

Weigh anchor!

Rescuing the navigable potential of the *Mogi River*,
in Porto Ferreira, Brazil, to address small local
farmers' issues

Topic Course

ETERNAL STRUGGLE
a landscape negotiation

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*When that old river
runs past your eyes*

*To wash off the dirt
on the riverside*

*Go to the water
so very near*

*The river will be
your eyes and ears¹*

Introduction

As someone who has lived most of her life in a relatively small city – that despite what its smallness may immediately suggest, also (re)produces issues broadly known that deny people access to their basic social rights in the daily life –, the first questions I'm liable to make when faced with the concept of Democracy, before turning to an interesting study case in a well known big city indisputably relevant to debate, where expectations of resistance are somehow corresponded, where oppression is expressively confronted, where people are organized as the social inequality they

experience requires them to be; these questions are, in one hand: "Where the action doesn't happen – why doesn't it? Specially when inequity is in plain sight?", "In this sense, how vulnerable people perceive their realities – but most of all, how they name it?", and on the other hand: "If there's one, what's the acceptable size of the political and what are its borders made of? For us to assuredly address *what have enough complexity* to be on the scene?". When Deleuze and Guattari say, in the first lines of their conceptual construction of *multiplicity*: "The two of us wrote

Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd"² would it be a misconception to bring somewhat of this comprehension to the reality of our cities, of our small cities, of people's low, spread, ordinary, but existent voices? How many makes a crowd? How dense it should be? How loud?





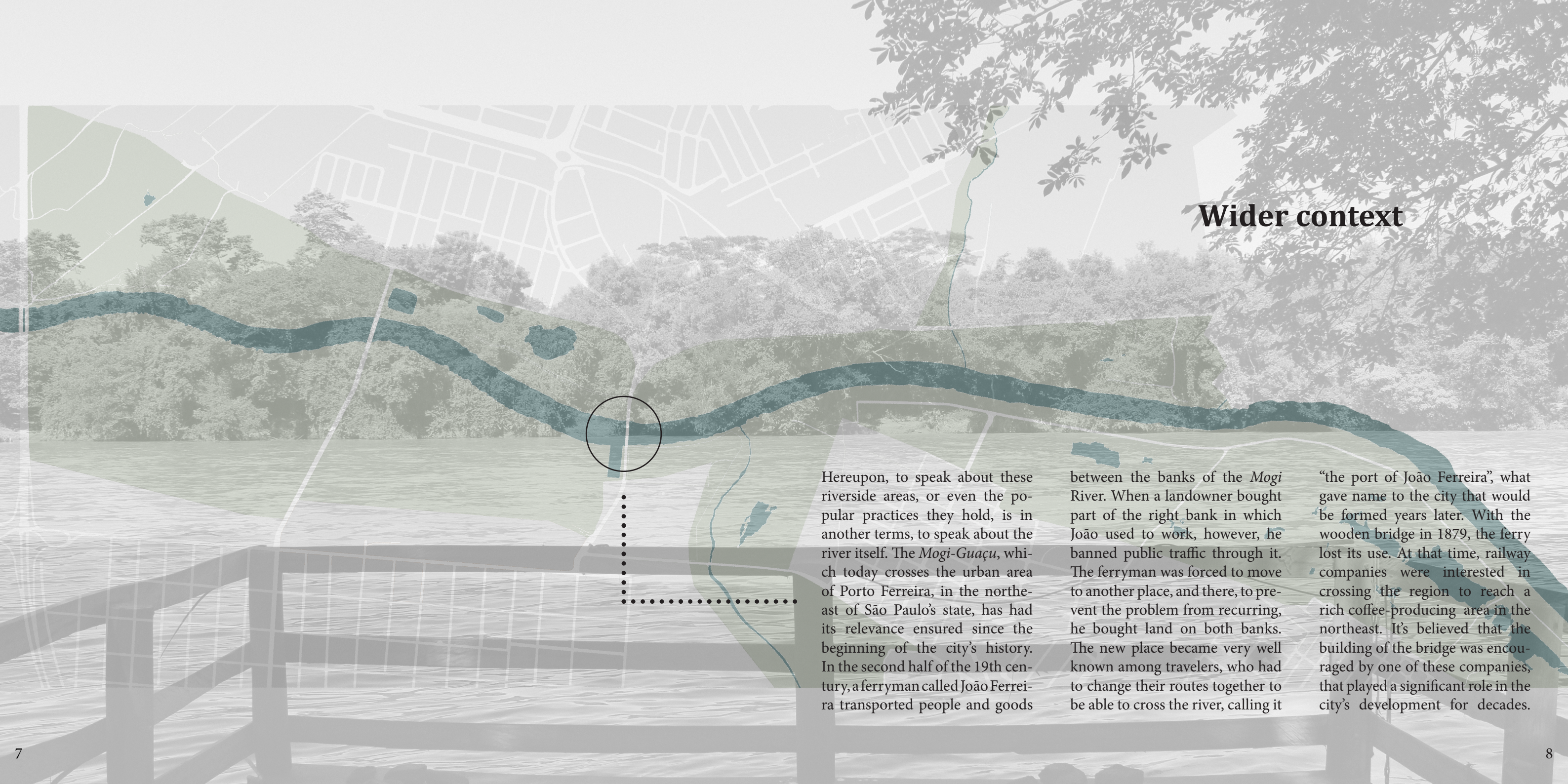
Investigation

None of these questions were, however, very familiar to me before this course – and that’s why it was particularly challenging (and enriching). As it asked us to look at our surroundings, at our local, I was impelled to rediscover mine, to deconstruct my shallow perception of a completely uninteresting place where everything and everyone is everyday the same – terribly unaffected, terribly resigned. I was impelled to reshape the relationship with my hometown; even before as a researcher or as a designer, as one of its people. In this sense, in our landscape investigation process, what firstly

came to light was the large public vague areas around the river that cuts through the city. Over the years suffering from human intervention (deforestation, pollution, burnings), they’ve never been effectively occupied. Our research was primarily dedicated to discover how do locals relate to their “vagueness” nowadays (so, if we can properly call them any “vague”), and in addition to isolated uses, it could identify a significant amount of family farming practices sparsed. At the same time, caught our attention that due to recent public investments to attract tourists and enhance

the ceramic trade for which the city is nationally known, the risk of gentrification processes in these areas has increased, threatening any social and environmental value they may now nurture.

Wider context



Hereupon, to speak about these riverside areas, or even the popular practices they hold, is in another terms, to speak about the river itself. The *Mogi-Guaçu*, which today crosses the urban area of Porto Ferreira, in the northeast of São Paulo's state, has had its relevance ensured since the beginning of the city's history. In the second half of the 19th century, a ferryman called João Ferreira transported people and goods

between the banks of the *Mogi* River. When a landowner bought part of the right bank in which João used to work, however, he banned public traffic through it. The ferryman was forced to move to another place, and there, to prevent the problem from recurring, he bought land on both banks. The new place became very well known among travelers, who had to change their routes together to be able to cross the river, calling it

“the port of João Ferreira”, what gave name to the city that would be formed years later. With the wooden bridge in 1879, the ferry lost its use. At that time, railway companies were interested in crossing the region to reach a rich coffee-producing area in the northeast. It's believed that the building of the bridge was encouraged by one of these companies, that played a significant role in the city's development for decades.

This is a recent photograph of the area indicated and described in the previous map, which may help us to better understand the composition of this landscape.

A) The current metal bridge built between 1912-1913. It replaced the wooden bridge, from the late 19th century, over which the railroad first passed (long extinct), with the aim of crossing the river and reaching important coffee-producing areas at the time. Nowadays, it's crossed mainly by residents of the northern part of the city in their home-to-work daily route. Heavy vehicles, such as buses and trucks, are prohibited from traveling on it.

B) This mentioned railroad, however, was primarily under the responsibility of local landowners. The company that was interested in installing one there, didn't receive the provincial government's authorization to do so. Wanting to reach the rich coffee-producing region anyway, it decided to invest on waterway transport. This place is where the port used to be (navigation was officially discontinued in 1903).

C) The *Leisure Area*. We couldn't find any historical documents discussing specifically about it, but we believe it could be part of the port's infrastructure. It's the area of the now on-construction urban park that will be dedicated to the restaurants that'll attend tourists.





Still, in cultural terms, a traditional event that used to take place annually before the pandemic is the so-called “buoy ride” between the *District of Cachoeira de Emas*, in the nearby town of *Pirassununga*,

also bathed by the river, and the *Leisure Area* we mentioned earlier. The tour is organized by two non-governmental popular entities, each located in one of the cities, with the objective of valuing

the river and nature, drawing attention to the importance of its preservation. The buoy ride has been going on for almost 30 years now and today hundreds of people take part in it, mainly

with the aim of having fun for a whole day. Participation is spontaneous and is made up of a very diverse public. Despite the name “buoy ride”, people also use canoes and ferries, as they prefer.

Closer context

The green colored areas that surround the river and on which our investigation focused, are protected by the current legislation and must be preserved. It's usual to find in them, however, irregular waste disposal, deforestation, burnings – practices that already happened before. It's interesting to note that most of these lakes along the river are resulted from the extraction of clayey soil to be used in the local ceramic industry. Today, the city is widely known for its ceramic products and the attention of the public administration has been very much directed towards this – the on-construction urban park (in red) is, maybe, its most evident example.



Going on, as we can see in the map, it's not unusual to find small cultivated gardens in these areas, from which their caretakers earn their livelihood. Since the river has not undergone (yet) any extreme intervention and the marginal lands are not (yet) intensively occupied, it provides water and soil for those who want to make of agriculture their source of income or to improve their already existent one.

On the other hand, it's not usual to find collective actions, as vegetable gardens formally managed by the community – what it's not the same to say there's no sense of community at all: neighbors completely unrelated to the gardens help willingly their owners here and there watering plants, inspecting the property, fixing a tool, driving downtown to buy materials, etc.

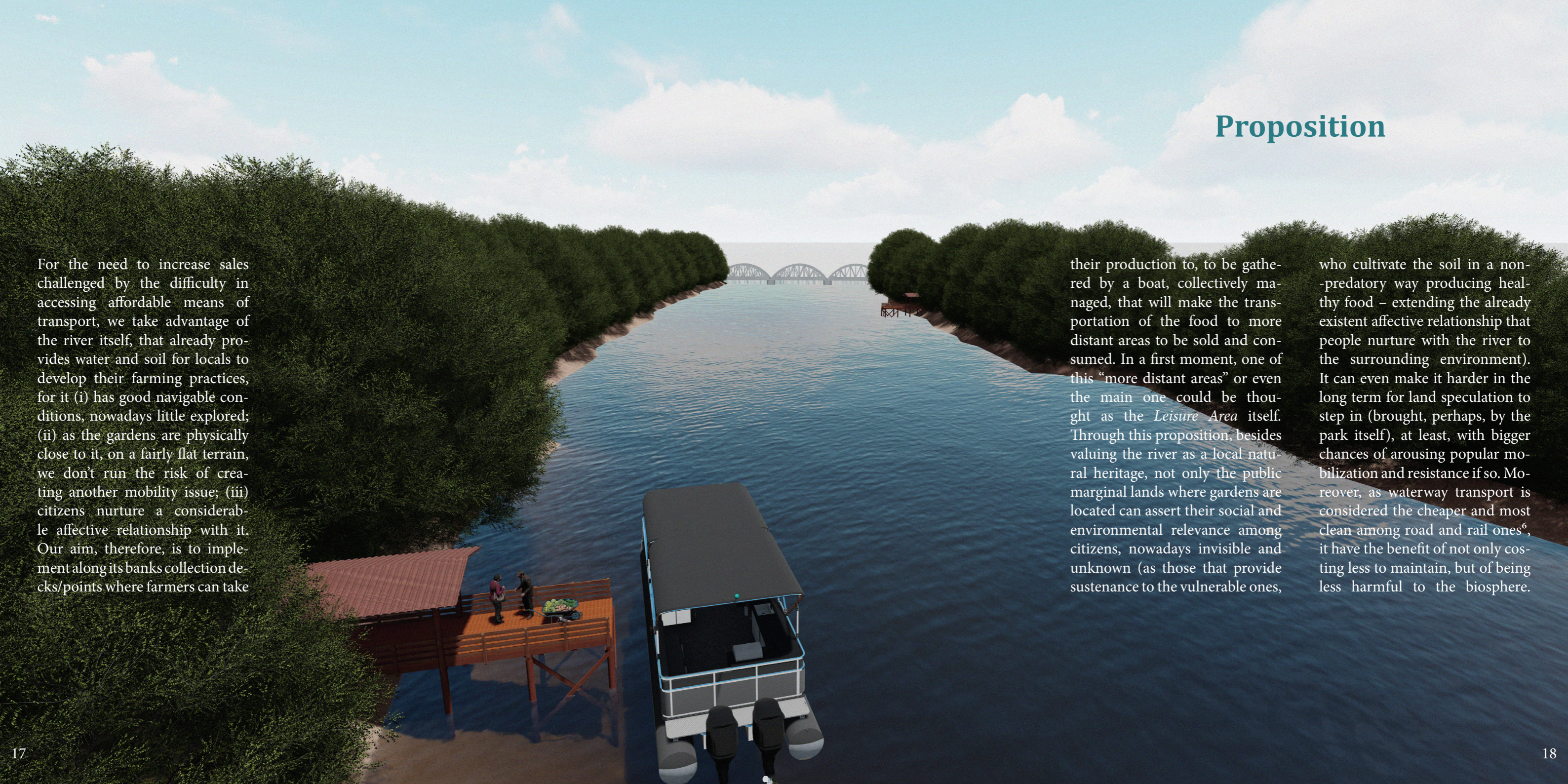


Issues

We talked to three local farmers; all of them have their main source of income in the gardens. When asked about the issues they've been facing in the day to day of work, all pointed to the cost of maintaining production, which has greatly increased, unlike their gains. Brazil is living unmatched times: more than 60 million people are nowadays affected by poverty and extreme poverty³, as the country also faces its worse level of hunger since 2004⁴, not to mention the worst hydric crisis in 91 years⁵. Besides selling vegetables to costumers who are used to go to his garden, one of the interviewed

for instance, heads every Sunday to the closest supermarket carrying his wheelbarrow full of green, to stand in the entrance gate offering fresh food to those that pass by. Even by doing this, however, it's still hard to make enough money. Increasing sales and/or reducing expenses is a general wish, but currently, they don't know how or have no means of doing so. There are producers that find an alternative in renting a car, or using their own, to drive around the neighborhoods announcing their goods repeatedly in the loudspeaker so residents can listen to it and buy directly from their house's

doorstep if interested – usually, chicken eggs; sometimes, sweet corn cake. Also, on Sundays, there is a fair in a downtown public space where local power allows people to commercialize their small productions, whether vegetables, traditional homemade recipes or handicrafts. Most local poor family farmers, though, have no material conditions to attempt either way, especially, in terms of locomotion and transportation – they can't drive, they don't own a car, can't buy one, can't afford to maintain one, either to drive it around, either to simply take their greens to the downtown fair.



Proposition

For the need to increase sales challenged by the difficulty in accessing affordable means of transport, we take advantage of the river itself, that already provides water and soil for locals to develop their farming practices, for it (i) has good navigable conditions, nowadays little explored; (ii) as the gardens are physically close to it, on a fairly flat terrain, we don't run the risk of creating another mobility issue; (iii) citizens nurture a considerable affective relationship with it. Our aim, therefore, is to implement along its banks collection decks/points where farmers can take

their production to, to be gathered by a boat, collectively managed, that will make the transportation of the food to more distant areas to be sold and consumed. In a first moment, one of this "more distant areas" or even the main one could be thought as the *Leisure Area* itself. Through this proposition, besides valuing the river as a local natural heritage, not only the public marginal lands where gardens are located can assert their social and environmental relevance among citizens, nowadays invisible and unknown (as those that provide sustenance to the vulnerable ones,

who cultivate the soil in a non-predatory way producing healthy food – extending the already existent affective relationship that people nurture with the river to the surrounding environment). It can even make it harder in the long term for land speculation to step in (brought, perhaps, by the park itself), at least, with bigger chances of arousing popular mobilization and resistance if so. Moreover, as waterway transport is considered the cheaper and most clean among road and rail ones⁶, it have the benefit of not only costing less to maintain, but of being less harmful to the biosphere.



Our main concern was to suggest an alternative to the problem posed by the small farmers that was proper to the specificity of their place, that is, to allow the continuity of their practices, which are negatively affected today by a series of economic and political issues, without the non-less harmful decision of introducing

something disconnected and unfamiliar into their daily lives. The objective was to identify, in the territory and in the landscape, the possibilities of what already existed and exploit it in order to meet their own shown needs. In this sense, the river, where our questioning began, also ended up offering some potential answers.

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c) https://www.flaticon.com/premium-icon/gardening_3350366?term=garden&page=1&position=2&page=1&position=2&related_id=3350366&origin=search