

# Interiorized Urbanization: new conformations in the Brazilian Northeast Territory

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## **Abstract**

The issue of this study points to a concrete object, whose reference is the configuration of an internalized urban network in the Brazilian Northeast. To understand this, we studied the formation of the network of cities in the region, considering the urbanization of the territory, until the last decades. We used the theoretical contribution in bibliographic readings of works that deal with the theme as in Azevedo. We analyzed the transformations in the territory accompanied by the restructuring of the economy, the growth of the number and size of cities and the representative increase of the urban roles in the territorial division of labor. We identified in Northeast Brazil an internalized urban network organized and dynamic, with the diffusion of new urban centralities far from the great centers of the region.

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary urbanization has increasingly demonstrated the fluidity of productive investments across the territory and the resizing of classical locational factors. This is a new tool that we use to observe the filling of space by economic activities in areas that until then had no representation in the territory.

The expansion of the object system and action system (SANTOS, 2004), within the territory, has enabled the rise of new urban centralities. To understand this configuration, we studied the formation of the network of cities in the northeast region, considering the process of urbanization of the territory, until the last decades. We analyzed the major changes in the territory accompanied by the restructuring of the economy, the growth in the number and size of cities and the significant increase in urban roles in the territorial division of labor (SANTOS, 2005 [1993]).

This process is not new; however, it has pointed a direction of important economic activities to the interior of the territory, thus creating new urban centralities and spreading characteristics restricted to the metropolises in urban-regional spaces of smaller cities.

The aim of this paper is to address this process that has taken place in the whole territory in the last decades, we focus, in Northeast Brazil, in a phenomenon we call the internalized urban network, which is spanned by the constitutive urban centers of this new configuration of the territory urbanization. We conducted a bibliographic survey on scientific literature and governmental reports.

## THE INTERNALIZED URBAN NETWORK: HOW TO READ IT?

Analyzing urbanization, understood as a process whose socio-spatial product is the city, demands an exercise of articulation between space and time (SPOSITO, 2004), especially under capitalism and its rebound in the social division of labor.

Studying urbanization calls for a careful historical analysis, observing all geographic objects (structural fixed and relations flows and social contents) responsible for their conformation in the territory, which allows us to identify changes and permanences (SANTOS, 2004 [1996]) and, thus, their roughness in space

(SANTOS, 2008a [1978]; 2004 [1996]).

Therefore, it is essential to understand urbanization as a process that created cities in the territory. These cities are rich in content, form, function and process (SANTOS, 2008b [1988]), and its apprehension is a necessity in this study.

When we refer to the non-metropolitan urban spaces in the country, we are committed to walking in a field that has not yet been sufficiently studied, compared to more urbanized areas, a shelter for large cities and metropolitan regions.

However, in recent decades, parallel to the phenomenon of metropolization in Brazil, some regional urban frameworks have been preserved, State capitals, which are often the largest urban centers, remained in charge of the national urban network (O'NEILL, 2010). More importantly in this historical moment, however, is the emergence of a new economic, political and social logic, market by the modernization and decentralization of activities, but also by a growing poverty and inequality, which were once restricted to large metropolitan centers (SIMÕES; AMARAL, 2011; BEZERRA; LIMA, 2011).

In this new moment, characterized mainly by the globalization of the economy, the emergence of new regionalization reorganized the territory, both in traditionally concentrated areas of economic and population resources in the South and Southeast of the country, as well as in less dense portions of the Center-West and Northeast. In the latter, there was a stunted urbanization, which was modified by the diffusion of this process throughout the territory over the last decades, changing the configuration of the urban network of northeastern Brazil.

### *The formation of the northeastern internalized urban network*

The main areas of population and economic resources of the Northeast were, or became marked, especially by the rapid urbanization and the multiplication of flows of all kinds (people, matter, capital and information), linked to the existence of a large economical activity or the rise of new centralities related to territorial management (IBGE, 2014). Some of these centers became true corridors of regional development in the territory's interior, due to the concentration of activities in this space and, thus, the expansion of their influence in smaller

centers (IBGE, 2008).

The analysis of urbanization of cities in the Northeast requires a denser and specific investigation on the regional economic dynamics, and its relation with the formation of the territory. As Clementino (1995, p. 28) points out:

[...] the historical processes of economic development of each of the regions of the country will give rise to different processes of urbanization: some more atomized, others more articulated and even those that present a hierarchical law of cities.

In the areas farther from the major centers, especially in the Brazilian Northeast, this aspect demonstrates a new feature of the urban-regional conformation and new senses and meanings of this portion of smaller cities in the regional urban network. For, on the one hand, there is the coastal strip, of old occupation, with highly urbanized cities, high urban density and concentration of a low-income population, on the other, there is the interior, also with indices of low human development, but with anurbanization that enables new urban centralities to emerge (LUBAMBO et al., 2005).

When one looks at the regional issue of the Brazilian Northeast, he can see clearly these changes in the territory, which can be confused by the growth of human development indices and the inequality in the region's urbanization (ANDRADE, 1984). This process changed cities arrangement, and it can be seen as a reflection of the dispersed urbanization and conditioning of the social and productive organization that preserved archaic forms of production (ANDRADE, 1984).

The formation of the Brazilian Northeast refers back to its occupation, observing the coastal → inland direction, when the first cities were constituted (AZEVEDO, 1994 [1957]) and, consequently, of the whole regional urban system.

Moreover, the spatial arrangement of the northeastern cities came from the production in the countryside and in the city, either from the traditional economies originating in the colonial period, or in the last quarter of the twentieth century, with State participation in industrial policy that reconditioned the region's economy to a new model and redefined the role of important inland cities (CLEMENTINO, 1990).

In the meantime, these cities began to assume new market-dictated functions, hitting directly the urbanization in the Northeast,

especially from the end of the last century (ANDRADE, 1995).

Clementino (1995) reports that until the mid-1950s, the city in northeastern Brazil assumed a purely political-administrative function. The camp was subordinated to the few existing cities, which concentrated most of the population and sheltered the military and mercantile capital.

This reality, seen in much of the Northeast, (ANDRADE, 1995; CORREA, 1977; LINS, 1990), showed that the spatial distribution of major functional and relatively more developed centers, was essentially along the coast, and the urbanization in the interior is rather delayed in its comparison.

As Cascudo (1984 [1955]) states, the interiorization of cities growth in the Northeast, initially considered as the constitution of the first cities, only began in the 18th century with the settlement of Chapada Diamantina, in the middle valley of the São Francisco and especially with the pastoral expansion in the backlands. The region that stood out the most in this respect was that which stretched from the Maranhão lowlands to the lower mucuri (border between the states of Bahia and Espírito Santo), with greater penetration of the eastern hinterland (ANDRADE, 1995). At that time, some important towns and cities were created in the interior of the region, such as: Icó (Ceará); Crato (Ceará); Sobral (Ceará); Assu (Rio Grande do Norte); Campina Grande (Paraíba); Sousa (Paraíba), Senhor do Bonfim (Bahia) and Jacobina (Bahia) (IBGE, 2011).

Noteworthy, the backlands comprise important areas of northeastern Brazil (from the states of Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe and Bahia), .This dimension is present in Andrade (2005 [1963]) when he differentiates the coast from the backlands, and in Oliveira's (1993 [1977]), discussion about the state and class conflicts in the region. Euclides da Cunha's "Os Sertões" (CUNHA, 1963 [1902]), illustrates the daily life of the *sertanejo* (people from backlands) in the face of the adversities of nature and man (farmer elites).

For a long time, urbanization was insignificant in the Northeast, often pointing to a political and economic predominance of the countryside over the city, characterized by the absence of an articulated urban network and the existence of very few command centers.

Clementino (1990, p. 72) points out that, when discussing the emergence of urbanization in the region, the territorial strongholds of colonels and oligarchic families must be

considered. "[...] As it owns the state apparatus at the local level, it uses to its own advantage the benefits of the state and somehow remakes the city." In this context, many cities were created and developed over decades, and have long been under the command of traditional families from their respective regions.

As for the formation of the internalized urban network, especially in the eastern portion of the Northeast, it was originally linked to the cattle paths built by the time. According to Andrade (1981) and Cascudo (1984 [1955]), until the mid-eighteenth century, much of the Northeast had not been occupied. However, the city system began to be built, mainly on the coast, linked to sugarcane exports, and, in the hinterland, cattle raising.

According to Cascudo (1984 [1955]), the genesis of the region explains regional diversity compared to other portions of the Brazilian territory. On the one hand, for many centuries, a small group of centers, especially located on the coast, played a role of a regional dynamic pole, moved by the external world, with a little internal relationship. On the other, there was a true regional mosaic, formed by more or less isolated "islands" of settlement without, large road structures interconnecting them until the 1940s (LINS, 1990).

About this first stage of urbanization in the region, Andrade (1974) states that cities and their regions have long been exercising almost exclusively intraregional relations, adapting to the geographical conditions and the historical moment in which they were created.

In addition, climate adversities, have historically delayed the occupation of Northeast's territory, even though in the last decades the northeastern backlands is currently one of the world's most demographically dense area (SALES, 2002).

Another issue to be considered is the region's land structure, which is important for understanding regional diversity of urbanization in the Northeast. On the subject, Santos (2005 [1993], p. 69) points out that the:

[...] land tenure structure, hostile from an early age to greater income distribution, higher consumption and higher tertiarization, helped to keep millions of people in poverty and prevented a more expressive urbanization. Therefore, the introduction of material and social innovations would encounter great resistance from a crystallized past in society and space, delaying the development

process.

This past situation remained for several decades, causing small population settlements to maintain archaic structures of society, hindering the insertion of these spaces to the socioeconomic changes already observed in other regions of the country (SANTOS, 2005 [1993]). Thus, urbanization of the Northeast was delayed, especially in its interior, driven by the shortage of highways facilitating access within the territory (LINS, 1990).

The reading about the spread of the road corridors, especially the highways, is closely linked to the expansion of the cities' influence area in the interior of the region and, thus, to population growth. Some of these have stopped growing and been absorbed by more dynamic centers or have lost their importance in the regional setting (CORRÊA, 1977).

This is a reality seen since the first half of the last century (GEIGER, 1963). About the emergence of important centers in the interior of Brazil, Geiger (1963) points out that:

From 1920 onwards, new "backlands", "trailheads" and "regional capitals" followed in the terminology used by Pierre Mombeig. They arose as much from the founding of new urban nuclei as from the valorization of old towns hit by the wave of colonization, that is, hit by the railroad or the highway (GEIGER, 1963, p. 111, emphasis added).

A milestone that accentuated of the region's urbanization occurred in the 1960s, with the expansion of industry, especially promoted by The Superintendence for the development of the Northeast (SUDENE), which improved the urban infrastructure of important inland centers.

This change was evident by of new urban functions of these centers, especially from the relative deconstruction of their wholesale roles, opening the cities, together with their respective regions, for socioeconomic dialogue with others (CLEMENTINO, 1990).

Even though many inland cities were created, only a handful of good quality roads interconnected these centers until the late 1970 (LINS, 1990).

The state capitals received the first and largest structures allowing the maintenance and expansion of the urban regional networks. This is because they benefited from their administrative function and, therefore,

concentrated a set of services linked to federal and state agencies in the region (CORRÊA, 1977; CLEMENTINO, 1995).

There was a precarious interconnection with the increasingly important intermediate centers, after the arrival of more specific public and private investments in these centers (CLEMENTINO, 1995).

To this end, we reinforce the importance of opening / paving major highways in the region such as BRs 101, 304, 222, 232, 324, 230, and others. The paving of BR 116, which linked the Northeast to the Center-South of the country, brought the greatest impact and integration to the region, as it facilitated the connection of the largest industrialized goods-producing centers to most of the Northeastern consumer centers, not only on the coast (LINS, 1990). Thus, until the late 1970s, very few inland cities were connected by paved roads, making any commercial and even administrative relationship with these spaces unfeasible.

This scenario began to change, when the productive restructuring of the territory took place and when decentralizing policies had been implemented since the 1990s and, mainly, in the 2000s, projecting the northeastern urban network, especially the interiorized one, with emphasis on the national urban network.

### *The new configuration of the northeastern urbanized interior network*

Although the urbanization process in the Northeast region was a little slower compared to other regions of the country, especially in relation to the Southeast, at the end of the twentieth century, large northeastern cities, some constituted as consolidated metropolitan regions, appeared as spaces of great concentration. population and more advanced economic activities. These spaces are promoters of “[...] technical and scientific knowledge and political decision-making bodies” (LIMONAD, 1996, p. 231) and can be seen everywhere.

On the other hand, given the new directions that urbanization has been taking in the territory, it is possible to observe the advance of some cities in the interior of the Northeast, in the instances of power, as well as assuming a commanding role of their regional urban network, even though they are still subordinate to the state capitals (IBGE, 1972, 1987, 2000, 2008).

This recent process of interiorization of

urbanization, in our view, is driven by the emergence of new urban centralities composed of intermediate regional centers that, added to their area of influence, become true urban agglomerations that congregate a large number of distributed cities. through the interior of all regions of the country.

According to Simões and Amaral (2011), the spatialization of this phenomenon located on the periphery of the Brazilian urban network can currently be understood by the settlement of the electro-electronic, chemical, mechanical and transportation industries, located from Minas Gerais to the south of the country, and by expansion of the extensive agricultural frontier linked to agribusiness, with emphasis on the northern part of Minas Gerais and some portions of the northeast. In this region, we also have the displacement of light segments, which require low technological sophistication in products and low qualification of labor, which proves to be the main focus of this activity to regional and local markets. Also according to Simões and Amaral (2011), this set enables the recent spatial dispersion of these productive sectors in the interior of the Northeast and the emergence of an embryonic polycentric urban network, formed by historically poor regions and their respective regional centers.

What we see in this process is the attraction of the most developed cities in the South and Southeast of the country for the most capital-intensive manufacturing industry, while in the interior of the Northeast and Midwest, we see the arrival of labor-intensive industrial segments (SIMÕES; AMARAL, 2011).

In the Northeast, we have observed an economic restructuring in the region that has allowed the advance of some urban activities, at first, more concentrated, in the large metropolitan regions, but also coming in the regional and small centers. This change allowed some national and even international groups to settle in these smaller spaces, enabling the regional integration of some areas.

The crisis and shrinkage of the traditional and complex sugar and alcohol activity, located on the coast of the Northeast region, which has been gradually transferred to the states of São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul and Goiás (ARAÚJO, 2014) should be noted. In the midst of this, we have the arrival of large projects in all states of the region: wind plants in Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Bahia and Piauí; thermoelectric and steel plants in Ceará and Maranhão; refinery and automotive industry in Pernambuco; shipyard and pulp industry in Bahia, among others. All

these bases have led to major changes in the productive structure of the region, which has been directly impacting the dynamics of cities and their respective regions.

Traditional economies, such as livestock and cotton, have been losing importance for the construction, agribusiness sectors, especially for grain production, “[...] such as hydroelectric (Maranhão), wind power plants (Bahia, Piauí, Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte), Refineries (Pernambuco and Ceará), Shipyards (Pernambuco, Alagoas, Bahia and Maranhão), Steel (Maranhão and Ceará), Pulp (Maranhão and Bahia), Automotive (Pernambuco) and Petrochemical (Pernambuco) [...]” (ARAÚJO, 2014, p. 549) and, above all, for the expansion of the tertiary sector, refunctioning the regional centers, with the expansion of education, health, modern commerce, specialized services aimed at companies and personnel.

With this, we must not forget that the changes in the productive structure of the region, especially in the tertiary, have provided, within the Northeast, the consolidation of small confectioners, small dairy and sheep industries, among other sectors.

But above all, the expansion of the science, technology and innovation base that the Federal Government has fostered in recent years has resulted in the expansion of universities in the interior and technical education institutes, with the establishment of new centers for research and development of centers technological developments in the interior (ARAÚJO, 2014).

In the last decade, 07 federal universities were created in the interior of the Northeast, distributed in several campuses spread throughout the regional centers of the region. Among the universities created in this context of internalization of higher education, we highlight the Federal University of Western Bahia (UFOB); the Federal Rural University of Semi-Arid (UFERSA); the Federal University of Vale do São Francisco (UNIFASV) and the Federal University of Cariri (UFCA) (MEC, 2012).

Given this conjuncture, in the Northeast region, the cities of Fortaleza, Recife and Salvador have appeared in recent decades as the spaces that are in charge of the regional urban network, presenting themselves as the main population, industrial and tourist centers, although these centers and their respective metropolitan regions are still relatively segmented and discontinuous in relation to the industrial and command corridor, especially located in the Southeast (IBGE, 2008).

Even with these changes that were part of the

process of territorial restructuring in recent decades in the region, which intensified the socioeconomic relations intrinsic to urbanization in much of the Northeast, little has changed from the atomization characteristic of the northeastern urban network (CANO, 1989). According to the author (CANO, 1989), The urban paralysis that occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century provided a:

[...] social heritage, with huge demographic surplus, perverse land structure and retrograde agriculture [promoting] a geographically and economically dispersed urbanization, consisting mainly of its nine regional capitals and about two dozen medium-sized cities, many of them inland (CANO, 1989, p. 68).

This social heritage has brought to the region a structural inequality, in which the levels of marginality and poverty grew to higher levels in the country, and even its main centers could not enjoy the benefits of more structured clusters, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (CANO, 1989).

This distorted profile of the Brazilian urban network, especially in the Northeast, can be clearly seen in the analysis of some studies of the Brazilian urban network (GEIGER, 1963; CORRÊA, 2006). However, the emergence, in the last decades, of some intermediate centers that have been playing an important role in the provision of services and commercial and industrial centralization, results in an important process to be observed, which shows us the design of this internalized urban network in the region.

Currently, with a prominent position in charge of the urbanized interior network in the Northeast, we can highlight the cities of Sobral (Ceará), Juazeiro do Norte (Ceará), Mossoró (Rio Grande do Norte), Campina Grande (Paraíba), Caruarú (Pernambuco), Arapiraca (Alagoas), Petrolina (Bahia), Feira de Santana (Bahia), Vitória da Conquista (Bahia), Ilhéus (Bahia) and Barreiras (Bahia), which have been running the urban network in the Northeast, assuming the role of interlocution with the most developed capitals and metropolitan centers of the region, as well as regional subcenters (IBGE, 2008). It is important to stress that some of these centers assume this status in the regional urban network in co-participation with other conurbated / nearby centers, such as Petrolina (Bahia) with Juazeiro (Pernambuco); Juazeiro do Norte (Ceará) with Crato (Ceará) and Barbalha

(Ceará) and Ilhéus (Bahia) with Itabuna (Bahia). This conformation was considered, for example, in the study of REGIC - 2007 (IBGE, 2008).

Considering what happens in the North of the country, where we still have a large spacing in the occupation of the territory, characterized by the existence of municipalities with immense territorial dimensions and very thin population densities, in the Northeast, we can say that there is a demographic and spatial consolidation very densely in some areas (IBGE, 2011).

Based on the last Demographic Census (IBGE, 2011), of the 05 largest cities with the largest population in the country, 02 are northeastern: Salvador (3rd) and Fortaleza (5th). The Northeast (with 30 cities) appears, after the Southeast (with 73 cities), as the region that houses the largest number of non-metropolitan municipalities with a population of over 100 thousand inhabitants, followed by the South (with 29 cities), North (with 10 cities) and Midwest (with 07 cities). Some of these centers appear with great spatial representation in their regions. Here, again, we highlight Feira de Santana (Bahia) (556.642 inhabitants); Campina Grande (Paraíba) (385.213 inhabitants); Caruarú (Pernambuco) (314.912 inhabitants); Petrolina (Bahia) (293.962 inhabitants); Mossoró (Rio Grande do Norte) (259.815 inhabitants), besides Imperatriz (Maranhão) (247.505 inhabitants) (IBGE, 2008; 2011).

Although it is still evident the concentration of population, equipment and services in the state capitals of the region, some intermediate centers have been showing an upward movement in the regional urban network, very related to activities related to globalized agricultural production that, according to Elias (2011, 2013), they form, in some cases, Agribusiness Productive Regions (RPA), characterized by modern agricultural spaces and non-metropolitan urban spaces, especially characterized by medium-sized cities.

Some regions under the influence of Juazeiro (Bahia) / Petrolina (Pernambuco), Mossoró (Rio Grande do Norte) and Barreiras (Bahia) have moved from subsistence areas to highly developed agricultural regions, where their headquarters house modern urban facilities (airports, malls, hypermarkets, concessionaires vehicles) and specialized services (clinics and medical laboratories, rental of agricultural machines, universities, technical schools) that make up a modern tertiary in the middle of the

northeastern semi-arid (SANTOS, 2016).

This process involves the diffusion of new urban centers far from the great metropolitan centers of the region, something that is closely linked to the economic interconnection and, thus, to a greater geographical approximation between the spaces.

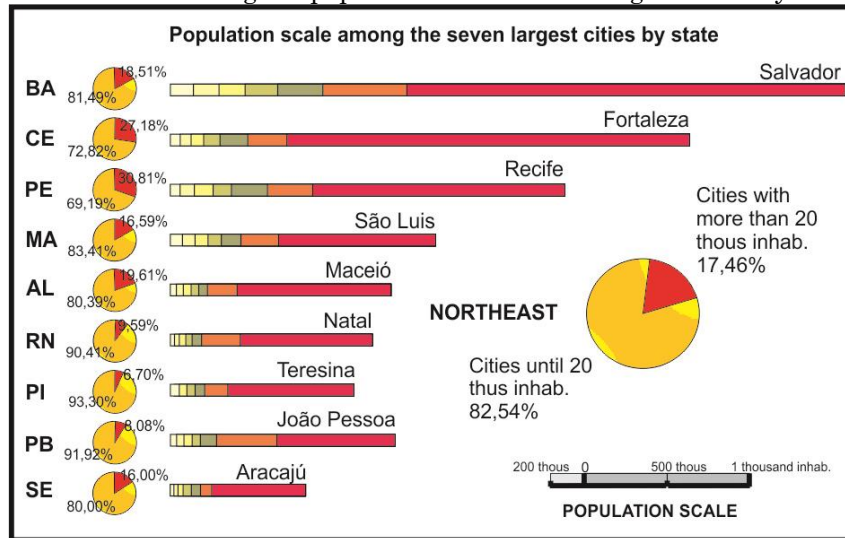
Even with the maintenance of a polycentric and macrocephalic urban network, with regard to the concentration of economic and population resources / investments in the capitals, there is an increasingly dense urban conformation within the territory, which in some cases reaches generate political and economic rivalry between these intermediate centers and state capitals, such as between Mossoró and Natal, in Rio Grande do Norte, and Campina Grande and João Pessoa, in Paraíba.

These centers have a huge range between the supply of goods and services and population concentration, in contrast, on the other hand, we have an internalized urban network, even with the rise of some cities, the inexpressiveness of the majority and / or the polarization of cities. one or two intermediate centers in each state. Thus, in summary, what we have observed so far is the emergence of a small number of regional centers, some with characteristics of medium-sized cities, and a large number of small towns with populations of less than 20.000 inhabitants (Figure 01).

As we can see in figure 01, there is a distance in the population size between the state capitals in relation to the other urban centers of its interior. First, we highlight the large percentage of small centers (82.54%), many of which are run by the nearest intermediate articulation centers (IBGE, 2011). We believe that this very common scenario in the interior of the Northeast is linked to the accelerated process of political and administrative emancipation of several municipalities in the region that gave cities the status of all these new municipalities.

The IBGE (2008) shows that the hierarchical organization of cities follows this inequality in its conformation in the Northeast region. While in the Center-South of the country, we have a structured urban network, comprised of a considerable number of metropolises, regional capitals and well-articulated subregional centers, in the Northeast, we have a spaced distribution between the centers, noting the absence of some levels. Hierarchical intermediaries.

**Figure 01** – Northeast Region: population scale of the largest cities by state (2010).



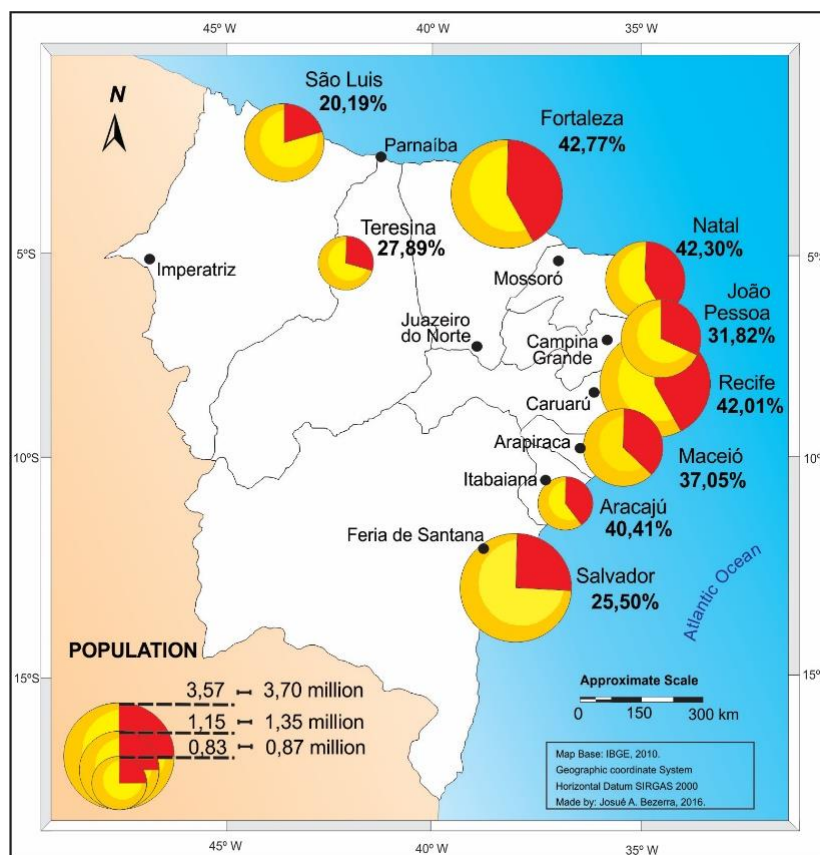
Source: 2010 Population Census (IBGE, 2011). Author's organization, Jun., 2015. Note: For the preparation of this figure, with the population scale (horizontal bars) of the northeastern cities, I considered the urban population of the seven largest cities in each state, based on the latest data from the Demographic Census of the state. IBGE (2011). Therefore, I excluded the cities that are attached to the headquarters of the metropolitan areas or urban agglomerations of state capitals. The presentation is organized in a decreasing way, based on the population size of the state capitals, which, in this case, are the largest.

With this, we realize that, even with the growth of the socioeconomic dynamics of the interior areas, polarized by cities with relative urban centralization in the region, it is not possible to see a major change in the supremacy

in the command of the state capitals under the regional urban network that can be seen by the concentration of the total population by metropolitan agglomerate of the capitals (Figure 02).

**Figure 02** – Northeast Region: concentration of the total population by metropolitan agglomerate of the capitals (2010)





Source: 2010 Population Census (IBGE, 2011); Observatório de Metrôpoles (2010). Organization and cartography by Josué A. Bezerra, Jun., 2016. For this representation, I considered the metropolitan areas or urban agglomerations of the Northeast that have in their headquarters the state capitals. For comparative data by Federation Unit, the municipality of Timon (Maranhão), which is on the left bank of the Parnaíba River and has a total population of 155,396 inhabitants. (IBGE, 2011), was not accounted for as an entity of the Integrated Development Region of Greater Teresina (Piauí).

Finally, we can say that the northeastern urban network continues to have a political and economic polarization on the coast, with branches led by midsize centers, but also with regional sub-centers that have gained importance in the periphery of this network.

These subregional centers articulate with a group of smaller cities, which are the majority in the country, and play a key role in organizing the urban-regional space within.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The new features of urbanization in the territory, as well as the recent conformation of the Brazilian urban network, made us see the new forms of representation of the urban phenomenon on the geographic scale in which the northeastern cities are located.

One of the conclusions we can consider in this end is part of the realization that the urban network today, even considering it as a dynamic

element of geographical space, privileging the speed of transformations, the complexity of interactions between places, and the multiplicity of actions that characterize the spatial relations (CORREA, 2006a; 2012), still have traditional ties of structure and hierarchical obedience of cities, mostly related to the spatial structuring of regional command centers in peripheral scales of the urban network.

Thus, it is true that, considering the diversity and dimensions of Brazilian urban networks, we have seen that the most recent research points to an opening of urban systems in the current period that allows a diversity of configurations in a set of urban networks (SPOSITO, 2011). , with the advent of new productive processes in space, and the evidence of subverted borders, which suggests a break in the hierarchical structure of cities in the scope of production, circulation, distribution and consumption (SANTOS, 2004 [1996]; CORRÊA, 2012).

However, Santos (2008b [1988]; 2004 [1996]) stated that, even with the advent of the technical-scientific-informational environment, it

is still possible to find certain levels of hierarchy in some scales of the urban and regional network, such as we observed in our research object that smaller cities are closely linked to the immediate next center of their urban network. This conservative configuration of the urban network is linked to the geographical situation in which cities find themselves in space, with the arrangement of a structured relationship in certain urban networks.

Thus, this set of cities is part of the interiorized urban network, understood by the emergence, in recent decades, of some intermediate centers that have played an important role in the provision of services and commercial and industrial centralization in non-metropolitan areas of the territory.

In the Brazilian Northeast, this phenomenon seems more evident, considering the late and geographically dispersed urbanization process, triggered in the second half of the last century (CANO, 1989; CLEMENTINO, 1990; SIMÕES; AMARAL, 2011) and which can be understood by medium-sized cities and / or regional centers and numerous small towns scattered throughout the interior of the states.

We note that this new phase of urbanization provided the diffusion of new urban centers far from the great (metropolitan) centers of the region, something that is closely linked to the economic interconnection and, thus, to a greater geographical approximation between spaces, generating, each time more, a densified urban conformation within the territory.

In this dimension of the northeastern urban network, the regional centers located in the interior are those that play a spatial role on this scale in the strata of the northeastern urban network, most of them composed of medium-sized cities, commanding what we call the interiorized urban network.

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