

The Infinite Periphery:
An Exploration of Everyday Life in the Periphery under Planetary Urbanization
Ender Iplikci

This dissertation explores the transformation of everyday life in the periphery of Ankara, Türkiye, under the broader theoretical framework of planetary urbanization. The study draws on Henri Lefebvre's hypothesis of the "complete urbanization of society" to contribute to ongoing debates in critical urban studies about the constantly changing nature of the urban condition in the 21st century by focusing on the everyday life in the urban periphery. Rather than perceiving the periphery as a mere spatial or temporal transition zone between the urban and rural, the research reconceptualizes it as a central component of contemporary urbanization. The periphery here is characterized as infinite, fragmented, speculative, and deeply embedded in global and local political-economic processes.

This study is rooted in a situated and reflexive standpoint, drawing from the personal and professional experiences of the author as an urban planner that was born and lived over 30 years in Ankara, as well as from a theoretical imperative to link everyday practices with structural urban transformations. The objective of this study is to address the frequent critiques of the discourse on planetary urbanization as abstract and generalizing. To this end, the study will focus on a concrete empirical case: the southwest periphery of Ankara. This area has been dramatically reshaped by the entanglement of neoliberal planning policies, speculative real estate dynamics, and socio-political shifts. As a result, the built environment and the lived experience in this area have been significantly altered.

Theoretical Framework

The dissertation is anchored in the theoretical traditions of critical urban theory, particularly the works of Henri Lefebvre, and more contemporary scholars such as Neil Brenner, Christian Schmid, Andy Merrifield, and others who have further advanced the discourse of planetary urbanization. The study commences with a critical examination of mainstream urban epistemologies and the historical evolution of urban theory. It focuses on how conventional definitions of "the urban" have become inadequate in capturing the current complexities of urbanization. In this context, Lefebvre's concept of the urban as a process – rather than a form or place – serves as a fundamental conceptual entry point.

The dissertation employs the concept of planetary urbanization not only as a descriptor of the general condition of urbanization worldwide but also as a critical lens through which to interrogate the social, political, and spatial transformations occurring at the urban margins. This study integrates the concept of everyday life with the framework of planetary urbanization, thereby situating itself within a perspective that seeks to understand macro-level transformations through the micro-scale of daily experiences.

Methodology

The methodological framework employed in this research draws inspiration from Lefebvre's regressive-progressive method, which offers a dialectical approach to understanding the transformation of urban space. This methodological approach facilitates the study's ability to transition between two distinct yet interconnected dimensions of Ankara's urbanization. The first dimension examines the structural-historical characteristics of Ankara's peripheral urbanization, referred to as the "regressive" dimension. In contrast, the second dimension focuses on the lived, everyday experiences of the city's residents in the present moment, termed as the "progressive" dimension.

The *regressive* component of the study involves an in-depth analysis of the institutional and political-economic evolution of Ankara's urban governance and planning mechanisms, particularly after the enactment of Law No. 6360 in 2014. This legislative act resulted in a substantial augmentation of the legal authority of metropolitan municipalities, concomitant with a redefinition of the geographical boundaries between urban and rural regions. This redefinition precipitated an acceleration in the process of urban sprawl and the facilitation of a new wave of peripheral development. Utilizing planning documents, municipal council resolutions, spatial plans, and reports by professional chambers, this phase of the research examines how state institutions and political actors have employed legal instruments, speculative planning, and privatized governance to reconfigure the periphery as a site of speculation and control. The *progressive* component is ethnographic and qualitative in nature. The fieldwork was conducted in two selected areas within the southwestern periphery of Ankara, spanning multiple phases between 2021 and 2023. The selection of these areas was predicated on their pertinence in contemporary metropolitan planning initiatives and their distinguished function in the proliferation of speculative housing landscapes. The empirical fieldwork is comprised of semi-structured interviews with residents. The author's personal experience as a resident of the case areas is a significant factor in the credibility of the research, as it was conducted through autoethnographic fieldwork. This multi-method approach facilitates a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how peripheral urbanism is shaped, contested, and experienced.

Significantly, the fieldwork underscores the voices and affective experiences of individuals residing in the urban periphery – households and individuals grappling with precarity, infrastructural deficiencies, mobility challenges, and symbolic marginalization. The methodological emphasis on everyday life as an analytical lens helps reveal contradictions and dynamics that are often overlooked in purely structural accounts of urbanization.

The Political Context of the Urbanization of Ankara's Periphery

The southwestern periphery of Ankara has undergone significant urbanization in recent decades. The dissertation focuses on this area not only for its urban growth but because it epitomizes a mode of speculative, fragmented, and state-driven urbanization that has become hegemonic in Turkey since the early 2000s.

The application of general epistemological debates on planetary urbanization to a highly localized empirical context, such as the case areas of the study, posed significant methodological difficulties. To address this challenge, an intermediary conceptual framework was adopted that connects broader theoretical discussions with local empirical realities, specifically the dimension of territorial regulation. This dimension functions as a pivotal intermediary between the processes of planetary urbanization

and local practice. This study firstly analyzes how the periphery of Ankara has undergone urbanization by refining the notion of territorial regulation through a focus on legislation and spatial planning. The rapid urbanization of Ankara's periphery offers a striking illustration of how urbanization manifests on a local level. This intermediary conceptual approach enabled the uncovering of the historical development of the urban fabric of the study area, the instrumentalization of legislative and spatial planning mechanisms, and the political and economic processes underpinning them.

An analysis of the planning decisions reveals that Ankara's metropolitan municipality – particularly under the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) control – acted as a broker of urban speculation, making frequent plan revisions and parcel-specific changes to cater to the interests of large developers. These changes were often enacted without public consultation and routinely challenged in court, sometimes annulled by the judiciary, only to be reinstated with minor adjustments. Despite the apparent modernity and order in these newly urbanized landscapes, the study reveals an underlying infrastructural fragility. A significant number of residential areas are characterized by the absence of fundamental public services, including but not limited to adequate road infrastructure, effective sewage systems, and convenient public transportation options. New developments are often disconnected from existing urban fabric, resulting in spaces that are dependent on automobiles and characterized by social isolation. The housing typology is dominated by high-rise gated communities, which are often promoted with the promise of prestige and safety. However, in practice, these communities contribute to segregation, alienation, and the commodification of urban space.

A review of interviews with residents indicates a certain ambivalence toward life in the periphery. While certain individuals acknowledge the economic benefits of residing in such areas, such as the reduced cost of housing and the distance from urban congestion, many others voice discontent regarding the substandard infrastructure, the paucity of amenities, and the dearth of meaningful social interaction. A dichotomy exists between the aspirational desires embedded in these spaces and the reality of isolation and uneven development. The periphery is thus a space of both dispossession and aspiration, which are shaped by state policies, market forces, and the everyday negotiations of its inhabitants.

The Transformation of Everyday Life in the Periphery

This dissertation proposes a novel perspective on urbanization and urban sprawl by shifting the focus from the role of everyday life as a mere backdrop to urban change to its position as a pivotal terrain where the dynamics of planetary urbanization are materialized, internalized, and contested. In the peripheries of Ankara, everyday life is undergoing a profound transformation. This transformation is characterized by speculative development, changing spatial configurations, infrastructural fragmentation, and shifting social relations. This study explores how these changes are experienced by residents navigating the contradictions of life in an increasingly commodified urban environment.

In the context of planetary urbanization, the dynamics of capital accumulation, state intervention, and global financialization profoundly influence the fabric of everyday life. In the context of Ankara's periphery, this phenomenon is exemplified by the proliferation of high-rise gated communities, the erosion of public space, the deterioration of accessibility to fundamental services, and the exacerbation of feelings of spatial and social disconnection. The rhythms and routines of daily life are increasingly governed by market imperatives and urban forms designed for private consumption and surveillance.

However, the dynamics of everyday life are not solely determined by these forces; they also create a milieu for informal negotiations, symbolic resistance, and alternative conceptualizations of urban futures. The dissertation utilizes a critical ethnographic framework to document how residents appropriate, adapt to, and at times, challenge the imposed spatial order.

This transformation of everyday life reveals the contradictions inherent in the process of planetary urbanization. On the one hand, the periphery attracts speculative investments and urban expansion. Conversely, it persists as a site where infrastructural deficiencies, precarious tenures, and disorganized planning impede the realization of the promises of contemporary urban living. These tensions manifest in everyday activities, such as long-distance commutes, feelings of social isolation in gated communities, and challenges in accessing reliable services. This dissertation examines these transformations, reclaiming everyday life as a political terrain. It argues that the global forces of urbanization are felt most acutely in this domain, yet it also demonstrates that resistance, adaptation, and hope take shape here. It posits that a comprehensive understanding of planetary urbanization necessitates not only a macrostructural analysis of capital and planning, but also a microanalysis of how urban residents live, interpret, and occasionally resist the processes that define their urban circumstances.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes several original contributions to the field of critical urban studies, both empirically and theoretically. It grounds the broader concept of planetary urbanization in the everyday realities of Ankara's urban periphery. These contributions manifest across five primary domains:

Grounding Planetary Urbanization in Local Contexts: While the theory of planetary urbanization offers a compelling framework for understanding the contemporary condition of the urban, it is frequently criticized for its abstract and generalized nature. This study aims to address such critiques by situating the general condition of the notion of urban and urbanization within the localized socio-spatial dynamics of Ankara. A thorough empirical investigation of two case areas reveals the way planetary forces manifest in a concrete urban context. This phenomenon exemplifies the manner in which substantial transformations are negotiated, resisted, and lived through the everyday practices.

Reconceptualizing the Urban Periphery: This study contributes to our understanding of the urban periphery by offering a nuanced perspective that recognizes it not as a temporal-spatial transitional space, but as a central terrain where contemporary urban processes unfold. By treating the periphery as both a product and a source of urbanization, the study challenges the conventional binaries such as center-periphery, urban-rural, or city-countryside. It underscores the periphery as a dynamic place shaped by contradictory processes – expansion and exclusion, development and neglect, regulation, and informality. This conceptual framework repositions the periphery within global urban theory.

Methodological Exploration through Critical Urban Ethnography: The study introduces a critical methodological approach that foregrounds the lived experiences without losing sight of broader political-economic structures. This approach is achieved by combining semi-structured interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and autoethnographic experimentation. This mixed approach enables a more relational understanding of how global processes are internalized, contested, and rearticulated through everyday life. Additionally, the employment of Lefebvre's regressive–progressive method introduces

a temporal and dialectical dimension to the analysis, thereby establishing a linkage between historical processes and contemporary lived realities.

Analyzing Urban Planning and Legislation as a Tool of Neoliberal Policies: This research provides a critical account of urban planning practices in Ankara, revealing how planning mechanisms and legislation activities serve as instruments of neoliberal policies on urbanization. Through a thorough examination of official documents, metropolitan municipality council resolutions, and spatial plans, this study unveils the way planning is employed to promote speculative development, deepen inequalities, and strengthen political power. This study makes a significant contribution to the discourse on the instrumentalization of planning and legislation, as defined under the territorial regulations dimension of urbanization.

Bringing Everyday Life to the Forefront of Urban Research: Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of the level of everyday life. It goes beyond mere structural critique, exploring how residents of Ankara's periphery experience and interpret their rapidly changing environments. Through the mundane aspects of everyday life, daily routines, and spatial practice, the study illuminates the intricate layers of urban life under attacks of global level. This emphasis on the everyday life reframes urbanization not just as a top-down process, but as a negotiated outcome of lived and localized processes and practices.

Limitations and Potential Further Research

While this dissertation provides a theoretically extensive and general, and empirically in-depth examination, it is imperative to acknowledge its inherent limitations. First, the study's geographic focus on the southwestern periphery of Ankara means that other parts of the city, which may exhibit different dynamics (e.g., industrial areas, squatter zones, historic neighborhoods), are not included in the scope. Future research could adopt a comparative intra-urban lens to map how the everyday life of various districts within the city experience and respond to planetary urbanization. Secondly, the study's emphasis on qualitative and ethnographic methods, while allowing for deep insight, necessarily limits the generalizability of findings. A complementary quantitative or spatial analysis (e.g., of housing trends, land values, or mobility patterns) could further substantiate the patterns identified here. Thirdly, while the dissertation situates the Ankara case within global debates on urbanization, it remains context-specific. To further expand upon these findings, a comparative analysis of analogous local contexts would be instrumental in enhancing the global discourse on urbanization in the periphery and its everyday ramifications.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Urban Periphery

The dissertation posits an argument for the reclamation of the urban periphery, emphasizing its significance as both a subject of empirical study and a conceptual and political domain. Rather than perceiving peripheral areas as incomplete, residual, or failed versions of the city center, it is essential to comprehend them as constitutive of the urban condition under the global capitalism. The periphery is where general economic imperatives, national policies, and everyday life intersect, giving rise to hybrid forms of urban question that are both exclusionary and inventive. The concept of the infinite periphery, as referenced in the original title, signifies not solely physical expansion but also the ideological imagination and political hegemony that accompanies such growth. This notion encompasses the logic that cities can be endlessly extended, monetized, and redesigned from above.

However, the study posits that this notion should be perpetually contested by material constraints, social conflicts, and the lived contradictions inherent in everyday life.

In an era marked by authoritarian repression, economic crisis, ecological degradation, and systemic urban inequity, this dissertation does not conclude with a sense of despair. Instead, it posits critical hope, proposing that from the periphery, novel urban imaginaries may emerge – ones that are more democratic, more collective, and more equitable. At its heart, this dissertation is a call to reclaim the periphery – not only as a space of empirical inquiry but also as a conceptual and political terrain. Rather than viewing peripheral zones as incomplete, residual, or failed versions of the city, they should be understood as constitutive of the urban condition under global capitalism. The periphery is where general economic imperatives, national policies, and everyday life collide, producing hybrid forms of urban modernity that are both exclusionary and inventive.

The notion of the infinite periphery, as invoked in the original title, speaks not just to physical expansion but to the ideological imagination that accompanies such growth: the logic that cities can be endlessly stretched, monetized, and redesigned from above. Yet this belief, the study argues, is continually challenged by material limits, social struggles, and the lived contradictions of peripheral everyday life.

By attending to these contradictions – and by foregrounding the voices and practices of those who inhabit them – this research aims to contribute to a more grounded and politically attuned urbanism. It invites planners, scholars, and citizens to recognize the periphery not as the city's failure, but as its mirror and memory, a space that both reveals and resists the violent logics of planetary urbanization. In an era marked by authoritarian retrenchment, economic crisis, ecological degradation, and widespread urban injustice, this dissertation ends not with despair but with critical hope: that from the margins, new imaginaries of the city can emerge – more democratic, more collective, and more just.