerably different from favelas, such as, for example, traditional territories or popular neighborhoods with a security of tenure, public services, and equipment, or urbanization in accordance with current standards, among others. Therefore, the proposal taken to the national meeting was, in the end, *favelas and popular settlements*.

Regarding the new wording of the criteria that guide the classification of favelas and urban communities, the consultative group reinforced the indispensability of the concept representing these territories as spaces for affirmation and unmet rights, rather than needy territories that do not comply with legislation.

The group also discussed the importance that, in the future, elements associated with sociability, identity, public security, and specific forms of organizing life and space can be incorporated into research to be carried out by the IBGE, in addition to indicating the need for studies regarding land rights, as was reinforced at the national meeting and will be seen in the following section.

Based on the debate with the consultative group, the IBGE created the initial proposal for a new nomenclature – *favelas and popular settlements* – and the wording of the criteria, submitted for evaluation during the meeting, both in conversation circles and through a publicized electronic form widely available to participants and online audiences. In the week before the meeting, the proposal was presented and debated on two occasions: at the ENCE (Escola Nacional de Ciências Estatísticas)/DGC (Diretoria de Geociências) Seminar, with the theme “Favelas and Urban Communities at the IBGE”, which

featured technical presentations from the IBGE on the challenges and operational innovations involving research census in this territorial section and a lecture given by professor Jorge Luiz Barbosa, member of the advisory group; and in the workshop “Debating the concept of favelas with the IBGE”, as part of the program of the 1st *Favela é o Centro* Research Seminar, organized by the Museu das Favelas, in São Paulo. In this workshop, the proposal created within the scope of the consultative group was debated with social movements and favela leaders in São Paulo, already highlighting some important clues of what would be presented the following week at the meeting in Brasília, such as the possible resumption of the term *urban community* and the resistance to the term *popular settlements*.

The program for the national meeting consisted of a conference and an opening table, six conversation circles and a presentation, which brought the following points to the debate: territorial diversity of Brazilian favelas and urban communities; the right to the city, possession, and property; representations, classifications, and narratives; the production of information beyond official bodies; operational challenges of collection, mapping and supervision; and the use, appropriation, and expectations in relation to information produced by the IBGE. The composition of the table and conversation circles sought to meet racial, gender, institutional, and regional diversity and forms of action in the territories, with representatives from community associations, social organizations, academia, and public bodies. At the end, a plenary session was held, which resulted in the collective production of a letter of demands to the body, committing it to meeting the main objective of the meeting, which is to promote the reformulation of the subnormal cluster nomenclature. Additionally, demands were sent for future IBGE research in favelas and urban communities.

In fact, the term popular settlements was discarded in the Favela Museum workshop and in the first activities of the national meeting, as it would be related to State action and would not be easily recognized by residents of favelas and urban communities. The expression *urban communities*, understood mainly as a term associated with the way in which people who reside in these territories define and recognize them, especially outside the Rio-São Paulo axis, was brought back. Participants invited to the conversation circles who went to the event as representatives from Belém, PA; Fortaleza, CE; Ceilândia, DF;

São Luís, MA; Recife, PE; Maceió, AL; Porto Alegre, RS; and Belo Horizonte, MG, defended the use of community, reinforcing the relevance of expanding the consultation process carried out by the IBGE, which culminated in the national meeting in Brasília. The Institute is the only body that aims to identify, classify, and map all favelas and urban communities in Brazil. To face this challenge, which involves conceptual discussion, it is of utmost importance that the consultation process be broad and diverse, considering the particularities and singularities of Brazilian socio-spatial formation.

As for the new wording of the criteria submitted for evaluation mainly through the electronic form, completed by 55 participants, the result was positive, presenting only comments and reflections from participants that relate more to the IBGE's future work agenda related to the topic than to screen modification.

The IBGE, with the support of the consultative group, based on all these inputs, indicated the nomenclature of favelas and urban communities as the most consistent with the discussions held during the consultation process, considering it as an input given by the subject politicians directly involved in this debate. It is important to note the popularity of this term, especially outside the Southeast region, and the epistemological shift promoted with this perspective, since the new nomenclature recognizes and takes as its starting point the forms of production in these territories based on practices. There is, therefore, recognition of effectively popular knowledge and practice, with the construction of a concept that carries greater representation and identification with the population.

Furthermore, in order to highlight that the new nomenclature, although supported by a concept – *community* – of an essentially sociological nature, continues to be a territorial category, the need for the maintenance of the qualifier *urban* was reinforced and the use of the term *popular territories* in the initial definition was emphasized.

Based on this entire process of consultation and popular participation, the IBGE presented, in the Methodological Note on the Change of Subnormal Agglomerates to Favelas and Urban Communities³², the concept of *favelas and urban communities*, establishing a bridge between the field of production of information for public policies and the territories that are the object of these policies, and moving towards housing and urban

policies that dialogue with the modes of production and actors present in these territories.

Chart 1 – taken from the IBGE Methodological Note³² – sets out the new wording of the criteria for the identification and mapping of favelas and urban communities, as well as the justifications produced by the Institute, after this broad process of studies and consultations, for the main changes made.

Beyond the name: future perspectives and challenges

At the beginning of the 2000s, geographer Fany Davidovich³³ pointed out that rethinking the favela was a recurring theme marked by successive, but discontinued, retakes on the subject, as well as by the persistence of conceptions and positions regarding those territories over time. In her opinion, the recent change promoted by the IBGE, the history of changes promoted by the country's official statistics and geoinformation body, and the challenges already highlighted in the consultative process carried out by the IBGE, reinforce the author's argument.

The process of changing “subnormal agglomerations” to “favelas and urban communities” and rewriting the criteria in light of constitutional, legal, and normative precepts associated with the right to housing and the right to the city, as well as a consultative process, breaks with the logic of territories in disagreement with the legislation – landscapes outside the norm and “normal” by urban theory, projective practice, and the State, which require their modification or extirpation³⁴ – highlighting them as spaces of unfulfilled rights. It thus recognizes that public authorities operated in these territories according to an incomplete logic, of discontinuity and improvisation, which breaks with the narrative of blaming the victim, the Other, as pointed out by D'Andrea³⁵.

In the consultation process for the conceptual change, the IBGE was able to mobilize society in order to debate, collaborate, and propose contributions to the topic, which made it possible to identify new and persistent challenges for the production of statistics and geographies on favelas and urban communities. The results of the 1st National Meeting for the Production, Analysis and Dissemination of Information on Favelas and Urban Communities in Brazil are quite intriguing and provocative for the future of the production of information on these territories.

Chart 1. New wording for the criteria used to identify and map favelas and urban communities.

Introduction	
Wording prior to reforms	New wording
<p>Forms of irregular occupation of land owned by others (public or private) for housing purposes in urban areas and, in general, characterized by an irregular urban pattern, lack of essential public services and location in areas that have restrictions on occupation.</p> <p>The identification of subnormal clusters must be made based on the following criteria:</p>	<p>Popular territories originating from the various strategies used by the population to meet, generally autonomously and collectively, their housing needs and associated uses (commerce, services, leisure, culture, among others), given the insufficiency and inadequacy of public policies and investments private sector aimed at guaranteeing the right to the city.</p> <p>In many cases, due to their shared origin, neighborhood relationships, community engagement and intense use of common spaces constitute community identity and representation.</p> <p>In Brazil, these spaces manifest themselves in different forms and nomenclatures, such as favelas, occupations, communities, <i>quebradas</i>, <i>grotas</i>, <i>baixadas</i>, <i>alagados</i>, villages, <i>ressacas</i>, <i>mocambos</i>, stilt houses, informal subdivisions, maloca villages, among others, expressing geographical differences, historical and cultural aspects in its formation.</p> <p>Favelas and urban communities express the socio-spatial inequality of Brazilian urbanization. They portray the incompleteness - at the limit, the precariousness - of government policies and private investments to provide urban infrastructure, public services, collective equipment and environmental protection to the sites where they are located, reproducing conditions of vulnerability. These are aggravated by the legal insecurity of tenure, which also compromises the guarantee of the right to housing and legal protection against forced evictions and removals.</p> <p>To identify favelas and urban communities, the IBGE uses the following criteria:</p>
<p>Justification: The introduction to the concept summarizes several points raised throughout this document, starting with the need to specify, from the outset, that it is a territorial category, opting to use the term “popular territories”. The importance of considering the autonomous production character of these territories is also highlighted, although, in exceptional cases, these are settlements produced by the State (hence the use of the adverb “generally”). The right to housing was brought as a central element, seeking to align the IBGE concept with international pacts and the Brazilian normative framework after the 1988 Federal Constitution. We also sought to remove the notion that favelas and communities are needy territories because of itself, emphasizing them as a result of the insufficiency and inadequacy of public policies and private investments. Next, emphasis was placed on the identity and community aspects that, in most cases, shape favelas and urban communities. This was an issue reiterated at various times throughout the consultation process, in addition to being explored in academic research. This characteristic supported reflection on the relevance of using “urban communities” as a complement to the term “favelas”. At the same time as this complement opens up space for the incorporation of different forms of self-identification of populations in relation to their territories, it also makes it possible to highlight their community character. Finally, the different nomenclatures known to refer to territories with these characteristics in different regions of the country were highlighted. This highlight is fundamental, as it reinforces the concept of favelas and urban communities as a broad concept that incorporates and recognizes multiple forms of the naming of territories, conferred by the populations themselves. The last paragraph of the introduction to the concept summarizes all the elements that make up the new wording of the criteria, considering the IBGE’s new approach to favelas and urban communities. Below are the criteria and their new wording, followed by justifications.</p>	

it continues

Chart 1. New wording for the criteria used to identify and map favelas and urban communities.

Wording prior to reforms	New wording
If there is irregular occupation of the land, that is, when the households are on land owned by someone else (public or private), now or recently (obtaining title to the land ten years ago or less) and when one or more of the following characteristics are added to the irregular occupation of land:	Predominance of households with different degrees of legal insecurity of ownership, and at least one of the other criteria listed below:
Justification: The new wording assumes the right to adequate housing, based on Comment no. 4 of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and in the Brazilian legal system after the Federal Constitution of 1988, expressed mainly in the City Statute (Law no. 10 257/2001), which presents the social function as a fundamental principle of urban property. To the extent that favelas and urban communities are produced with the purpose of guaranteeing the right to housing, and considering that property must fulfill its social function, it becomes anachronistic and distant from fundamental social precepts to describe these territories as irregular, as well as talking about “occupation of other people’s property” – which results in its stigmatization. Security of tenure is also considered to be one of the core elements that guarantee the right to adequate housing, with its guarantee being the duty of the State, in the face of arbitrary evictions and threats. Finally, it should be noted that, in the same favela or urban community, there may be different degrees of legal insecurity of ownership.	
Wording prior to reforms	New wording
Precariousness of essential public services , such as household electrical lighting, water supply, sanitary sewage and regular garbage collection and/or	Absence or incomplete and/or precarious provision of public services (public and domestic electrical lighting, water supply, sanitary sewage, drainage systems, and regular garbage collection) by the competent institutions; and/or
Justification: The main change, in this regard, refers to the change in perspective, seeking to highlight that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental right and promoting it, therefore, is a duty of the States and competent institutions. When considering favelas and urban communities as territories marked by precarious public services, there is a risk of promoting a certain naturalization of this condition, qualifying them as needy or even precarious in themselves. The new wording identifies these territories, within the scope of essential public services, from the other end, which is the supply, that is, the favelas and urban communities are not deprived, the supply of essential public services is incomplete or precarious.	
Wording prior to reforms	New wording
Urbanization outside current standards , reflected by the presence of narrow circulation roads and irregular alignment, many unequal sizes and shapes, absence of sidewalks or irregular widths, and constructions not authorized by public bodies and/or	Predominance of buildings, streets and infrastructure that are usually self-produced and/or guided by urban and construction parameters different from those defined by public bodies; and/or
Justification: Once again, this change sought to avoid the stigmatization of favelas and urban communities. As a way of making housing feasible in the face of incompleteness or precariousness of initiatives through the competent bodies to guarantee this right, the populations of these territories have developed their own logic for organizing space, which needs to be recognized in its specificities, as well as, in addition to demanding specific investments, in many cases, present autonomously and communally developed solutions. This recognition, therefore, must go beyond simply qualifying this urbanization as “irregular”.	
Wording prior to reforms	New wording
Occupancy restriction , when households are located in an occupied area that does not comply with legislation that aims to protect or restrict occupation for housing purposes, such as, for example, highway rights-of-way, railways, protected environmental areas, and contaminated areas.	Location in areas with restricted occupation defined by environmental or urban planning legislation, such as highways and railways, rights-of-way, power transmission lines, and protected areas, among others, or in urban sites characterized as areas of environmental risk (geological, geomorphological, climatic, hydrological, and contamination).
Justification: The main change in the wording of this criterion refers to the incorporation of the environmental risk dimension, which is closely related to processes of vulnerability of certain populations. This criterion used to identify and map favelas and communities becomes essential, given the increase in environmental events that result in disasters and deeply impact these territories, such as floods, deluges, and landslides.	

Source: IBGE (2024).

In general, the document materializes the intention of consolidating a governance culture that promotes collaboration between the body and society, through transparency, user participation, and the technical responsibility of the Institute, materialized in the principle of relevance of the Code of Good Practices for IBGE Statistics³⁶, that is, meeting users' information needs, according to their demands. It also exposes a growing challenge in the production of official geographies when confronting the need for information for public policies and investments, especially those related to urban and housing rights, with the dimension of lived space, place, residents and the power of these territories, whether it is emerging or embryonic.

It is possible that the land issue is the one that becomes most evident when the above perspectives are compared. This is not an unprecedented issue in discussions on the Ibgean concept, nor is it an exclusive element of the IBGE concept. It exemplifies both the issue of regularization and the legal insecurity of ownership, dialoguing directly with sensitive aspects of the right to the city and the right to housing. However, when considered the "common denominator"³⁷ of favela identification, it disregards the sense of belonging, as an area can cease to be a favela with the regularization and title of its residents.

This situation was illustrated by Souza³⁸ when simulating a question that a "lay" reader could ask to develop a reflection on the favela's identifying elements: "but, what if the State provides a favela with infrastructure and promotes its land regularization? Will the space continue to be a slum?" And the author responds:

In principle, no; However, as the force of inertia of prejudice is very great, it is likely that in the collective imagination of the privileged population, the concentrations of poor people that would continue to be spaces would probably continue to receive some discriminatory treatment in everyday life. Hence the importance of facing, in addition to the provision of infrastructure and land regularization, the problem of poverty, as well as the challenge represented by the racist and stigmatizing elements present in the imagination and associated with the images of certain places³⁷.

This same question was asked by favela residents in the consultative process carried out by the IBGE: "will we stop being a favela or community if there is land regularization or if all service needs are met?" This provocation is even more pertinent if we consider the view of identity constructed by residents and their belonging

to the favelas. Will the resident of Rocinha or Paraisópolis no longer consider their territory a favela if the State complies with all its constitutional duties? Would the favela not continue to exist despite State interventions as a territorial manifestation of the place?

It is also a challenge for the IBGE, which when naming "favelas and urban communities" based on the criteria of land regularization and provision of services, will face the growing demand of a population that perceives the favela beyond these identifying criteria.

Figure 1 represents the geography of the Maré complex from two different perspectives: that of the IBGE and that of the Maré Census, carried out by Network Association of Maré in partnership with the Favelas Observatory. The differences lie in the land issue, as the IBGE does not consider regularized areas and housing complexes. Furthermore, the IBGE considers areas in isolation, ignoring the idea of a complex. It is possible, through census sectors, to reconstitute the area of the neighborhood or complex, but this method depends on subsequent aggregation. These differences can have impacts on the formulation of public policies and investments in these areas and are probably disconnected not only from the residents' sense of belonging, but also from what common sense recognizes as the Maré favela or complex of favelas.

Based on these questions and the accumulation of reflections made by the IBGE since the 2000s, the relevance of seeking to reconsider the land issue as the main classification criterion in future conceptual reviews promoted by the body was highlighted. In addition, the possibility of investigation was mentioned using the criterion of the self-declaration of the territorial identity of residents regarding their belonging to favelas and urban communities.

D'Andrea³⁵ points out that peripheral territories are culturally heterogeneous, but there are diacritical elements that allow their residents to recognize and distinguish themselves. Dealing with the periphery, he highlights some elements that must be considered, but states that the starting point for analyzing the phenomenon must be the territory.

What criteria should be considered to identify, classify, and ultimately portray the country's favelas and urban communities in official statistics? There are authors³⁸ who believe that it has not been possible to conceptualize the favela objectively for some time due to criteria of infrastructural deficiencies, morphology, income, and

legal status. Souza³⁷ believes that it is essential to consider these elements together and move even further by considering people's feelings and their identities.

The reconciliation of this information or classification perspectives, however, is not easily resolved in the process of preparing the territorial census base or sample research, as recognized by the United Nations itself when forming, between 2017 and 2023, a group of experts made up of UN agencies, other multilateral agencies, NGOs, universities, and selected countries, including Brazil, to identify these areas on a global scale. The group of experts was formed with the intention of developing standardized tools, definitions, and methods to produce data on favelas and urban communities (slums) based on spatial definitions, where favela spaces are identified a priori, and the associated risk factors to residence in these territories, results examined regardless of definitions.

The group's main objective was to encourage countries to adopt new methods of identifying spaces in these territories at the lowest level of

geographic disaggregation in a demographic and/or housing census and in other national surveys, due to the various limitations that the non-identification of these territories or the use of the urban poverty proxy generates for statistics. One of the limitations identified by the United Nations group of experts is related to the limitation of sample surveys, such as demographic health surveys, which in many countries use sampling bases taken from censuses that do not territorially distinguish favelas and urban communities from other areas of the city³⁹.

Brazil, through the IBGE, makes this distinction, but there is still room to satisfy the demands of collecting specific information about the reality of favelas and urban communities with possible implications for questionnaires; their sample fractions, including the evaluation of differentiated samples; and indicators that capture neighborhood relations, close ties, cooperation, self-organization, and legal security of ownership and food security, as signaled at the national meeting promoted by the IBGE. Having a sample in the Continuous National Household Sample Survey

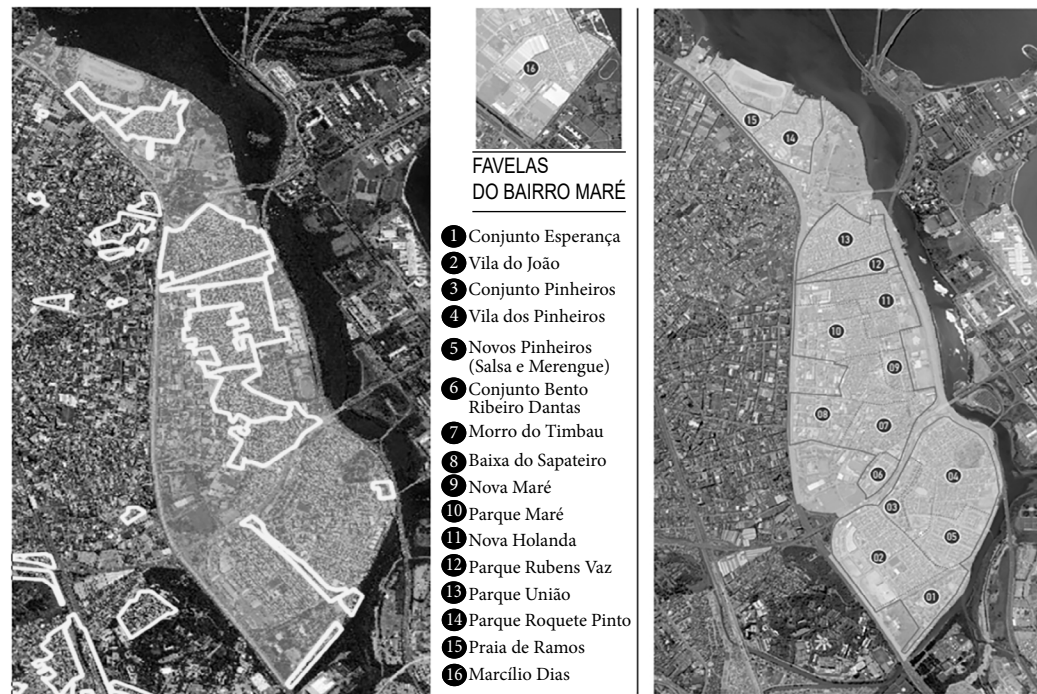


Figure 1. Census sectors of the Maré favela, according to the IBGE and Maré favelas of the neighborhood or neighborhood or complex, according to the Maré Census.

Source: IBGE; Maré Census.

that allows one, for example, to provide unemployment and informality results for favelas and urban communities that are separate from unemployment results in other areas will enable the design of public policies and investments that are more in line with the realities of these territories. This can be applied across several dimensions of social, economic, and environmental indicators. This is also a way of having information at more regular intervals for territories that tend to be more sensitive and affected by cyclical aspects and climate phenomena.

Therefore, it is the proper time to return to Milton Santos' central question in "The Geographer's Work in the Third World"⁴⁰, which consists of knowing whether we want to remain limited to a fixed form of interpretation, that is, a single way of reasoning, or whether we are willing to evolve along with the changes occurring in the world. For him, "the methodology itself must be constantly renewed, otherwise reality escapes it". He also states that, in certain cases, when using statistics to verify their accuracy, we are faced with the fragility of our doctrines and asks: "Should we, however, disregard statistics, documents, reports, and the entire legion of mute collaborators?"

In the results of the national meeting, collection in favelas and communities appeared as a challenge that should be considered in future censuses and IBGE surveys. Among the points worth highlighting are the definition of a protocol for access and approach to communities and their leaders, as well as the need for interviewers from the community itself (IBGE, 2024). Holding community planning and awareness meetings, as well as observing the adoption of language adapted to the needs and reality of the territories, is also an investment point to ensure greater participation and adherence from residents. In this sense, one can take advantage of the experiences of the Municipal Geography and Statistics Commissions (CMGEs) and Census Planning and Monitoring Meetings (REPACs).

For planning operations and research, the permanent consultation process carried out through a network of actors involved with the topic tends to avoid constant retakes and intermittent efforts, as noted by Davidovich³³. The experience carried out by IBGE with traditional peoples and communities indicates a path that can also be followed in favelas and urban communities. With those populations, the permanent participation and collaboration of civil society has brought significant gains to census geogra-

phy, to the structuring of territorial bases and to the design of conceptual and operational methodologies for surveys and research⁴¹, leading to a better portrayal of reality in order to guarantee the exercise of citizenship, as envisaged by the Institute's mission.

In Censuses, the IBGE has experience in defining work areas formed by favelas and urban communities, encouraging the hiring of residents of these territories. Specific training and guidance were also developed in the 2022 Census, as well as actions with civil society organizations. The deepening of these actions, incorporating new possibilities, such as the hiring of community mapping guides or community health agents who know the territories, tend to facilitate the addressing, the route, the identification of homes, and the reception by the residents with positive effects for the census operation or research.

Having passed through the stages of production and analysis of statistics and geospatial information, we are left to understand the challenges that arise in incorporating the knowledge produced by the IBGE through the users themselves, those more directly involved with these territories, especially the population residing in favelas and urban communities. We once again return to the principle of the relevance of the Statistics Code of Good Practice, which presupposes the existence of processes at the Institute to advise, train, and inform users about statistical products, as well as to consult them, periodically, on the public utility of statistics.

This principle aligns with the demands of developing a differentiated strategy for data to return to communities, which involves meetings to present results, additional dissemination channels, and integration and rapprochement with local dissemination channels. Furthermore, it is also important to establish partnerships, exchanges, and/or training of knowledge and statistical and geographic production methodologies with laboratories, organizations, groups, collectives, among others, which carry out autonomous research in their territories, in such a way as to spread good production practices, distribute statistics and geographic information, and incorporate knowledge from these territories into IBGE training.

It is important, at this point, to return to Souza⁴² in his discussion of "native terms", understanding this thesis as an effort to carry out an analysis of a term/concept interested in reflecting on possibilities of socio-spatial change,

suspicious of heteronomy and concerned with collaborating, cooperating with the subjects with whom it interacts, with the aim of assisting in resolving issues. As pointed out by D'Andrea³⁵, "a good theory is one that changes the concrete reality of the greatest number of people".

As pointed out by Magalhães⁴³, the construction of the process of recognition and legitimization of favelas and urban communities as constituent territories of the city requires the establishment of original conceptual formulations, systematic studies on and innovative interpretations of the practices, and representations affirmed by their residents. Official representations, therefore, are an important means through which to dispute meaning, as they represent the possibility of a structural effect of public policies and investments, as well as the recognition/perception of these territories.

Final considerations

The position taken by the IBGE, after almost four decades of using the term "subnormal agglomeration", undoubtedly represented a major advance in the way the State, through its institutions, understands popular territories in Brazil. The decision to change the nomenclature, adopting the term "favela" and combining it with "urban communities" signals the organization's willingness to dialogue – and listen – to those who actually experience the reality of these territories and claim it beyond the perspective that understands them based on what they do not have or are not.

In this way, the process of reviewing the nomenclature and writing of the criteria can be understood as a fundamental epistemological and political shift in relation to the way in which the concepts that guide the production of statistical and geoscientific information in Brazil are thought of and formulated. As reiterated by several actors during the national meeting, this event was a change of utmost importance, constituting a historic moment for the country.

Based on a broad process of dialogue and consultation with actors from different sectors of society involved directly or indirectly in the topic, the IBGE constructed a new perspective on these territories that translates into new representations and narratives, focusing on the daily lives of its inhabitants. It can be said, therefore, that the objectification of the concept of favelas and urban communities – and its rewritten criteria – makes these territories visible/enunciated as inventiveness, affirmation, and power, leaving lack and denial in the twilight zone, illuminated with the previous nomenclature.

As for the lines of force, the new name and the new wording of the criteria represent and classify reality without hierarchizing it, understanding these territories no longer as spaces that are below the norm, irregular, illegal, or disordered, but rather as singular spaces, which present their own parameters, norms, conditions, and possibilities in the face of the daily struggle to guarantee life, in all its dimensions.

However, this was the first step. The commitment made by the Institute with society was to build a relationship capable of promoting not only specific action, specifically linked to the modification of the nomenclature, but also of enabling a new understanding of favelas and urban communities, including the review of the criteria that are used to define them as such. In this sense, it is the beginning of a new relationship.

Certainly, there are numerous challenges to be faced, from a technical point of view, so that the definition to be constructed by the IBGE and the different actors involved can encompass the different meanings linked to favelas and urban communities. However, assuming the responsibility inherent to the Institute – depicting the reality of Brazil – can only be successfully carried out if this endeavor is taken as a priority. The path will not be free of difficulties and setbacks, but it will certainly be more easily followed if the coordination between those who produce the data and those who support its preparation is guiding the path.

Collaborations

All authors participated equally in all stages of the article.

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