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ECOCIDADE: Territorial Co-Production, Insurgent Citizenship and Community Climate Resilience in São Paulo's Urban Peripheries

Abstract

This paper examines the ECOCIDADE project, a community-led urban resilience initiative operating in Brazil's marginalized peripheries, implemented by the NGO The City Needs You Institute. By centering care practices, circular economy dynamics, and grassroots climate adaptation, ECOCIDADE challenges conventional technocratic approaches to resilience. Drawing on fieldwork in Brasília, São Paulo, the analysis demonstrates how the project reframes sustainability as a process of insurgent citizenship and shared governance—one through which informal settlements reclaim agency amid environmental and political crises. The article argues that ECOCIDADE's four-phase methodology (capacity building for autonomy, network activation, policy prototyping and cooperation, collective and intersectional care) constitutes a robust strategy for territorial co-production. This strategy offers a critical alternative to mainstream climate urbanism and suggests that such co-productive approaches—which treat peripheries as sites of epistemic innovation rather than as deficits—are essential for the renewal of democracy in contexts marked by deep inequality.

Keywords: participatory urbanism; climate justice; territorial co-production; insurgent citizenship; community climate resilience; circular economy; favela; periphery; Brazil.

Introduction: The Crisis of Urban Resilience While Planting Another Future

While Brasília ranks as one of São Paulo's most vulnerable neighborhoods (Instituto Cidades Sustentáveis, 2025), residents like Noemia, Nivalda and Hilda insist on planting a different future. These veteran activists have long fought not only for basic services, but to reinvent what their territory might become. In retirement, their care labour persists through urban gardens that function as multifunctional socioecological infrastructures: it generates mental and collective health, creates spaces for intergenerational learning, harvests rainwater and compost, and generates income through food preparation. This seed initiative encapsulates the central thesis of this article. Brazil's urban peripheries, home to over forty million people, face compounding crises of climate vulnerability and extractive governance (Caldeira, 2017). Yet within these landscapes of precarity, sophisticated strategies of territorial co-production—collective processes through which residents partner with or

pressure state and non-state actors to produce and govern public goods (Mitlin, 2008; Ostrom, 1996)—are forged daily. These strategies represent a vital renewal of democratic practice, one rooted in insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2008) and the reclamation of the right to co-produce the city.

According to Samson and Arruda (2022), the ECOCIDADE project, aims at just agroecological transition in Brasília by working with a mosaic of community-led initiatives for climate collapse mitigation and socioenvironmental justice. By establishing a decarbonized local system, urban and food resource flows are redesigned through cooperation between production, consumption, and organic residue destination in public spaces. The project consists of a community economy based on resource exchange, integral care, local and circular approaches.

This article analyses ECOCIDADE as a paradigmatic case of co-productive strategy. Beyond a critique of technocratic resilience planning, it dissects ECOCIDADE's methodological framework, which systematizes a pathway for radical participatory democracy and community-based adaptation in the era of climate emergency. The project operationalizes resilience through four interconnected pillars: 1) capacity building for autonomy; 2) network activation; 3) policy prototyping and cooperation; 4) collective and intersectional care. This article is based on theoretical analysis and empirical data from participatory action research conducted in Brasília between 2021 and 2023, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and collaborative mapping.

The argument proceeds in four parts. First, it critiques the limits of mainstream climate urbanism. Second, it details ECOCIDADE's four-phase methodology. Third, it presents findings from Brasília. Finally, it reflects on the project's lessons for equitable urbanism, democratic renewal and community-based adaptation—lessons that position the periphery as a vital epistemic center for reimagining the future city.

While revealing complex dynamics based on the relationship between capacity building, distributed networks, policy prototyping, and care, we ask whether it is possible to think of strategies for territorial co-production and for the renewal of democracy without those relevant dimensions—and we propose to look for pathways already existing in Brazilian peripheries.

Section I: Beyond Technocratic Resilience

The Limits of Mainstream Climate Urbanism

Dominant paradigms of urban climate resilience, often originating in the Global North, prioritize techno-managerial approaches and large-scale, expert-led infrastructure (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2013). In this framework, vulnerability becomes a technical variable and communities are cast as passive beneficiaries. When applied to contexts such as Brazil's peripheries, this approach suffers from critical flaws: it tends to ignore situated knowledge

of micro-climates (Scott, 1998), and depoliticize the socio-spatial production of vulnerability (Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021).

As Roy (2005) argues, planning often operates through 'civic governmentality,' that invites participation primarily to legitimize predetermined outcomes. That creates what Holston (2008) identifies as a 'mediated citizenship', where rights remain conditional. The result is a persistent disconnection: international frameworks advocate for inclusive cities, but local implementation remains technocratic and capitalist, failing to engage marginalized communities as epistemic and implementation agents (Watson, 2014). This raises a difficult question: what would it mean to entangle radical participatory democracy with climate urbanism in a genuinely transformative way?

The Need for Community-Based Climate Action: repairing inequalities

Climate change impacts fall disproportionately on vulnerable populations, who are more exposed and possess less capacity to cope with the effects. Mainstream projects typically fail to address existing layers of vulnerability and often reproduce extractive modes of production based on surplus accumulation by construction companies, with little attention to local capacity development. This combination, widely recognized by literature and policy makers, tends to exacerbate existing inequalities in the territories, making the intention to achieve justice and equity even more complex.

Considering that, it is essential that climate adaptation strategies consider the vulnerabilities in the territories, in its intersection with the effects of extreme events, and beyond: society needs effective adaptation measures that strengthen capacities of the most vulnerable populations, in a more just, secure and resilient way, therefore allowing them to respond to extreme events but also promoting better living conditions. Effective adaptation requires strengthening the capacities of the most vulnerable and the repair of historic inequalities, to promote better living conditions.

Community-based initiatives address the root problem through a focus on capacity development for autonomy, climate and community resilience, the reduction of long-term climate risks, and the responsibilities' share for care ethics. The relevance of this approach is recognized in Brazil by the ministries through recent guides such as 'Community Plans for Climate Risk Reduction' and 'Community Nature Based Solutions' (Ministry of Cities, 2025; Ministry of Environment, 2025). Yet, critical questions remain: how can historic inequalities be repaired while an adaptation for the climate crisis proceeds? How can local people be included in the co-production of solutions during the implementation of climate action? How can innovative democratic processes be installed that go beyond listening and toward co-produced community action, with confrontation of inequalities, redistribution of resources, and the leverage of citizen-owned (scalable and more efficient) policy responses to climate change?

Data as a Political Tool

In this context, data becomes a crucial political terrain. The 'worst neighbourhood' ranking is a form of data violence that erases agency and complex realities (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). Official data on peripheries is often aggregated, outdated, or designed for surveillance. A foundational strategy of territorial co-production is reclaiming data generation.

Participatory mapping and community-led monitoring are acts of counter-cartography (Parker, 2006), making visible not just risks but assets, skills, networks, and existing solutions created by the territories. When residents map gardens, water sources, dumping sites, they are building evidence-based alternatives. This data strengthens local networks, empowers state negotiations, and challenges technical expertise monopolies, asserting residents as knowing subjects with essential local knowledge (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). ECOCIDADE's starting point is this epistemic shift, framing data co-production as the foundational democratic act of resilience-building itself.

Section II: The ECOCIDADE Methodology - A Four-Phase Framework for Co-Production

The failure of institutional responses to sociospatial injustice during the COVID-19 pandemic motivated decentralized civil society responses, particularly in urban peripheries. Complex social arrangements and entanglements emerged, involving for example the rural and the urban: MST (Movimento Sem Terra - the Landless Movement) fostered associations with food production and right to the land with informal and vulnerable settlements in the peripheries of the cities, with the support from organizations of the third sector. ECOCIDADE emerged as one initiative that supported food security through solidarity and proximity networks. Distinctively, its strategy was not merely emergency food delivery but established a more local and circular food system—from production in urban gardens to consumption in food culture spots to composting in schools. As a long-term strategy, based on nature and culture-based solutions, the project recognized and connected existing initiatives, which strengthened capacities for sustainable and lasting impact in Brasília (fig.1).

From recognizing the territory, its citizens' initiatives, its knowledge, its proposed solutions, ECOCIDADE, initiated by A Cidade Precisa de Você in Brasília in June 2021, proved to be a methodological framework for structuring territorial co-production around food systems and local climate action, which can be systematized into four iterative phases.

Phase 1: Capacity Building for Autonomy

Based on existing initiatives in the territory, this phase focuses on the development of abilities and solutions test and prototype. Rather than the imposition of external training, it starts with existing knowledge and addresses identified gaps. The strategy supported small-scale interventions like community composting hubs or expanded gardens as tangible 'proofs of concept', which delivered immediate benefits. Technical advice supports local initiatives through workshops on nature-based solutions (fig. 2, 3) and through the implementation of technologies such as biodigesters, rainwater harvesting systems, and ecological water treatment systems. Initiatives receive technical advice on circular and solidarity economies, including the development of business models for urban farmers and cooks (fig. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Additionally, the initiatives receive a seed fund with shared governance that allows the continuation of activities. This phase recognized that for sustained participation throughout time, initiatives must address material needs, going beyond the alternative and towards substitutive technologies (Ventania, 2021), which can offer viable distributive pathways, far from the capitalist centre-periphery paradigm. As the project evolves, it focuses on "work, income, and autonomy: enabling initiatives to generate income through sustainable models" (The City Needs You, 2023). Over six months, this phase engaged over 3,100 community members across fifteen workshops and thirteen technical assistance visits, with the installation of three composting systems and the distribution of three hundred seedlings.

Phase 2: Network Activation

Resilience is underpinned by connectivity. This phase focuses on the forging of horizontal links through spatial and social mapping and through an asset-based approach to underutilized resources, which are identified and categorized around the dimensions of alliances, knowledge, services, spaces, and nature (e.g., vacant lots for urban farming, informal waste collectors). With simple GIS tools, local students mapped physical assets such as vacant lots and gardens (fig. 9, 10). Workshops produced a catalog of social capital, with the identification of gardeners, builders, educators, and caregivers. A digital-physical platform connected forty-seven local initiatives—community kitchens, urban farms, schools—through a 'classifieds' system that matches needs and surplus resources. These alliances are based on reciprocity, blending academic and community epistemologies, and having as output a 'living territorial profile' as a constantly actualized care ecosystem for the commons, owned and safeguarded by the community.

A digital counter-cartography was produced as an exchange tool that allows the flows and relationships within the eco-citizen action network to be visualized (fig. 11, 12, 13, 14). ECOCIDADE's team of technical advisors and local students walk around the neighbourhood to map underused resources available in the region, related to the food cycle. Through an asset-based approach, with pedagogical and ludic methodologies, underutilized resources are identified and categorized around the following dimensions: alliances, knowledge, services, spaces, nature (e.g., vacant lots for urban farming, informal waste collectors). The information about the resources mapped is uploaded in a digital platform, as a means of crossing data and establishing possible collaborations, exchange between needs and offers, tracking flows of goods and services in the neighbourhood

Besides the material assets, one of the most fundamental resources are the diverse stakeholders. Community members, NGOs, sympathetic municipal departments and actors, and universities are identified by interest, indicated by trust, and classified by their needs and what they see as value. Therefore, an eco-citizen action network is organized by confluences of what people desire and what they can offer. On a territorial scale, it created a portfolio of twenty-five socio-environmental services, a territorial curriculum with classes offered by local citizens - being the common spaces (the gardens and the food culture spots) the classrooms. It materialized the concept of sustainable proximity¹ (Moreno, 2020) in the context of urban peripheries, where short cycles of food, waste, and knowledge build community autonomy and climate resilience. The project received an award from Moreno in 2022 as a practical example of this concept.

Within a year, the project promoted sixty activities with engagement of over three thousand participants. Evaluations show that fifty-six percent of interviewees reported new relationships with other initiatives, with eighty-nine percent of those attributing these relationships to project actions. A total of ninety-five percent felt that a local mutual support network had solidified, and eighty-six percent noted that this network included actors with no prior contact. One participant offered a reflection on the "valuation of one's own territory," with an observation that even in the periphery, possibilities and skilled people exist who only needed incentives.

Phase 3: Policy Prototyping and Cooperation

This phase translates grassroots innovation into institutional change through the systematization of learning into evidence-based policy briefs and intersectoral policy creation, support for territorial co-governance spaces, and facilitation of institutional dialogue. The project organized events that gathered residents, health agents, teachers, and local politicians to co-draft local climate adaptation proposals; facilitated institutional dialogue by using prototypes and community data to advocate within formal policy channels; and influenced intersectoral public policy creation. Multiple actions, in different

¹ The sustainable proximity concept gained international attention when the '15 minute city' was elaborated by Professor Carlos Moreno and implemented by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo in Paris. As highlighted in the IPCC report, urban form, planning and infrastructure can be used to encourage sustainable lifestyle changes, and urban areas that develop effective 15-minute city strategies are very likely to reduce urban energy use and emissions (C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group - Global Observatory of Sustainable Proximities, 2025). The ECOCIDADE project was awarded by professor Carlos Moreno in 2022 in Megacities Festival, considered as an example of a '15 minute city'. By placing people and nature at the centre of urban planning, the proximity concept aims to ensure an equitable distribution of all essential social functions – such as housing, job opportunities, everyday needs, public services for care, leisure and education, green and biodiversity areas – so that all residents can benefit from shorter access time and high quality life. This systemic approach of urban planning frees people from time spent travelling in long distances of pendular movement between centre and periphery, strengthening territorial development in local centralities. In our case, there is a specific adaptation of this concept to a peripheral context, where proximity is often about survival networks rather than just amenity access.

scales, could build ways of continuing the work done by the project and develop a leaving strategy of The City Needs You NGO from the territory.

The project sustained hybrid governance—from the territory to municipal, federal, and international scales—through collaborative networks, multi-level coordination, and the strategic use of formal regulations. With the aim of long-term change, the project supported multiple governance mechanisms: collaborative networks (as a distributed platform for the exchange of knowledge, resources, and labour); multi-level coordination (a link between social capital and a connection among local, regional, and national governments for policy alignment); awareness and strategic use of formal regulations (tactical engagement with legal, administrative, and bureaucratic frameworks that define the rights and obligations of actors within the territory, such as advocacy for legal recognition and new typologies of tenure to provide security); formal spaces of participation (the strengthening and occupation of mechanisms such as councils and community assemblies for increased legitimacy and sustainability); informal institutions and norms (a foundation in informal social capital and community ethics of care, plus customary rules and traditions that guide community behavior and resource use); and technical and financial instruments (the development of participatory tools such as mapping and data generation, plus direct payment for community members, as a leverage of civic provision through community-contributed labor and resources).

With a focus on local activists, the project offered advocacy training for a shift from insurgent citizenship toward formal policy influence and co-production. The recognition and collection of knowledge from diverse people across different sectors of the city administration produced a collective intelligence about how systems work and how to achieve advocacy with a synchronized agenda for the well-being of the territory. Beyond the mapping of this knowledge, the project organized it into communication materials for access by the general public.

This advocacy resulted in concrete policy access: three urban gardens now receive scholarships (POT hortas), and one initiative won a thirty-thousand-reais acceleration award (Sampa+ Rural). The methodology was systematized and scaled through the ECOCIDADE Game, which was tested with twenty initiatives across São Paulo (fig. 15, 16). The 'Fazer Juntos' policy laboratory contributed to the conception of an intersectoral program for financial aid to unemployed mothers as school food cycle guardians (POT Maes Guardiás), a benefit to two thousand women over two years (São Paulo City Hall, 2023). The project also influenced federal programs (the National Program for Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture, and the Green and Resilient Cities Program) and Brazil's Climate Plan, with a final culmination in recognition at the UN Habitat Assembly (2023) as a reference for sustainable proximity.

Phase 4: Collective and Intersectional Care

Underpinning all phases is an ethics of care—a recognition that environmental work in contexts of structural violence cannot be separate from emotional and social burdens (Tronto, 2013). Care was operationalized as processual care (meetings with provision of food and childcare, besides celebrating rituals for the small victories) and as recognition of the often-invisible feminized care work as essential social infrastructure. The project, with a composition predominantly of Black and brown peripheral women, nurtured networks of intersectional care, acknowledging how gender, race, and age shape experiences of participation, and how collectivity and mutual support is crucial when working in urban peripheries and with female leaders.

To counteract extractive dynamics that often plague participatory projects,, ECOCIDADE institutionalized fair remuneration for participation, with priority on payment for young people and unemployed women. Recognizing that the burden of participation falls disproportionately on the economically precarious, this reframed community work from voluntary feminized labor into a valued economic activity, directly addressing material needs while building common capacity. The project also identified the need for dedicated 'guardians of collective care'—individuals with responsibility for the continuous activation of networks, the translation of institutional information, and the coordination of common agendas. Through the visibility of urban agriculture subjects in municipal policies, the project contributed to the institutionalization of care.

Section III: Findings - The Politics of Community and Climate Resilience in Action

ECOCIDADE's implementation in Brasília revealed both transformative potential and inherent tensions. While the initiative successfully fostered knowledge sovereignty, activated circular economies, and strengthened solidarity networks, it also surfaced structural limits that defined the contemporary frontier of participatory governance in peripheries (fig. 17). These limitations are deeply political, revealing the contested nature of co-production within contexts of inequality and institutional inertia. The findings present a dialectical portrait: the emergent power of territorial reclamation stands alongside persistent constraints imposed by a hostile political-economic architecture.

The core achievement was a demonstration that resilience is a social and epistemic process before it is a technical outcome. Through a map of latent resources—material, natural, human, and financial—the project shifted narratives from scarcity to abundance and challenged the dominant deficit-based portrayal of the peripheries. A fundamental strategy was the activation and connection of local initiatives for a cooperative ecosystem, with a focus on the better use and distribution of multidimensional resources. A critical operational insight was the strategic identification and engagement of community members with time availability and intrinsic motivation, particularly elders. Their involvement provided not just labor but crucial intergenerational knowledge and social continuity, grounding the project in the territory's historical memory and cultural fabric. This was complemented by the

indispensable role of trusted local mobilizers—residents who acted as cultural translators and micropolitical navigators. Their deep, embedded knowledge allowed them to map power dynamics, build legitimacy, and foster a sense of belonging, ensuring that actions were widespread and culturally resonant.

The aspiration to translate this mobilized energy into durable change demands engagement with formal political structures. The project made a concerted approach towards formal mechanisms of participation, actively engaging with the territory's elected community counselors to strengthen the bridge between grassroots mobilization and public authorities. This was part of a broader strategy to structure a formalized territorial climate action plan. Through regular meetings, co-organized events, and the establishment of multi-sectoral co-governance tables, the project exercised radical democracy, fostering people's agency in the creation of public policies. This territorial action promoted dense local networks that actively sought to engage public servants from diverse sectors and facilities—schools, health centers, subprefectures—building relationships of sustainable proximity and co-envisioning a common future for the territory.

However, this intricate sociopolitical ecosystem does not emerge instantaneously. One of the project's most profound learnings concerns temporality and time constraints. The rhythm of building trust, negotiating conflicts, and cultivating collective agency follows a distinct logic from the productive capitalist time, from the funding cycles and the policy mandates. Encompassing these different time frequencies is one of the biggest challenges. Effective co-production demanded from the project management a deep comprehension and flexibility to move at the speed of the community's challenges and possibilities, recognizing that cultural shifts are forged through frequent, regular, and often slow-burning encounters.

Underpinning all these processes was the explicit institutionalization of a care ethics as a transversal principle. With recognition of how the intersectionalities of gender, race, class, and age shape both vulnerability and participation, meetings provided material support such as food sharing and childcare, alongside spaces for the valuation of the emotional labor required for the sustainment of collective action in a context of structural violence. These provisions were vital to the cohesion and momentum of the network, and transformed isolated initiatives into a collective political subject. Through work primarily with women, the project revealed a territorial sociocultural change through the women's appropriation of the habits encouraged by the project. With considerable capillarity in health centres, schools, and among neighbours, the women who participated became multipliers of a more healthy and resilient culture in Brasília, and they received recognition and invitations to share their knowledge with the youngest. The powerful sociocultural capital generated by the project can be considered a driver for climate resilience in the territory, once it was converted into urban governance capacity and into access to public policies.

Yet, for all its methodological innovations, ECOCIDADE's implementation revealed the formidable structural challenges that define the frontier of participatory governance. The most tangible are the issues of land regularization and shared management. Many of the project's flagship initiatives, such as gardens in health centre areas, occupied land are under precarious tenure—whether public, private, or contested—, once there is not an accessible or standardized pathway to formalize it, depending many times on political will of the responsible body in the municipality. Besides that, many times the cooperation agreements

can only be signed by a legal entity, restricting the scope of possibilities for more community and “informal” organizations. This lack of legal security of possession or use concession casts a permanent shadow, being a central risk factor and making long-term planning and ecological restoration fraught with risk. This tenurial insecurity points to a deeper, underlying challenge: a profound lack of clarity on formal pathways to regulate and legitimize community-led urbanism. Existing bureaucratic and legal frameworks are often ill-equipped to recognize or support such initiatives, leaving processes vulnerable to being transposed by opaque exercises of micropolitical power, making systemic change elusive. How territorial co-production can persist without land regularization?

This challenge is symptomatic of a broader set of intersecting gaps identified by the project: gaps in information sharing between state and community, in local knowledge translation into bureaucratic evidence, in implementation capacity within fractured state agencies, and in replicating methodologies beyond isolated pilots. Crucially, all these limitations are exacerbated and often perpetuated by the overarching issue of chronic funding precarity. The reliance on short-term grants and unpredictable public earmarks creates a cycle of uncertainty that jeopardizes continuity, distorts community agendas towards funders’ priorities, and exhausts the emotional and social capital of leaders. This financial instability tends to trap transformative grassroots innovation in a perpetual “pilot phase”, directly threatening the long-term viability of the very resilience it seeks to build. However, the ECOCIDADE strategy of building autonomy on local citizens’ initiatives could create a pathway out of this vicious cycle, mapping existing resources, strengthening capacities and relationships based on social capital that started to build a long-term sustainability. This has proven to be true once, two years after the end of the project, the initiatives are still there, the community members are being hired by local services and other organizations, as well as being financially subsidised by urban agriculture public policies.

Thus, the findings from Brasilândia present a clear, if complex, equation: the renewal of democracy and the building of genuine climate resilience in the peripheries depend on co-productive strategies that are as sophisticated in their social and care protocols as they are uncompromising in their confrontation with the political-economic structures of land, law, finance and time that currently constrain them. The periphery’s agency is not in question; the challenge lies in restructuring the systems that have historically sought to suppress it.

Knowledge Sovereignty and Circular Economy in Practice

ECOCIDADE demonstrated that data justice is a foundational prerequisite for climate justice. Participatory mapping transformed abstract vulnerabilities into actionable evidence, putting Brasilândia on the urban agriculture map and shifting municipal debates from generic demands to specific proposals. This epistemic shift—from residents as beneficiaries of data to owners and protagonists of knowledge—challenged extractive research traditions (Rocha & Moreira, 2023) and reasserted the value of local knowledge for effective adaptation.

The project enacted circular economy as tangible climate adaptation. The pilot composting hub achieved an estimated 30% organic waste reduction, which mitigates methane emissions while producing fertile soil for the urban gardens, creating a virtuous cycle that strengthened local food sovereignty and reduced carbon footprints. However, this success was tempered by challenges around food delivery and waste collection logistics—highlighting that socio-ecological circularity must confront the need for public policies subsidizing cooperative systems in vulnerabilized communities, instead of multimillionaires private concession contracts that still throw organic waste in the landfills.

Social Capital, Value Creation and Implications of Cooperation

The project's emphasis on connectivity materialized in an expanded eco-citizen network. According to much of the literature, social capital is a notable mechanism that enables climate adaptation, being broadly defined as the effective possession of a network of relations capable of being mobilized. Social capital emerged through multiple actions of the project. Multiple axes of the project (amongst Network Activation, as well as Collective and Intersectional Care, and Policy Influence) allowed trust, reciprocity, recurring interactions, and shared norms and values to emerge amongst the communities that were forged. The bonding-bridging-linking triad (Pelling & High, 2005; Craig et al., 2023) helps understand this multidimensional concept: bonding refers to close ties within defined groups; bridging spans social divides; linking denotes vertical ties with hierarchical institutions.

In ECOCIDADE, bonding allowed residents to understand themselves as part of a movement for neighborhood wellbeing; bridging connected producers with consumers of goods and services; linking with Municipal Secretaries and Ministers leveraged relationships accessing public policies. Previously, São Paulo's north was not seen as having urban agriculture—this blind spot reinforced the invisibility of peripheral women's labor. Personal access to decision-makers opened opportunities; after experiencing initiatives firsthand, they emerged from invisibility to access subsistence opportunities, transforming social exclusion into inclusion. Therefore, the connectivity and social capital reinforced by the project's linking with Municipal Secretaries and Ministers leveraged relationships and accesses that contributed for the maintenance and sustainability of the initiatives, through the access of public policies.

Social capital thus proved a driver for climate resilience by enabling access to financial support, physical assistance, informational mechanisms, and emotional mutual support. Social connections influence community resilience once they allow people to access resources such as financial support, physical assistance and local logistics, informational mechanisms, and emotional mutual support. Social capital is converted into urban governance capacity through a deliberate, multi-phased process that builds and leverages different types of social capital to engage with formal political structures. The project began by strengthening bonding capital within the community, then built bridging capital to connect disparate local groups, and crucially, developed linking social capital by forging vertical ties with municipal and federal institutions. Value creation serves as the central driver and cohesive force in network activation and partnerships by generating multidimensional benefits that give all stakeholders a vested interest in the network's

success. For the community, value emerged as new social capital, income generation through a circular economy model, personal empowerment (especially for women), and access to public policies and awards. For the state and institutional partners, the project offered a tangible, low-cost proof-of-concept for effective climate adaptation—a replicable model that provided external legitimacy and prestige. This reciprocal value creation ensured that cooperation was not merely transactional but transformative, as each actor—from residents to municipal secretaries to international bodies like UN Habitat—derived concrete benefits that reinforced their commitment to the work.

The implications of cooperation and salience are profoundly dialectical, revealing both transformative achievements and persistent structural constraints. Positively, cooperation enabled the transition from insurgent, outsider status to formal political influence, creating a unified eco-citizen movement, capable of embedding community-generated solutions into state structures. Simultaneously, the project strategically asserted salience by using participatory counter-cartography to challenge deficit-based narratives, making invisible peripheral knowledge and feminized care work visible and politically relevant to policymakers. However, these achievements were shadowed by negative implications: cooperation risked co-opting community agendas to funder priorities and imposed heavy participation burdens on women, while salience often collided with institutional inertia and fragmented governance, revealing that even when a community becomes visible, decision-making power and budgets remain concentrated in higher authorities that systematically neglect the periphery.

The Structural Limits and Lessons of Participation

ECOCIDADE crystallized several structural limits circumscribing participatory models. First, land tenure insecurity proved fundamental—many vibrant community gardens operated on public or informally occupied land without legal security. This constant eviction threat undermines long-term investment and reveals that environmental justice is inextricably linked to urban land reform.

Second, funding precarity creates dependency cycles. Reliance on short-term grants distorts community priorities toward funder agendas and exhausts leaders constantly seeking resources. However, ECOCIDADE's strategy of capacity building of existing citizen initiatives created pathways beyond this cycle—two years post-project, initiatives continue existing, through public policies support and income generation from selling goods and services.

Third, institutional inertia and fragmentation in the state apparatus presented formidable barriers. This inertia can be translated as a "lack of autonomy of the subprefecture", as the project documents cite (The City Needs You, 2023). Even with decentralized subprefectures, true decision-making and budgets remain concentrated in higher authorities—a manifestation of sociospatial inequality. Besides that concentration, the public policies are fragmented into multiple Secretariats, many times not relating to one another. To tackle this, a public policy laboratory was promoted, uniting different sectors to look systemically at the same complex phenomena.

Multiple negotiation strategies were employed to overcome institutional inertia. Visits by politicians and ministers to the community gardens shifted negotiations from abstract ideas toward the scale-up of functioning solutions. The existing initiatives in Brasília enacted the tangible multidimensional benefits delivered by the urban gardens, a demonstration of the need for proof-of-concept for public policy innovation. Strategic links with mid-level public servants created internal allies who navigated administrative labyrinths and advocated from within. The 'Fazer Juntos' laboratory gathered those servants for intersectoral coordination and public policy co-creation, a response to the challenge of policy fragmentation in the areas of food security and territorial development. During the laboratory, forty-five public policies were mapped and organized into accessible communication materials (fanzines with simplified language), a direct address to the fact that information does not reach the borders.

In order to build long lasting capacities in the local activists from Brasília, the project acted as a mediator through cultural and bureaucratic translations: the mapping of public policies demystified state resources for communities, while the transformation of community knowledge into bureaucratically legible evidence served the state. The convening of multi-layered tables created shared accountability, dispersed opposition, and increased the political cost of inaction. The leverage of external legitimacy—recognition from federal ministers, UN Habitat, and national television—created powerful leverage, raised the stakes for local actors, and made collaboration a source of prestige. This external validation applied gentle top-down pressure while it brought value to initiatives.

Finally, the project exposed how participation burdens fall disproportionately on women, who juggle community labor with care responsibilities—underscoring the non-negotiable necessity of feminist care ethics and fair remuneration. Participation cannot be founded on the extraction of free labour from the most vulnerable.

Conclusion: Towards a Radical Urban Climate Praxis

How did the transition from insurgent citizenship to co-production and political influence occur? ECOCIDADE employed multi-pronged stakeholder negotiation strategies that reframed community-state relationships, shifting from demand (where community asks) to co-production and demonstrated value (when community offers a solution).

This transition was a deliberate process of redistributing power through layered capital. Insurgent foundation began with the reclamation of space and self-reliance, which bonded social capital among women as an eco-citizen network. Systematization transformed insurgent energy into a replicable methodology (the ECOCIDADE Game), built bridging capital, and connected disparate groups into a collective political subject. Strategic engagement built linking capital through participatory channels, trusted mobilizers, and intersectoral policy laboratories. Formalization embedded community solutions into state structures through policy creation (POT Mães Guardias), tool adoption (in federal programs), and agenda influence (UN Habitat recognition). The transition happened not by insurgency abandonment, but by moral authority's leverage to build bridging and linking capital, a channel for insurgent ideas to reshape formal institutions.

ECOCIDADE stands as a powerful testament to a fundamental truth: within the polycrisis of climate breakdown and democratic erosion, urban peripheries are not passive vulnerability zones but active terrains for societal renewal. Its methodology, refined through daily praxis of women like Noemia, Nivalda, and Hilda, presents a framework for territorial co-production as the engine of democratic praxis and effective climate action. By the centering of knowledge sovereignty, the activation of sustainable proximities to local resources, and the ground-up prototyping of policies, ECOCIDADE reframes resilience not as a technical outcome but as an ongoing form of insurgent citizenship—a collective reclamation of the right to co-produce the city.

This blueprint comprises: the transformative use of idle spaces that convert liabilities into assets and fulfill social and environmental functions; social technologies for democratic management; solidarity economies that circulate goods within short and circular circuits and generate abundance from discard. This ecosystem represents prefigurative politics, enacting the future eco-city paradigm, organized around care, cooperation and ecological regeneration, co-produced by those historically excluded from its design.

For policymakers, scaling impact requires a shift beyond pilots and toward the institutionalization of participation: permanent community climate councils with decision-making power; public finance directed by community priorities; legal recognition of citizen-led initiatives through new typologies (such as commons concessions); and the internalization of care ethics through fair remuneration and support for care responsibilities.

As final provocation, ECOCIDADE challenges radical epistemic inversion: what if ministries of cities took direction from favelas? What if the favela, long stigmatized as a problem, was recognized as an advanced laboratory for post-carbon urban living? The renewal of democracies and the effectiveness of climate responses depend on this capacity for epistemic humility—a redirection of power and resources toward strategies of territorial co-production already sown in these fertile grounds of resistance and resilience. The periphery is not at the margin of the urban future: it is its vital heart, a demonstration that another city is already under construction, garden by garden, through insurgent citizenship and collective care.

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