

THE GREAT URBAN GAMES: Rationalization of Play, Leisure and Capitalism

A. Igino Silva Junior & B. Marcela Almeida & C. Flávio Schiavoni

PIPAUS, Interdepartmental Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Arts, Urbanities and Sustainability; Federal University of São João del-Rei, Brasil

igino@ufsj.edu.br

marcela.almeida@ufes.br

fls@ufsj.edu.br

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between society and leisure in the urban space. It presents a review of leisure supported by David Harvey, and Guy Debord: capitalism and city, and the society of the spectacle. It presents a way of questioning how functionalists bases fail to promote leisure and how the play actives and give space to rethink leisure and public space. It presents Vilém Flusser's ontology of the human being of post-history, *homines ludentes*, as the foundation of being in contemporary times. It also presents the theory of the rationalization of play (ludification) (Grimes; Feenberg, 2012). We also present two Brazilian cases of study which analyzes games in public spaces as socio-spatial dynamics that question the functional use of the city.

Keywords: society and leisure, ludification, playful activities, capitalism and city.

Thematic clusters: 3: Urban dynamics.

Topic: Post-crisis cities and socio-spatial dynamics.

Introduction

The city we live in nowadays is the expression of a complex system of economic, political, and social relations, sometimes connected, sometimes divergent. For Roberto Lobato Correa (1999), the city is sometimes a disintegrated organism and sometimes an articulated organism. It reflects and drives the social condition at the same time, and it is a set of symbols and fields of struggles as well. According to Lefèbvre (2001), before the rise of capitalism, the city was more like a work of art than a product, a place of production of knowledge and techniques, besides being a space that concentrated social and political life. The most dazzling and grandiose urban creations, beautiful and prestigious, originate from pre-industrialization times from the substantially political cities, such as the eastern and archaic, to the medieval cities with their commercial and handmade aspects. In these cities, the land had not yet become a commodity. However, the birth of competitive capitalism and from the growing surplus-value of agriculture, cities began to concentrate wealth: treasures, products, and virtual capital.

The cities experienced as a work of art, once full of parties and unproductive activities, were established holding everyday pleasures and did not necessarily aim to achieve higher profits or monetary appreciation of its goods and lands. Now, money and product exchange control them directly dominated by wealthy urban capitalists and banks' interests. In other words, cities now have the purpose of exchange value, which emerged after industrialization, as opposed to its use-value. This process has changed the way of understanding the belonging to the city of all social classes and, over the time of civilizations, some particular practices of the urban space take place to ensure the production and reproduction of social life in the patterns defined by hegemonic institutions in favor of capital.

The capitalized city has played an essential role in shaping markets, imposing consumer-oriented lifestyles that wrest people's cultural expressions to the desires of capital, and provide substantially pre-programmed spaces. According to Sílvia Macedo and Vanderli Custódio (2012), one of the answers to the gradual emptying of urban public spaces is a growing ideology of consumption strengthened by symbolic goods which have been cultivated by the middle class from the twentieth century. In order to achieve urban status, this population has been looking for indoor environments such as malls, bars, theaters, museums, casinos, among other private places, seeking access to culture and leisure.

In this context, the decline of public spaces stems from the decay of life in society in which the citizen becomes a potent consumer and is persuaded to occupy a couple of select spaces with a shallow sense of collectivity. Although several different procedures cause this decline, the effects of evasion of the population end up generating a lack of security and maintenance in public spaces that are essential elements to maintain their occupation.

Nevertheless, contemporary city streets have gradually become a place for occasional and media encounters. The commodity is no longer restricted to enclosed spaces and spreads over the urban organism through its showcases permeable to the anesthetized gaze of the passerby. Thinking about the street from this perspective determines its unique public function exclusively as a servant of capitalist development. In this sense, the playful experience in the public space challenges the functionalist structures. Games in public spaces promote an escape from the functionalism of public spaces established by capitalism. Games can propose creative rationality from which emerge different forms of appropriation of the public space, differently from those predicted by the functionality of capital.

1. Methodology

This paper aims to investigate how games in the urban space can be subdued to the functionalist and capitalist logic of space, but also to present it as an escape from the preprogramming of public spaces. Thus, this paper aims to present how games can change the default logic in public spaces. The methodological steps to achieve the objective are: 1) Establish a scenario of how leisure occurs in the urban space: 1.1.) Review of the main aspects that characterize the capitalist functionalist city based mainly on the arguments of David Harvey; 1.2) Questioning the fact that the consumer society prioritizes private and consumption spaces as leisure, based on the arguments of the Situationist International. It is concluded that leisure in private consumption spaces is indeed prioritized, so when leisure in public space occurs it is largely linked to profit-making strategies, the public space primarily serves the function of circulation. Then we start to investigate how urban games that take place in the public space can be characterized as a confrontation with this established order. Therefore, the following steps are established: 2) Reading how the actions that question the order established in public spaces can be understood as "playing against the device", concept by Vilém Flusser. This offers a philosophical perspective on how to escape functionalist predetermination; 3) Presentation of the "ludification theory", a theory that highlights the high levels of rationality in digital games. These two theoretical bases on the game offer the criteria for the analysis of two case studies: the first uses the public space for play (free game) and the second uses digital technology as an interface for the game in the public space. Finally, the case studies offer an analysis of the two main moments of transition of games — play mode and game mode.

2. Urban Environment, Leisure and Contemporary Culture

Cities and their dynamics are older than the urban planning we know today, which is a modern phenomenon that came after industrialization. The English Marxist geographer David Harvey (2013) explains that some of the urban ills generated by capitalism stem from an active role played by urbanization itself. Harvey based his argument on the project of Haussmann in Paris (19th century) and Moses in New York (20th century), by adapting to the ideals of capital they created, for example, a system of exorbitant highways capable of isolating entire neighborhoods. He says that the capitalist logic — today called neoliberal logic — submitted the urbanization process, therefore, came to be conceived on a massive scale due. Harvey (2013) affirms that this urbanization process not only causes changes in the city's infrastructure but also transforms the population's lifestyle:

The system worked very well for some fifteen years, and it involved not only a transformation of urban infrastructures but also the construction of a new way of life and urban persona. Paris became 'the city of light', the great centre of consumption, tourism and pleasure; the cafés, department stores, fashion industry and grand expositions all changed urban living so that it could absorb vast surpluses through consumerism (Harvey, 2008: 26).

Besides the changes in cities' scale and daily lifestyles identified by Harvey (2008), society has gone through a process of "normalization" that delimits social patterns of behavior to which people must adjust. Based on Michel Foucault's studies, Ritter (2016) pointed that there is a biopolitical technique of government in which external criteria limited individuals and populations, which are affected by the masked interests of these power structures by a deliberate false adherence. The standardization criteria shaped people who want to be "normal". The institutions establish a dilemma that runs through people's relationship that is a normalized inclusion or a social exclusion.

Meguis and Castro (2015) argue that cultural media is not the only cause of this process of alienating and interference in human beings' lives. The public power contributes to that by allowing, for example, disparate investments in neighborhoods of different social classes. It creates types of zoning and forms of space occupation that increase the segregated reality of cities. Therefore, the population has limited leisure options, which are satisfied through the private initiatives that spread over the city like malls, playrooms, arcades, clubs, among other places. The primary objective is to encourage customers to stay consuming more and more, instead of having a leisure experience.

The population abdicates cities' public spaces because of a series of different procedures. People who have high-income levels due to the privatization of cultural and leisure activities. People who have a low purchasing power, due to the impossibility of engaging in free social or cultural activities, either because of the fear of leaving home after dark - because there is no guarantee of security - or because of their marginalization in the cultural development process (Gonçalves, 2002). The public power aggravates this situation by isolating public spaces from collective use. It falls back on utilizing walls, or intimidating procedures, claims the lack of security generated by permanence in squares, parks, and gardens, by unemployed or "suspects", with no conditions for popular participation in cultural activities. These spaces tend to be associated with those of commerce in an attempt to transform them into a commodity to be sold.



Fig. 01 Belo Horizonte's Municipal Park

According to the Situationists International (SI) studies, the bourgeois society fosters the population alienation by the entertainment originated from TV programs and the mall stroll. Nowadays, we can consider also the hours reading social networks on cell phones. For Situationist authors, they must be fought for influencing the spectacularization of daily life. Situationist authors say that these aspects promote the spectacularization of daily life and, because of that, they must be fought. The well-known *Theory of Derive* idealized by Guy Debord in the mid-1950s presents a new method to engage in public space using psychogeography. Psychogeography is the study of the effects of the geographical environment, whether planned or not, that act directly on the behavior of individuals. In other words, for the Situationists (Jacques, 2003), cities become understandable

when their characteristics are related to the psychical and emotional effects that their environments produce on a human body through games and leisure.

The *Theory of Derive* is an open system for interactions that allows people to become Homo Ludens. It brings games closer to public spaces and generating a new socio-imaginary space. So, people can have a deeper understanding of their social, political and cultural conditions beyond those previously imposed by modern institutionalism. Suitably, the fun becomes a questioning method of urbanism due to its potential to generate a new type of spatial investigation of the city, such as those produced in situationist psychogeographies.

The games are a common form of leisure in urban environments that drives people to its collectivity occupation. To understand the game as an activity inherent to all cultural manifestations, Johan Huizinga (2008) studied games as part of daily activities considered "serious" and necessary as the features of the urban environment. As stated by the author (2004), the ritual has originated in the sacred game, poetry was born from the game and was nourished by it, music and dance were a pure form of a game. Knowledge and philosophy find expression in words and forms derived from religious competitions. Playful models were the base for war's rules and aristocratic life conventions. Thus, culture is a game in its first phases.

We present some authors who identify that the game is present in the foundations of cultural activities, social life, and human experience. In a more broad and inspiring sense, Vilém Flusser proposes an ontology of the human being of post-history, *homines ludentes*, as the foundation of being in contemporary times. Flusser states that we tend to perceive our environment in the context of games, unlike the 18th Century, when perception was associated with mechanisms and the 19th Century when perception was associated with organisms (Flusser, 2011a). What is the basis for playfulness is our praxis - a game with symbols and "the fact that we live programmed: programs are games" (Flusser, 2011a).

The post-industrial world is based on devices that, according to Flusser, have two programs. The first is the hardware: the hard object is an intelligent instrument (produces photographs automatically). The second is the software: a soft, impalpable thing, which despises the instrumental aspect, makes it a toy. What makes the device a toy is not its hardware, but its software, which is "the virtualities contained in the rules" (Flusser, 2009: 27). These two programs are part of the device and work together. Besides, behind them are other programs, ad infinitum. It turns out that no one can own devices since it will always be a functionary of a metaprogram. As such, no one can make his or her own decision; he or she can work according to it. So, Flusser (2009) concludes that what matters is not who owns the apparatus, but who exhausts its program. Here, we assume that Flusser points out a possibility of escape from the capitalist logic based on the ownership of goods and the observation that the categories of the industrial world no longer serve the post-industrial apparatus' world.

We can say that the city-apparatus is a by-product of the industrialization process and the capitalist mode of production. We can use it as a toy, updating its virtualities. However, we will be subordinate to a metaprogram (a program within which is the program of the city apparatus). Then one of the main questions arises from Flusser's philosophy: is there room for freedom in the programmed world? Ideologies based on causes and purpose do not offer choices, since everything is determined, either as a cause or as an end. Differently, in programmatic society, chance characterizes systems, so chance becomes a necessity (Flusser, 2011b).

Programmatically, everything happens at random; again, is there a room for freedom? To answer the question, Flusser says that, consulting the praxis of photography, we will realize that freedom occurs when we play against the apparatus (Flusser, 2009), or even playing with the apparatus. However, to achieve freedom, one cannot act like a functionary, who acts according to the program. Non-emancipated players abide by the rules of the game and act accordingly to the program. Freedom depends on the action as a player trying to beat the program.

To "retake" the city as a public thing, is to experience it beyond the interests of the capital. In this sense, playing against the city-capitalist apparatus implies experiencing it differently from capitalist programming, in search of other virtualities.

3. Playing against functions: towards a ludic experience.

Andrew Feenberg (1995) states that technological objects have two different types of meanings. One is identical to their function and, the other meaning is the aspects of the technical objects associated with the social life that is independent of their function. The city, as a hard object, is based on a set of technical conditions subordinated to pre-programmed functions. Such functions, as previously argued, are based on the interests of the capitalist mode of production. In this sense, leisure is a commodity. It is interesting to investigate how the playful use of the city that brings about a type of leisure that is not related to profit, but social capital.

In "Rationalizing Play: A critical theory of digital gaming" (2012), Grimes and Feenberg highlight the transformation of children's pastimes into a multi-billion dollar digital gaming industry. The scope of their work is mainly the rationalization of technically mediated games (MMOGs). In order to formulate "a critical theory of digital games that would allow a broader understanding of how play practices may themselves come to reproduce the larger processes of rationalization at work within modern capitalist societies" (Grimes and Feenberg, 2012: 21). Games are formally rational systems that impose a rational logic on experience (Feenberg, 1995). Technological mediation reduces the potential for spontaneous negotiation between players, and their actions are limited to a predefined set of possibilities. The stricter the rules and the more controlled the systems, the more difficult subversion is.

In everyday life, passages from serious to playful, and vice versa, are organized by the authors, as shown in the table below. The first transformation shows the transition from serious content to organized play, but not yet completely disconnected from reality. The second transformation expresses the transition from the play state to the game state by structuring rules that reduces the ambiguity of the free game to the establishment of space and time conditions. According to the authors, this is the most recurrent passage in the literature on games. In this state, the spirit of play is still present, which demonstrates that playing a game implies a delicate balance between the two moods (Grimes and Feenberg, 2012).

TRANSFORMATION 1 TRANSFORMATION 2 TRANSFORMATION 3

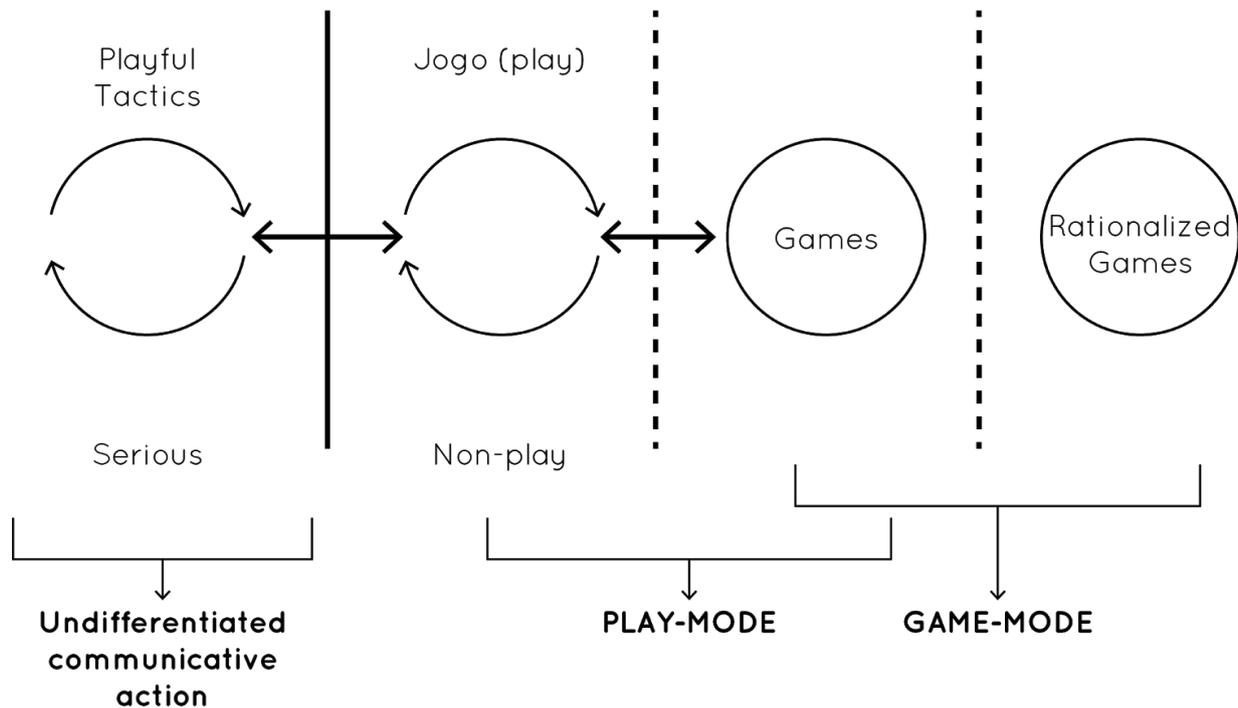


Fig. 02: The rationalization of play: a differentiated approach. Source: Grimes & Feenberg, 2012: 30

The third transformation occurs when games become technically mediated, such as massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) and professional sports. The rules, limits, and reflexivity, characteristics that are present in the second transformation, are intensified. The play is converted into measurement and calculation, as in MMOGs, the experience in the game is measured in XP points (experience points), which is necessary to reach the next level or to gaining access to other experiences in the game environment, for example (Grimes and Feenberg, 2012).

We can note that a large part of the playful experiences in the urban space remains in the play-mode stage. We believe that the intermediate level of rationalization of the experience favors social interactions in the city. When public space is used following the strict rules of its operation, it becomes more precise and controlled. In this sense, it meets the functional and not playful needs, contributing little to leisure. Next, based on this structure, we will present two brazilian examples of playful experiences on the intermediate stage of rationality.

Ana Assis performed an analysis of games in public space based on site insertion, the power of agency, and the dissensual character in the following game presented below. For Assis (2015), the power of agency in games concerns not only to the possibility of sharing knowledge through experience but also by extrapolating the limits of communicative rationality by popularizing this knowledge. Games, as an agency, "fulfill at the same time the role of social mobilizer, facilitate discussion between stakeholders, and enable the emergence of other spatial imagery" (Assis, 2015: 111). On the other hand, based on disagreement, the dissensual nature of the

game determines that starting from an equity relationship, the essential condition for dialogue is reached. According to Assis (2015), political subjects are constituted insofar in games, as they question the order established by the sharing of the sensitivity.

3.1. Subverting spatial rationality: The Athens' Game

This game has been originated from a critique of the functional city manifest produced by the modernists at the 4th International Congress of Modern Architecture (ICAM) that took place in Athens in 1933. In this manifest, they regulate principles of the city functions, summarized in living, working, circulating, and leisure. Assis (2015) says that the game's goal is to go against the ordering separation of functions in the city, "blurring the limits between them and making the use of space more flexible" (Assis, 2015: 112). In other words, through the game, they sought to expand the spatial vocabulary and develop critical notions regarding the production of space, aiming to expand the universe of debate about the city, extolling the voice of the community and taking their opinion into account once that the community are the most affected by urban planning decisions.

This game structure sought to reproduce the tension between the formal logic adopted by the Vila Viva programme and the informality of the manner with which to occupy and produce space inside the favela. Each of the functions (housing, leisure, work, and circulation) was associated with a colour and represented by a team of players. For each of the colours/functions, a group of cards was prepared associated with everyday activities and situations related to the four functions. The game unravelled on top of a large piece of white cardboard that fulfilled the role of a board. During each round, groups selected a card from one of the colours as long as it was not their own colour. Through the use of drawings and collages, groups would represent solutions responding to the combination of the action that had been drawn (on the card) and the corresponding function of their group. For the structure of the game, the actions available on the cards of the other three colours never coincide with an action that traditionally corresponds to the function represented by its group (Assis, 2015: 112).

Within this structure of rules, the traditional function of each space and the activities selected in the cards never corresponded and presented unusual combinations of the use of these spaces. The author mentions some examples:

some of the possible combinations were, for example: a space in which to play ball in one of the circulation structures (a street to play ball or a basketball hoop at the bus stop); mixed spaces of trade and housing (houses were represented with bars and shops on the front, or houses with signs for manicure/pedicure); a space to study in the park, or a space to rest in the supermarket (Assis, 2015: 112).



Fig. 03 Street Soccer. The result of joining the cards, for example, transit(circulation) with leisure, generates the famous street soccer, which is a common playful activity in Brazil.

The Athens Game's agency configures the emergence of a spatial imaginary that is more consistent with the reality of the community, creating connections with their empirical experiences and the fantasies of new spaces. While the dissensual nature of the game enable a more democratic environment than a participatory meeting, as it is not the game's demand that the participants have prior certainty of their wishes, but rather that the game promotes the formulation of these wishes. This game subverts the spatial rationality, which can be understood beyond a simple pastime or fictitious playful activities. It gives a base for people to think about the limitations of a functionary space, and explore new collective experiences in public space. Imagination encompasses other layers of information and communication that expand the players' experience and subjectivities.

3.2. PokémonGO: two levels of rationalization

Ingress e PokémonGO, from Niantic Labs, are digital games free-to-play that take place in urban space. Ingress consists of "hacking" portals in landmarks of cultural importance in cities. The objective is to defend the ideals of opposing factions (Illuminated x Resistance) regarding the use of "exotic matter". The database regarding cultural points is fed in a participatory way by the players themselves, who send photos and other information necessary to be evaluated by veteran players and can become new portals not only for this game but also for PokémonGO, which uses the same database. Ingress data creates points of attraction for players called Portals, but in PokémonGo they can be PokéStops or Gyms. When interacting with Portals / PokéStops around the city, players count on luck to get more desired items during the game, similar logic with the appearance of Pokémon on the map. The user needs to travel to a specific location to be able to interact with a portal or a PokéStop that, in the physical space, can present itself as a monument or a building. In addition to georeferenced city information, the game also uses other information from real space such as weather and time (day and night).

PokémonGO is an MMOG that mixes two distinct levels of game rationality: it reaches play-mode when interacting with the city and game-mode when interacting at the digital game. However, there is no balance between these two states. The interaction with the city is subordinated to the interests of the game interaction.

The game replaces the diversity of spaces or equipment in the city with just two types of points: PokéStops or Gyms. It establishes an impoverishment of the city's functionalities and contributing very little to a real interaction with the public space. In this sense, we observed that in PokémonGO, the city serves to economic interests. As much as games like PokémonGo have a creatively appropriation of the public space and question the predefined use of space, at the same time it also submits to the predefined urban formal structures.



Fig. 04 PokémonGO Interface. Gameplay pictures of PokémonGO in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. March 7, 2020. Source: ignisffatus user.

6. Discussion

The Athens' Game remain at the second level of rationalization of the games proposed by Grimes and Feenberg (2012). They show a rational structure that allows openness to new results. There is not a high level of rationality in which the results are pre-defined (for example, digital games). During the games, the reality of everyday life and the reality of the game are mixed. The games are an aesthetic experience of the city, and different leisure emerges from those programmed by the city's civil service. Thus, the unexpected results are mostly related to social interaction and not necessarily to the internal logic of the game.

On the other hand, PokémonGo brings to the light characteristics triggered by segregation processes such as the concentration of better urban facilities and access to better social and cultural conditions in places where people finds the highest income concentrations. According to the journalist Gisele Brito (2016) and the architect Pedro Mendonça, it is in the southwestern quadrant of São Paulo's capital that are the greatest number of interest points of the game, because that is where the best offers are located, as cultural facilities and public transports which promotes points of expressive circulation of people. Thus, the lower classes need to travel long distances to have the same leisure opportunities as the upper classes, a logic similar to the search for better education and health. The socio-spatial relationships that arise from the occupation of these elitist spaces by citizens from peripheral regions generally cause reactions, driven by prejudice, that influence the daily lives of individuals. The game reproduces and reinforces the logic of the capitalist city structure.

7. Conclusion

The functionalist cities are planned based on technological determinism in which social and cultural life are shaped by technologies of production, consumption, exchange, and communications. In most cases, the social context is taken into account as an extrinsic factor to its functioning, so that only the technical aspects of the urban spaces are considered in its development. The functionality of the urban environment is a necessary attribute of our contemporary life into cities. However, the urban space composes complexities that go beyond functional issues. If the cities can be compared as an apparatus divided into hardware and software, like proposed by Flusser, we can say that it is necessary to reprogram the software, playing against the program to give a different meaning to the hardware: a social meaning.

The Athens' game shows the possibility of a game against the apparatus in terms of Flusser (2008). The participants play against the strict rules imposed by Modern functionalism for a new appropriation of space. Athens' game uses traditional elements of a game, rules and cards, to create an opportunity to debate the maintenance of a traditional community. The winner is not only the one who won the last match but the whole community in general. It is essential to realize that this game remains on the second transformation - the play-mode - in terms of Grimmes & Feenberg (2012).

On the other hand, PokémonGO mix realities. There is a high level of rationality mixed to the real city. Nevertheless, we can see that at this game, the third transformation - game-mode - overcomes the second one - play-mode and the possibility of new outcomes are restricted.

The main result observed is a fruitful dialogue between the space and the emergence of another relationship with the city not foreseen in the functionalist program. The functionalist city has stricter the rules and is planned to be a controlled system, making complicated new ways of use, becoming more challenging the subversion of the system. Nevertheless, the unforeseen results depend on the rational structure that drives them (Almeida, 2016). So the rationalization is vital as a base against which it is possible to play against it and obtain cultural profits.

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