

Original Article

Informality, precariousness, and entrepreneurialism: new and old issues of urban labor in Latin America over the last decade (2012-2021)¹

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Introduction

This article assesses how the social sciences in Latin America mobilize three contemporary topics—informality, precariousness, and entrepreneurialism – by performing a quantitative analysis of the differences, similarities, and the theoretical and methodological perspectives of urban sociology and anthropology on the continent over the last ten years.

Since the middle of the last century, two approaches have been dominant. First, dependency and underdevelopment theorists have emphasized the peripheral and late character of Latin American capitalism as an obstacle to the full development of its labor market. Consequently, they point to a permanent oversupply of labor that reduces wage levels, contributes to the impoverishment of workers, and undermines the formation of the workers' self-image.

Sociological and economic analyses since the middle of the last century have emphasized the category of "informality." The first approach, as a result of the so-called "modernization theory" (Rostow, 1971), considered informality a transitory situation that would be overcome as migrant workers arriving in urban centers were incorporated or integrated into modern and industrial sectors.

Proponents of the "marginality theory" and a certain branch of the "dependency theory" saw this "duality" of Latin American societies as a structural characteristic

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of the industrialized countries of the continent, whether due to internal or international obstacles (Frank, 1967; Germani, 1973; Quijano, 1970).

In turn, the “ECLAC school”² also notes structural obstacles to the generalization of labor laws in these countries and the social and economic consequences of this situation. These authors advocated the industrialization of the continent and the removal of these obstacles, thus reducing inequalities by the progressive incorporation of workers into the manufacturing industry and the formal labor market (Bielschowsky, 2009).

In the 1970s, a functionalist approach criticized this perspective due to the existence of a large mass of workers who were never incorporated into the capitalist labor market. As a result, it highlighted the functionality of the “informal” sector – previously seen as “archaic,” “backward,” or a disorder of late Latin American capitalism – for the very process of capitalist accumulation, since the costs of production and reproduction of workers were significantly reduced by the dynamics of the “informal economy” (Oliveira, F., 1972). This perspective proposed a relational analysis rather than a “dualistic” analysis of labor market dynamics.

This was the first time that the “sphere of reproduction” was incorporated into the analysis of urban labor in Latin America, which was made possible by the first studies in urban sociology and anthropology that assessed the concrete conditions of workers in the cities, their identities and projects, bringing a more ethnographic perspective to the world of urban work. Although some Marxist authors followed a structural approach to the “working class” to address issues such as “urban spoliation” (Kowarick, 1979) and the “informal labor market” (Cardoso; Camargo; Kowarick, 1973; Machado da Silva, 1971), others analyzed patterns of sociability, identity formation, collective organization, and workers’ motivations and aspirations (Caldeira, 1984; Durham, 1980; Zaluar, 1985).

This perspective centered on the “social reproduction” of the “popular classes” was relegated to urban sociology, which progressively moved away from the sociology of labor. As a result, from the 1990s onwards, the issue of informality was no longer understood in relation to wage employment, but rather as an economic initiative that escaped government regulation (Machado da Silva, 1993). Thus, the perspective shifted from the workers themselves to the economic regulation of the labor market.

In short, during the so-called “import substitution industrialization” period, high rates of economic growth in some countries produced an “expectation of incorporation” of workers into the formal labor market. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the economic crisis on the continent and the subsequent process of deindustrialization and labor flexibilization reduced this growth and significantly worsened living conditions in Latin American cities. Since then, the expectation of “incorporation” or the “utopia of the wage society” (Cardoso, 2010) is no longer a possible normative horizon.

At the same time, ethnographic urban studies established illegal and informal transnational markets as their central topic. This literature addresses the transitivity between the formal and the informal, the licit and the illicit (Telles, 2006, 2009; Telles; Hirata, 2007). The idea of “globalization from below” consolidated

² ECLAC is the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

informality not as an issue to be overcome, but as a central feature of the relations between the Global North and South (Hirata, 2021).

In this context, policy makers and scholars progressively replaced the concept of “informality” with the pair “employability/entrepreneurialism” in the 1990s and 2000s (Tommasi; Corrochano, 2020). These concepts do not have the same critical meaning as informality and act to convince or “domesticate” workers (Machado da Silva, 2002). Thus, the ideology behind “entrepreneurialism” within the framework of neoliberal capitalism has been criticized as a new way to justify and manage inequalities in contemporary capitalism.

Recently, another concept has emerged in the literature on labor: “precariousness,” which has acquired increasing importance, especially in the seminal works of Bourdieu (1998), Butler (2004), and Standing (2011). Each of these authors highlighted different aspects of precariousness in life and work.

Bourdieu focused his analysis on the precarization of working conditions, the lack of occupational security, and the reduction of benefits or rights linked to the world of work in contrast to the Fordist industrial period. Standing (2011) follows the Bourdieusian line of analysis. However, his perspective changed the conceptualization of precariousness from working conditions to a category or social class (Millar, 2017). Therefore, Standing’s analysis has a normative concern that refers not only to an “ideal” insertion of workers into the relations of production, but, above all, to their role as potentially transformative agents of capitalism itself. On the other hand, Butler (2004) analyzes the issue of precariousness not only from the perspective of labor, but also considering it a generalized human condition. Thus, she constructs a vision of precariousness as essentially relational since vulnerability is unevenly distributed among people.

These analyses show that the specificity of work in urban contexts loses its centrality. However, the city is a fundamental space for the reproduction of the workforce (Castells, 2009). Therefore, reconnecting the sociology of labor with urban sociology is necessary to analyze the relations between the spheres of production and reproduction in Latin American capitalism. In other words, we must analyze how labor informality, the precariousness of labor relations, and the encouragement of entrepreneurialism affect the way of life and the daily dynamics of the popular classes, since these perspectives have been lost in recent decades.

The starting points for this analysis are the three “quasi-concepts” presented so far: informality, precariousness, and entrepreneurialism. They are “quasi-concepts” due to their ability to create an internal critique of broader concepts, describing phenomena that often escape conceptual understanding while also providing relatively stable cognitive references that guide our perception of certain social phenomena. Thus, the “quasi-concept” is in a porous zone, halfway between social perception and a broader and more rigorous conceptual reflection (Machado da Silva, 2002).

Methodology

This study used the SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) database, an electronic library with a selected collection of Ibero-American scientific journals. In addition to having journals from Brazil, SciELO currently holds journal publications from several other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile,

Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. Its network includes 391 journals, of which 306 are active, and over 450,000 indexed articles. Even though the sample consists mostly of Brazilian publications (about 80%), the database allows comparisons with neighboring countries in terms of questions, themes, and research approaches.

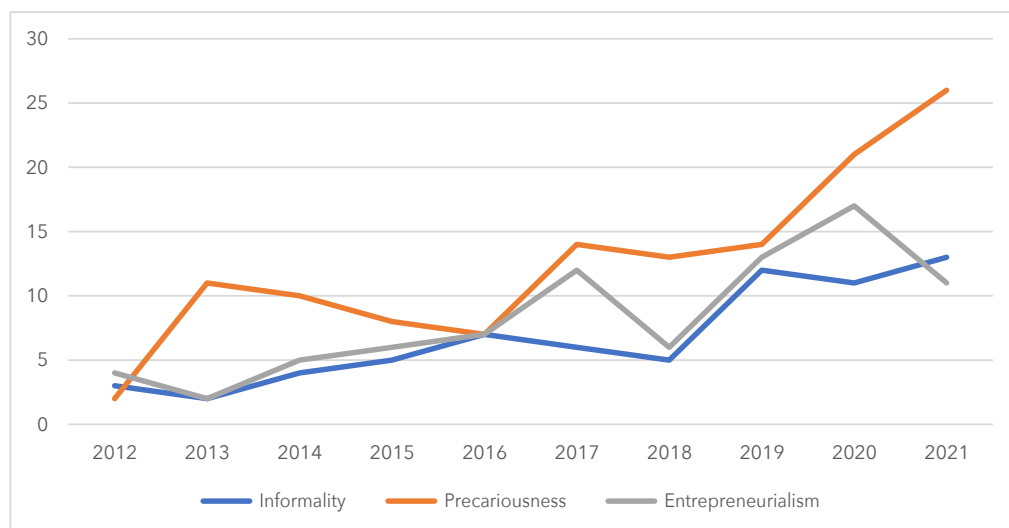
The research was conducted on May 25, 2022, and began with individual searches for the three aforementioned “quasi-concepts” in contemporary urban labor studies: “precariousness,” “informality,” and “entrepreneurialism.”

The initial search generated 1,558 results, of which 1,484 were articles. Most articles were related to “precariousness” (696), followed by “entrepreneurialism” (523) and, to a lesser extent, “informality” (265). This study analyzed only articles and not theses or dissertations, considering the importance and circulation of articles in current scientific production and the possibility of performing a qualified quantitative analysis, since articles are significantly more synthetic than other forms of production.

To facilitate the analysis, the temporal and spatial scope was restricted. The following areas of the Web of Science (WoS) platform were selected: Sociology, Anthropology, Humanities, Urban, and Work. Finally, this study focused on the last 10 years (2012-2021), which represented almost 80% of the selected articles. As studies published in 2022 were still in progress at the time of this research, they would hinder the analysis of the results and were therefore excluded.

Graph 1 presents the breakdown of the sample initially selected for each search term by year. It shows an upward trend in recent years in the number of articles addressing the three themes, especially in the last three years³.

GRAPH 1 - Evolution of the number of articles published annually on informality, precariousness, and entrepreneurialism (2012-2021).



Source: elaborated by the author based on data collected from SciELO.

³ The number of articles addressing “entrepreneurialism” in 2021 slightly reduced compared with the previous year, which does not necessarily contradict the medium-term trend of growing production on the topic, since it may be a one-time reduction or even a delay in the publication of the most recent issues of some journals.

After these refinements, 277 articles were still divided between the three issues. They were organized in a Microsoft Excel table and underwent a new round of analytical refinement for the exclusion of articles that did not address the topics of interest. The following publications were excluded: specific case studies in the rural environment; articles more related to the sociology of work (addressing specific professions, such as nurses, teachers, etc.); articles on public or collective health issues; articles with economic rather than sociological analysis; articles with a more managerial than social perspective; studies on entrepreneurialism from the perspective of the middle and upper classes; studies on the evaluation of the “entrepreneurial training” of young people or students; articles that pointed to the dissemination of entrepreneurial logic to other areas, such as public policies; and articles not related to urban and/or labor issues⁴.

As a result, the analysis was based on 57 articles on precariousness, 38 on informality, and 44 on entrepreneurialism. Thus, the total number of articles was 134, excluding the five that appeared in the searches simultaneously. Only five articles simultaneously fit more than one issue, showing that the three groups of articles adopted distinct and possibly complementary, but very rarely overlapping perspectives. In four of the five cases, the intersection was between informality and precariousness (Bezerra; Corteletti; Araújo, 2020; Estanque; Climent, 2021; Galvão *et al.*, 2019; Rubio Campo, 2021), and in only one, between informality and entrepreneurialism (Silva, 2017).

The next step was to identify the central issue of the article, any secondary themes, and the methodological procedures adopted. This analysis was performed by reading the titles, keywords, abstracts, and, when necessary, excerpts from all selected articles. The following sections organize the analyzed articles within these issues, point out possible relationships between the research methods and the thematic approach, and, when the issue is relevant, analyze the differences in focus given by researchers from different Latin American countries.

Main themes and methods

This section is subdivided into three parts. Each one addresses one of the three main issues analyzed in this study and seeks to assess how these “quasi-concepts” are used in studies with different theoretical and empirical approaches.

The methodological classification was divided into six major groups: 1) theoretical articles, which were not directly based on empirical data; 2) case studies, which analyzed one or more concrete cases and eventually used a variety of methods for data collection and analysis; 3) comparative studies, which systematically compared two or more concrete cases; 4) ethnographies; 5) quantitative analysis; and 6) multi-method research, which combined quantitative and qualitative methods.

⁴ As the focus of this study is the Latin American debate, articles published in journals based outside the continent and whose authors and research object were also located outside its countries were excluded. On the other hand, articles by researchers from countries outside the continent were kept, as long as they were published in journals based in Latin America or their empirical object was the Latin American reality, due to its possible influence on the debate on the continent.

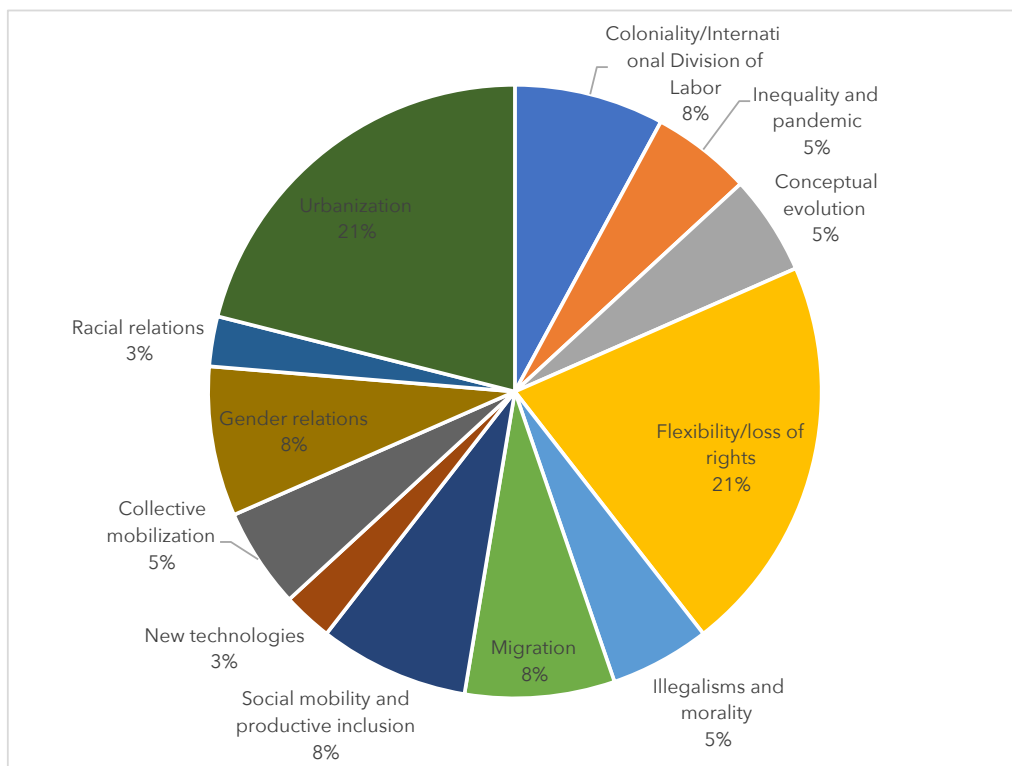
Informality: continuity of ECLAC’s structuralist heritage

Informality has been a crucial issue in the Latin American debate for many decades. While this concept has lost strength in the Brazilian reality, it remains quite strong in other Latin American countries, especially in Argentina, evidenced by the language in which the articles were written. Despite Brazilian journals representing 80% of the journals available in SciELO, 21 of the 38 analyzed studies (55.3%) were written in Spanish, four (10.5%) in English, and 13 (34.2%) in Portuguese.

Most of the articles that are in English and Portuguese were published in Brazilian journals, except for three in Portuguese that were published in Portuguese journals. Most studies in Spanish were from Argentina (14), two from Colombia, one from Chile, three from Brazil, and one from Portugal.

Regarding the research topics, Graph 2 shows the predominance of two main topics, each encompassing 21% of the articles involving informality. The first concerns the informality resulting from the late, uneven, and incomplete urbanization process in Latin America. These articles address topics such as public transport and urban mobility (Villar-Urbe, 2021), but, above all, informal settlements and the process of public intervention and land regularization in these areas (Costa; Lopes, 2018; Costa Lima; Freitas; Cardoso, 2019; Elorza; Alvarado Rodríguez; Monayar, 2019; Fank, 2021; Gonçalves; Vale, 2021; Sáenz Acosta, 2016; Yunda, 2019).

GRAPH 2 - Distribution of the selected articles by topics related to the issue of informality (2012–2021).



Source: elaborated by the author based on data collected from SciELO.

The second topic concerns the flexibilization and loss of rights due to the economic reforms and productive restructuring that occurred in most Latin American countries. In this field, most publications are historical studies that seek to analyze the structural changes in the world of work (Antunes, 2014; Cardoso, 2016; Díaz, 2015; Messina, 2017), but the literature also includes case studies on several economic sectors, such as bars and restaurants (Rubio Campos, 2021), the textile industry (Ludmer, 2019), and civil construction (Costa; Tomasi, 2014), and research focused on public policies for the protection of workers and related to social security (Maneiro, 2017).

In terms of quantitative relevance, some articles more broadly assess “coloniality” or the international integration of Latin America – or the “Global South” – in the international division of labor and its consequences to the labor market (Durães, 2020; Estanque; Climent, 2021; Munck, 2021). To some extent, this is an attempt to update the ECLAC agenda or address the dependency relations to which Latin America is subjected, but from the perspective of the processes of “globalization from below.”

Articles on the processes of productive inclusion and social mobility amid informality (Comas; Cicciari; Rubio, 2016; Elbert, 2016; Silva, 2017) and the situation of immigrant workers and their relationship with the “informal economy” (Muschi, 2021; Porras Díaz, 2018; Sáez *et al.*, 2020) also stand out. In the same proportion, another important topic concerns gender relations in the world of work (Águila, 2015; Bezerra; Corteletti; Araújo, 2020; Guiraldelli, 2012). As in the case of coloniality, each of these three groups represented 8% of the analyzed sample.

Four other groups represented 5% of the sample each: theoretical and conceptual research (Lijterman, 2017; Rabossi, 2019); studies on the collective mobilization of workers in informal markets (Braga, 2019; Galvão *et al.*, 2019); analyses of the relationships between informality, illegal markets, and moral issues (Perelmiter, 2020; Pires, L., 2013). Moreover, the more recent studies evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal workers and its consequences in increasing social and economic inequalities (Jacovkis *et al.*, 2021; Maldovan Bonelli; Goren; Corradi, 2021). Finally, two other topics address, respectively, informality amidst new digital work technologies (Abílio; Amorim; Grohmann, 2021) and the overlap of informality and racial oppression (Martins, 2012).

In methodological terms, case studies predominated (36.8%). This type of research uses different methods (usually qualitative) to conduct a more in-depth study of a specific situation or occupational category, as in the case of workers in the construction industry, the entertainment sector, or specific branches of the manufacturing industry. In total, 15.8% of the sample were quantitative studies, 13.2% were ethnographic studies, 7.9% were comparative studies, 5.3% were action research studies, and 2.6% were multi-method studies. Moreover, 2.6% of

the studies performed historical analysis, and a larger portion (15.8%) corresponded to purely theoretical research⁵.

Thus, based on the set of articles that address the issue of urban labor by the quasi-concept of informality, this panoramic view showed that, despite the loss of centrality of the category for research developed in Brazil, it remains relevant in other Latin American countries, especially Argentina.

Regarding the topic, articles that seek to empirically analyze the consequences of the processes of flexibilization in the world of work, mainly due to the loss of rights, predominated. Studies involving race (Martins, 2012) and gender (Guiraldelli, 2012) issues could be included as a secondary aspect of the consequences of the new labor reality.

Despite the empirical character of most studies, when mobilizing the idea of informality, the authors generally start from a more structural perspective regarding the transformations of contemporary capitalism and the integration of Latin America in the global context. Thus, it shows an important continuity with the theoretical traditions of the ECLAC school.

Moreover, despite the importance of urbanization as a central topic in the discussion of informality (21% of the articles), the literature does not present any connection between the logic of informal settlements as a place of reproduction of the workforce and informal work as a situation of precarious production and distribution of wealth.

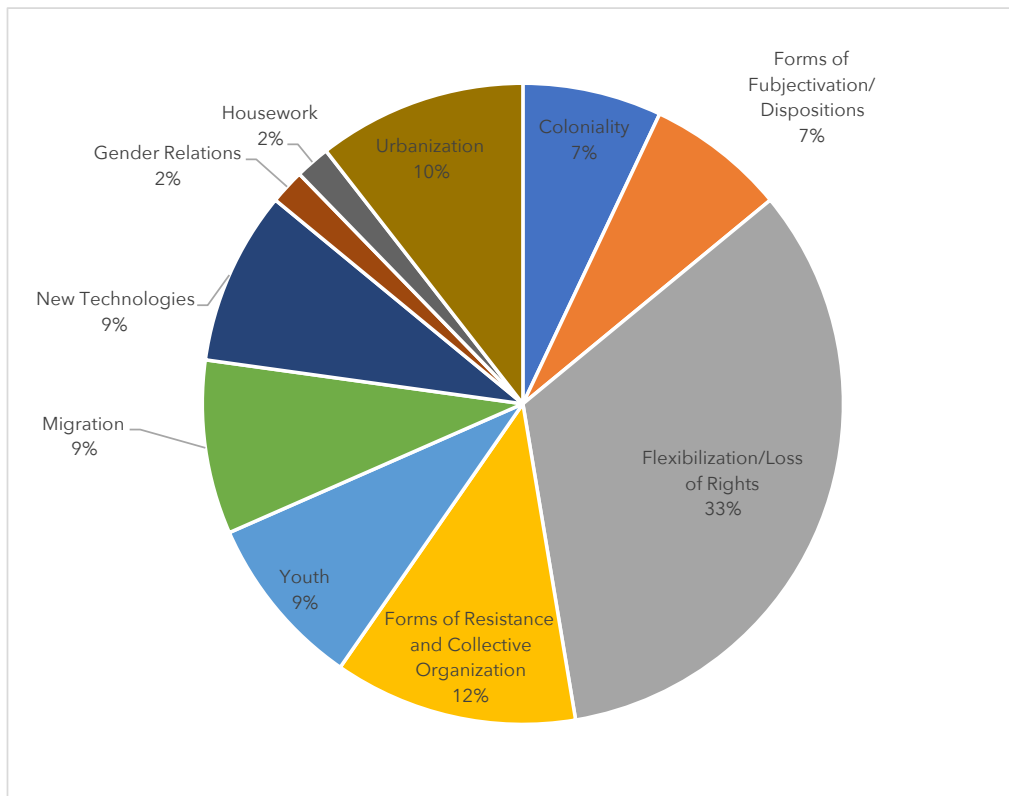
Precariousness and the new dynamics of working conditions

Regarding precariousness, the division between articles published in Brazil and in other Latin American countries was more proportional, which is reflected in the language in which they were written (40.4% in Spanish, 8.8% in English, and 50.9% in Portuguese, of 57 articles). In the case of the articles in Spanish, studies on precariousness had greater diversity and balance between the Spanish-speaking countries of the continent.

The topic of flexibilization and loss of rights in the face of structural reforms and changes in international capitalism prevailed. According to Graph 3, about one-third of the articles address this issue, either from a theoretical point of view (Albanesi, 2015; Cuevas Valenzuela, 2015; Estanque; Costa, 2018; Filgueiras; Souki, 2017; Gennari; Albuquerque, 2012; Maciel, 2018; Pineda-Talavera, 2019; Souza; Lemos; Silva, 2020; Vargas, 2016), and from case studies (Araújo, 2013; Barrios Moreno; Loubet Orozco, 2021; Braga, 2014; Coscia, 2020; Galvão *et al.*, 2019; Rubio Campos, 2021; Trajtemberg; Varela, 2015; Zavala-Villalón; Vidal-Molina, 2019) or from a comparative (Cardoso; Azaïs, 2019) or quantitative studies (Carvalho; Fernandes, 2018).

⁵ No correlation between research methodology, topic, and country of researchers or publication was found.

GRAPH 3 - Distribution of the selected articles by topics related to the issue of precariousness (2012-2021).



Source: elaborated by the author based on data collected from SciELO.

The analysis of forms of resistance and collective organization stood out, accounting for 12% of the total articles analyzed. Most (57%) used ethnographic research methods (Barros; Osório; Dias, 2018; Duclos, 2017; Fernández Álvarez, 2018; Pérez Torres, 2018), two were theoretical texts (Butler, 2017; Vejar, 2013), and one was a case study (Estanque, 2014).

Regarding precariousness, two other topics emerge as new, when compared with informality. The first concerns the effects of the processes or the situation of precariousness among young people (Aguilar-Forero; Muñoz, 2015; Aparicio-Castillo, 2013; Ganter Solís; Tornel Cifuentes, 2016; Rausky, 2020; Soler-i-Martí; Ballesté; Feixa, 2021). The studies by Soler-i-Martí, Ballesté, and Feixa (2021) and Aguilar-Forero and Muñoz (2015) also address the forms of collective mobilization that young people have developed in the context of precariousness. The second new topic concerns forms of subjectivation and the production of dispositions, which appears in 7% of the articles (Béhar, 2019; Franco, 2021; Robert; Spolle, 2020; Villar; Bernardes, 2018).

On the other hand, two other topics are repeated within this topic, including the percentage of articles that address them: coloniality and the position of Latin America in the international division of labor (Bertolotti; Ramírez, 2021; Estanque; Climent, 2021; Grinberg, 2020; Vejar; Hernández Aracena, 2017); and migration and the precarious condition of these workers (Berríos-Riquelme, 2021; Gaviria-Londoño; Luna-Carmona, 2013; Leite; Silva; Guimarães, 2017; Peña; García-Mendoza, 2019; Sáez *et al.*, 2020). This last topic includes four case studies.

A topic that appeared in the analysis of informality, but which is more prominent in precariousness, concerns new digital technologies, often associated with “uberization,” “platformization,” or “gig economy” (Lima; Bridi, 2019; Oliveira; Carelli; Grillo, 2020; Rosenfield; Mossi, 2020; Soriano; Cabalquinto; Panaligan, 2021; Vasconcelos; Mello; Oliveira, 2021). This issue, despite its recent emergence due to contemporary technological changes, relies exclusively on the production of Brazilian researchers within the sample analyzed in this study.

Finally, the topic of gender relations has less representation in the sample (Bezerra; Corteletti; Araújo, 2020), but is in strong dialogue with the withdrawal of rights and the flexibilization of labor relations and domestic work (Araujo; Monticelli; Acciari, 2021). Moreover, the issue of urbanization and its consequences in terms of precariousness stood out (Birman; Fernandes; Pierobon, 2014; Castro; Reschilian; Zanetti, 2018; Freitas, 2014; Mitidieri, 2020; Pagani; Alves; Cordeiro, 2016; Schvarsberg, 2017). As in the previous case, urbanization and work seem to constitute two completely different worlds when it comes to precariousness.

Regarding methodological procedures, as in the case of the articles analyzed in the previous section, case studies also predominate even more intensely (45.6%). Purely theoretical articles represented 31.6% of the sample. Ethnographic studies accounted for 15.8% of the total; as previously mentioned, studies of this type may be related to analyses of resistance and collective organization. Finally, a smaller percentage of the articles used comparative or quantitative methods (3.5% each).

In short, these results show a greater diversity of countries interested in the quasi-concept of precariousness in Latin America. This interest is predominantly empirical, studied from concrete cases: the precarious situation of certain groups of workers in the urban context.

When compared with the other articles, the emphasis on precariousness increased when addressing the withdrawal of rights and the flexibilization of labor relations (33% versus 21%). Similarly, studies related to forms of resistance and collective organization (12% versus 5%) and the effects of new technologies on labor relations (9% versus 3%) were more frequent. On the other hand, the issue of productive inclusion and the prospects of social mobility disappeared, since the possibilities of “integrating” workers into capitalist relations of production according to the pattern of industrial capitalism seem to be an increasingly less likely normative horizon from the perspective adopted by the articles analyzed in this section. Finally, the complete absence of articles on racial relations and the small portion involving gender issues also draws attention since these are two central topics in contemporary political and sociological debate.

Precariousness and precarization are emerging phenomena in contemporary capitalism and not exclusively in Latin America. Although the analyses are less structural and more focused on the conjuncture, their starting point continues to be the global context. Therefore, the predominance of case studies (45.6% of the total) focused on the work environment removes the urban context of social reproduction from the analysis and makes it difficult to study other forms of precariousness beyond the world of work.

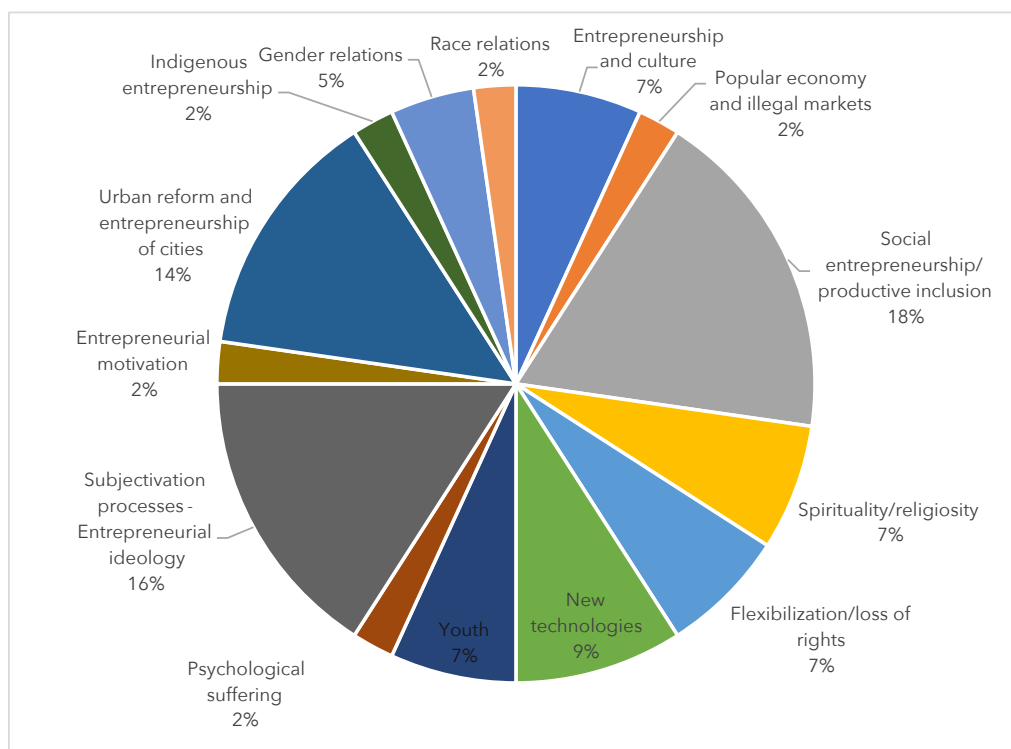
Entrepreneurialism: between the possibilities of inclusion and ideology

In the case of entrepreneurialism, the predominance of Brazilian publications is much more striking. More than 59% of the 44 articles analyzed were published in Portuguese and less than 32% in Spanish. Moreover, the four articles published

in English, which represent 9% of the sample, were written by Brazilian authors. In the case of Spanish-speaking researchers, publications from Colombia prevail (eight out of 14), followed by Argentina (3), Mexico (2), and Chile (1).

Graph 4 shows that this set of articles addresses a wide range of topics. However, for purposes of organization, they were reorganized into five large groups: 1) the possibilities of entrepreneurship in promoting social inclusion; 2) entrepreneurship in the face of changes in contemporary capitalism and the emergence of new technologies; 3) entrepreneurialism in relation to subjectivity and psychological issues (motivations, ideological processes, and their eventual connections with the religious or spiritual field); 4) the entrepreneurship of specific groups (women, Black people, young people, Indigenous people, in the field of culture and popular commerce); 5) entrepreneurialism and the dynamics of urbanization processes.

GRAPH 4 - Distribution of the selected articles by topics related to the issue of entrepreneurialism (2012-2021).



Source: elaborated by the author based on data collected from SciELO.

In the first group, which corresponds to 18% of the total sample, some articles analyze the possibilities (and limits) that entrepreneurialism can impose on the social inclusion of certain groups. The topics range from the processes of politicization of consumption (Ramos; Blanc, 2021) to the social responsibility of companies and universities (Bañuelos García; García Martínez; Álvarez Diez, 2021; Bargsted, 2013; Chirinos Araque; Pérez Peralta, 2016; Ocampo Eljaiek, 2016), the role of non-governmental organizations (Radrigán, R.; Dávila R.; Penaglia V., 2012), and the solidarity economy (Gaiger, 2015). Thus, in contrast to precariousness, the “integration” of the poorest into the capitalist market - often involved in the idea of “social impact” - should be possible according to some of the

authors who address entrepreneurialism. Moreover, this set of articles highlights the central role played by actors that seek to promote entrepreneurship as a solution to economic and social issues, such as companies, universities, foundations, and other civil society organizations.

The second group of articles is closer to the two other aforementioned issues since it dialogues with the structural changes in contemporary capitalism that result in the flexibilization and withdrawal of labor rights (Becher; Martín, 2016; Krein; Colombi, 2019; Wolff, 2014) and with digital technological transformations (Abílio, 2020; Maia, 2019; Palermo; Ventrice, 2020; Pires, A. S., 2021). In this group, Palermo and Ventrice (2020) and Maia (2019) use ethnographic methods while also address the subjectivation processes and the ideological role played by the growth of the entrepreneurial discourse.

This third issue, related to the subjective and ideological aspects of entrepreneurship, represents 27% of the analyzed articles. Among them, publications that specifically address the processes of subjectivation and ideological persuasion stand out (Amorim; Moda; Mevis, 2021; Ericson, 2020; Faria, 2020; Rocha; Carvalho, 2018; Silva, 2017; Souza, C. G., 2020; Tommasi; Velazco, 2017), representing 16% of the total. One article analyzes the motivation of entrepreneurs to start their own businesses (Roldão; Monte-Mor; Tardin, 2018), based on quantitative analysis, and other studies assess the interconnections between entrepreneurship and religiosity or spiritual issues (Enoque; Borges; Borges, 2015; Funes; Ramírez, 2021; Souza, A. R., 2018). Finally, one article analyzes the psychological suffering caused by these ideological processes (Peters, 2021).

A relevant group of articles (14% of the sample) focuses on the penetration of neoliberal ideology into the very dynamics of urbanization by analyzing urban reform or restoration and international competition between cities, a situation in which municipalities act as “entrepreneurs” (Brito, 2021; Casaqui, 2016; Jesus, 2017; Leal, 2017; Oliveira, C. M., 2020; Oliveira; Misoczky, 2016; Tavares; Fantin; Silva, 2021).

Finally, the last group of articles (23%) involves specific groups that embraced the idea of entrepreneurialism, including studies that analyze entrepreneurship in the field of culture (Bittencourt; Domingues, 2016; Carvalho; Cutrim; Costa, 2017; Judice; Furtado, 2014), among young people (García-García, 2015; Gómez Granada; Baquero Soler; Álvarez Zapata, 2019; Mendieta Ramírez; Estrada Rodríguez; Pérez Pérez, 2019), women’s entrepreneurship (Forero-Bernal; Durán-Duarte, 2019; Silva-Peralta; Rompato, 2020), Black entrepreneurship (Rezende; Mafra; Pereira, 2018), entrepreneurship among indigenous peoples (Rueda-Rodríguez; González-Campo, 2021), and popular entrepreneurship and its connections with illegal markets (Hirata, 2014).

Regarding the methodology, articles on the “quasi-concept” of entrepreneurialism are even more intensively based on empirical studies, since only 13.6% of the sample are purely theoretical (against 15.8% for informality and 31.6% for precariousness). Among the methodologies applied, 43.2% are based on case studies, 22.7% on ethnographies, 9.1% on quantitative methods, 6.8% are multi-methodological, and 4.5% are comparative.

In short, within entrepreneurialism, the polarization between two major groups is more evident. On the one hand, those who seek to highlight the “social” character of entrepreneurialism, that is, its ability to “include” or “integrate” certain groups into the market economy. Unlike the debate on informality in past decades, the focus of

advocates of this social side of entrepreneurialism highlights the role of money as an “integrating” mechanism rather than on social rights (Feltran, 2014).

On the other hand, the focus of the analysis is on criticizing the processes of subjectivation and ideological persuasion that would be able to create a disposition to become an entrepreneur. This is, however, more of a conceptual than an empirical division since many studies move from one reading to another and point out possibilities and limits of this integration process, with either a fierce or a moderate criticism towards the ideology behind the notion of entrepreneurship in the context of contemporary capitalism.

Finally, no article on entrepreneurialism addressed forms of resistance and collective mobilization. Furthermore, as in the previous cases, the analyses of entrepreneurship do not connect the spheres of production and social reproduction. Thus, the city is more a background than an integral and fundamental part of labor relations.

Final considerations: frameworks and absences in the debate on contemporary urban labor

When analyzing the contemporary debate on urban labor in Latin America, an inescapable theme permeates most of the articles reviewed in this study: the changes in contemporary capitalism around the so-called “neoliberalism” or “globalization.” Consequently, different authors are concerned with how national states manage labor relations and how this is related to national integration into the international market. However, the analyzed articles, which addressed one of the three “quasi-concepts,” approached and articulated with this topic in different ways.

In the first case, the primary focus of the publications on informality were the processes of subordinate integration of the Latin American continent into this “new world order,” which reproduces an internal situation in which the informal sector of the economy would be a permanent and structural condition. Strictly related to this first point, the flexibilization of labor relations and the reduction of the role of the government in the economic development and social protection of workers by neoliberal reforms are aggravating factors.

The focus of the articles on precariousness is exactly the opposite, and the processes of flexibilization of labor relations and reduction of rights are considered a planetary condition and not a specificity of the “Global South.” In both cases, a group of authors, although a minority, discusses the possibilities of this conjuncture toward the emergence of forms of resistance and collective mobilization of workers. This perspective is absent in publications on our third “quasi-concept.”

The approach of entrepreneurialism differs considerably from the others. In this case, the ideological aspects and their consequences on the consciousness, dispositions, and practices of individuals are dominant. Thus, the forms of “governmentality” (Foucault, 2008) and management within the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski; Chiapello, 2009), the processes of subjectivation and ideological persuasion produced by the set of neoliberal ideas become the center of the debate (Dardot; Laval, 2016).

In short, informality is predominantly seen in its structural character, precariousness as a project to deteriorate the material conditions of workers,

and entrepreneurialism as a way of hiding this situation and encouraging adaptation to govern the poorest. Therefore, we should explore the complementarities and omissions of each “quasi-concept” by articulating between fields that seem distant but involve quite similar issues. After all, empirically, city workers might constantly migrate from informality to precariousness, even if formalized, and then to entrepreneurship (and vice versa) without significant changes in their conditions or subjective aspirations (Fontes, 2022).

Moreover, bringing the sociology of work closer to urban sociology is necessary, in order to reestablish the connections between labor and the city. In most of the studies analyzed, the urban environment is a secondary context in which labor relations develop, rather than a fundamental space for the reproduction of the workforce, where workers elaborate their way of life. This allows a deeper analysis of the precariousness of life and not only of work (Butler, 2004), of the effects of the lack of state protection on informal (or illegal) markets, and of the disturbances that the entrepreneurial logic produces in the ways of life of urban populations.

The debate presented in this study also needs to approach the practices around urban illegalities, in which the most vulnerable workers and those with less possibility of integration operate (Feltran, 2021a, 2021b). Similarly, the intersectionality between oppression in the world of work and that experienced by subaltern groups, especially women, Black people, migrants, the LGBTQIA+ population, and residents of slums and urban peripheries, must be further studied. These groups are especially affected by the processes analyzed in this study but appear only in a few articles.

In this sense, authors developing studies on intersectionality (Collins, 2022; Crenshaw, 2019) and social reproduction theory (Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2016; Vogel, 1983), which have resonated strongly in Latin America in recent years, can make essential contributions to this debate on urban labor and its relations to the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

Race, class, gender, and territory are social markers of difference and inequality in Latin American capitalism. Understanding how these oppressions reinforce, overlap, and feedback the mechanisms of accumulation and oppression are issues that future studies need to address with more emphasis. Forms of resistance and possibilities for transforming the scenario tend to emerge from this epistemological turn.

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Abstract

Informality, precariousness, and entrepreneurialism: new and old issues of urban labor in Latin America over the last decade (2012-2021)

Urban labor is a key issue in Latin American social sciences. Since the middle of the last century, two contrasting theoretical and methodological perspectives have tended to dominate approaches to this topic. On the one hand, structuralist analysis focuses on the dependent and subaltern integration of the Latin American economy in the world market. On the other hand, some authors working with ethnographic methods seek to analyze the concrete situations of life, work, and survival of urban popular classes. More recently, three issues have dominated the debate: informality, precariousness, and entrepreneurialism. Based on a quantitative analysis of 134 academic articles, this study analyzed how these three issues have been mobilized in different ways and with different research methods by Latin American researchers. This analysis identifies a gap between urban sociology and the sociology of labor that disconnects the spheres of labor production and reproduction in urban contexts and overlooks the importance of workers' everyday lives in the city. Therefore, this study argues in favor of a rapprochement between these two fields to bring together urban labor studies and other contemporary issues, such as race, gender oppression, and illegality in the city.

Keywords: *Work; Urban; Informality; Precariousness; Entrepreneurialism.*

Resumo

Informalidade, precariedade e empreendedorismo: questões novas e antigas sobre trabalho urbano na América Latina na última década (2012-2021)

Trabalho urbano é uma questão central para as Ciências Sociais da América Latina. Desde meados do século passado, duas perspectivas teórico-metodológicas divergentes têm dominado abordagens sobre o assunto. Por um lado, a análise estruturalista focaliza a integração dependência e subalterna das economias latino-americanas no mercado mundial. Por outro, autores que trabalham com métodos etnográficos buscam analisar as situações concretas de vida, trabalho e sobrevivência das classes populares urbanas. Mais recentemente, três questões dominam o debate: informalidade, precariedade e empreendedorismo. Partindo em uma análise quantitativa de 134 artigos acadêmicos, este estudo analisou como pesquisadores latino-americanos, a partir de diferentes métodos e perspectivas, mobilizam essas três questões. A análise identificou uma lacuna entre a sociologia urbana e a sociologia do trabalho, o que desconecta as esferas da produção e reprodução do trabalho em contextos urbanos e ignora a importância da vida cotidiana dos trabalhadores na cidade. Assim, este estudo argumenta por uma aproximação entre esses dois campos para reunir os estudos do trabalho urbano e outras questões contemporâneas, como raça, opressão de gênero e ilegalidade na cidade.

Palavras-chave: *Trabalho; Urbano; Informalidade; Precariedade; Empreendedorismo.*

Résumé

Informalité, précarité et entrepreneuriat : nouveaux et anciens enjeux du travail urbain en Amérique latine au cours de la dernière décennie (2012-2021)

Le travail urbain est une question clé dans les sciences sociales latino-américaines. Depuis le milieu du dernier siècle, deux perspectives théorique-méthodologiques contrastées ont dominé les approches de ce sujet. D'une part, l'analyse structuraliste se concentre sur l'intégration dépendante et subalterne de l'économie latino-américaine dans le marché mondial. D'autre part, certains auteurs travaillant avec des méthodes ethnographiques

cherchent à analyser les situations concrètes de vie, de travail et de survie des classes populaires urbaines. Plus récemment, trois questions ont dominé le débat : l’informalité, la précarité et l’entrepreneuriat. Basée sur une analyse quantitative de 134 articles académiques, cette étude a analysé la manière dont les chercheurs latino-américains, à partir de méthodes et de perspectives différentes, mobilisent ces trois questions. Cette analyse a identifié un fossé entre la sociologie urbaine et la sociologie du travail qui déconnecte les sphères de la production et de la reproduction du travail dans les contextes urbains et néglige l’importance de la vie quotidienne des travailleurs urbains. Par conséquent, cette étude plaide en faveur d’un rapprochement entre ces deux domaines afin de réunir les études sur le travail urbain et d’autres questions contemporaines, telles que la race, l’oppression de genre et l’illégalisme dans la ville.

Mots-clés : *Travail ; Urbain ; Informalité ; Précarité ; Entrepreneuriat.*