

## The Canal\*MOTOBOY Project

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The **Megafone.net** project [<http://www.megafone.net/>], since 2003, has invited various social groups to express their experiences and opinions online. Usually, they are overlooked or misrepresented in the mainstream media, and the digital domain is another public space for disseminating and sharing ideas, collaboratively or not.

The Canal\*MOTOBOY project [<http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/>] is about the Brazilian motorcycle courier group and has taken place in the city of São Paulo. Since 2007, sixteen motorcycle couriers [1] have registered their everyday urban experiences in real time, day and night [figure 1]. They operate on motorcycles for various practical and work-related reasons: as a cost-efficient alternative to infrequent and expensive public transport systems, or as a means of avoiding or reducing the effects of urban congestion. It is important to ensure that in Brazil, the motorcycle courier, nicknamed either 'motoboys' or 'mad dogs', is more than a job; it is an urban and social phenomenon. The city of São Paulo has approximately 950,250 licensed motorcycles (Denatran, 2012), increasing by more than double (118%) between 2001 and 2010. This number is quite impressive, five times higher than for vehicles – about 23,56% - in the same period (Mendonça, 2011). From this total number of motorcycles, around 220,000 are registered to couriers and are responsible for 2 million deliveries per day. "In a city of some 20 million inhabitants, it means they make up one per cent of the population" (Whitaker, 2012). Around 70% is young, male and between 25 and 40 years old. In Brazil, only 25% of motorcycle couriers have their jobs guaranteed by the Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) [4], while 75% are autonomous, and for this reason, the current situation is quite political. The immense number of two-wheeled vehicles – about 12,7% of vehicles in the city of São Paulo - changes the appearance of daily urban traffic, worrying authorities, altering behaviours, and so the everyday cityscape (Mendonça, 2011). According to Silva et al. (2012), speeding – a practice reported by 45.2% of the motorcycle couriers - was associated with accidents because they had less time to avoid collisions. The number of fatal accidents in the city of São Paulo increased 7.1% in 2011, compared with 2010; the annual total of 512 victims, 471 were men, and 41 were women (CET, 2012). Even pedestrians are not yet used to this urban condition; if before crossing the street was enough to ensure that all cars were stopped, now it is no longer so. Travelling in between vehicles, motorcycle couriers can hit people and are

now responsible for 19% of deaths from trampling in the city (Mendonça, 2011). Therefore, if some years ago, people kept an eye on vehicles to avoid accidents while driving, biking or walking in cities, now motorcycles have a prominent place in the attention of those who drive, bike, or walk.

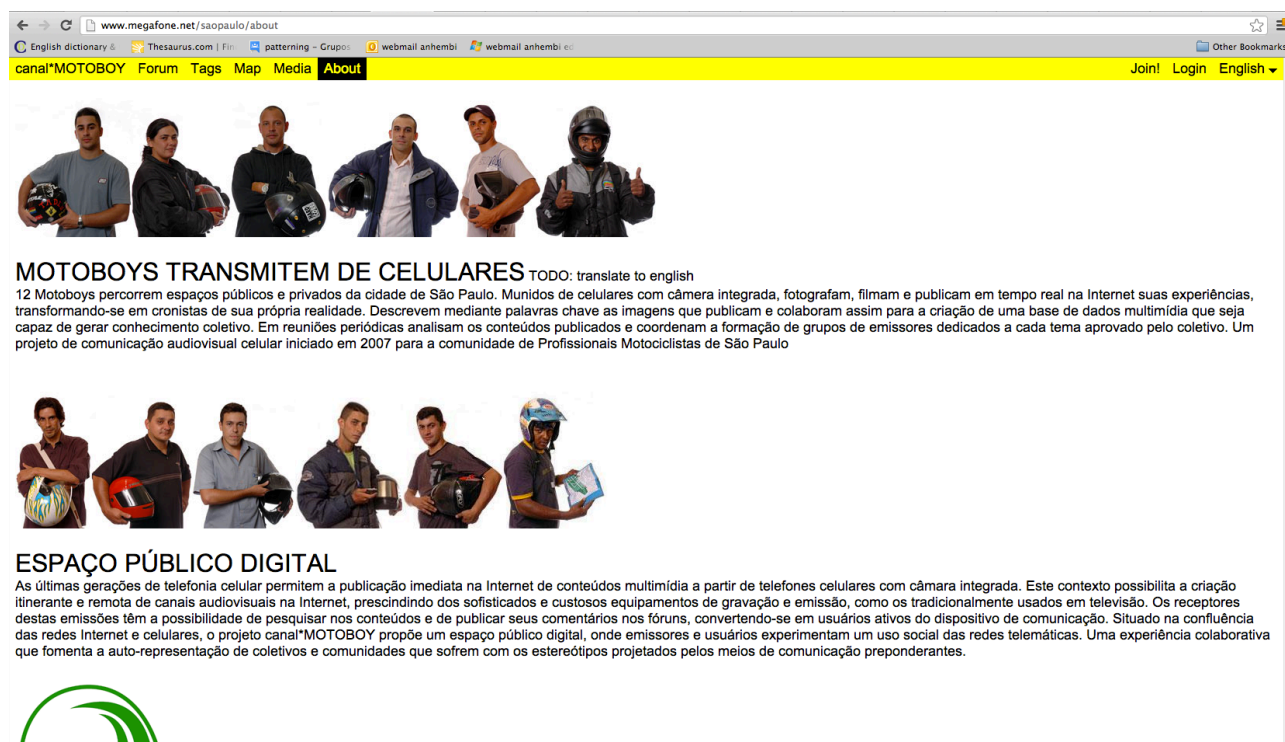


Figure 1: The collective group. Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/about>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

The project proposal is to create a collective digital space about the city of São Paulo and its urban everyday issues. Using mobile phones to create audio recordings, videos, and images that are immediately published to the Web, motorcycle couriers amplify their social and political issues, both individually and collectively. By compounding real-time information, mobile phone users reconfigure their physical territorial limits, expanding and articulating actions across the physical and digital domains. For example, checking Webcams online or using GPS, users avoid traffic, floods, and car accidents, and determine other modes of urban behaviours and everyday routines. They create other possibilities for being temporarily 'on the move', registering online their real-time choices in time and space coordinates.

On the website, motorcycle couriers upload images and videos and write texts and comments, creating a multimedia database structured around keywords they name, for example, friends, family, accidents, flood, rain, culture, everyday life, events, street art, labour demonstrations. As members, they post information related to the city, personal and labouring class matters, producing informal knowledge to be shared. So, this informal knowledge can be codified and

understood as patterns of embodied experience, which must necessarily be culturally and socially shared. During periodic meetings, these mobile phone users and members analyse the information and coordinate the creation of other specific groups for each theme approved by the collective. The project is concerned with creating a digital public space to reflect on the collective and its modes of social and political representation, and to augment its possibilities of action and interference, unmediated and unfiltered by traditional mass media.

The infodesign of the website contains four sections, organised by keywords such as forum, tags, map, and media; these terms organise the posted and shared content by mobile phone user's name, date and time, and geolocalised coordinates [2]. The main idea is to geographically situate all the information shared [figures 2 and 3] using the location-based app with the Google Places API [3]. The access of data is done through specific tags, terms created and named by the author, to filter tips, facts, cultural events and news about the city of São Paulo, personal facts and opinions – such as family party, friends' meeting –, and labour issues – such as working conditions, labour laws, labour meetings, and cultural seminars and exhibitions. For example, the content is marked on the Map interface [figure 3] – a general view of all posts, and presented on the author's Web interface with more detailed information – photographs, videos and texts [figure 4].

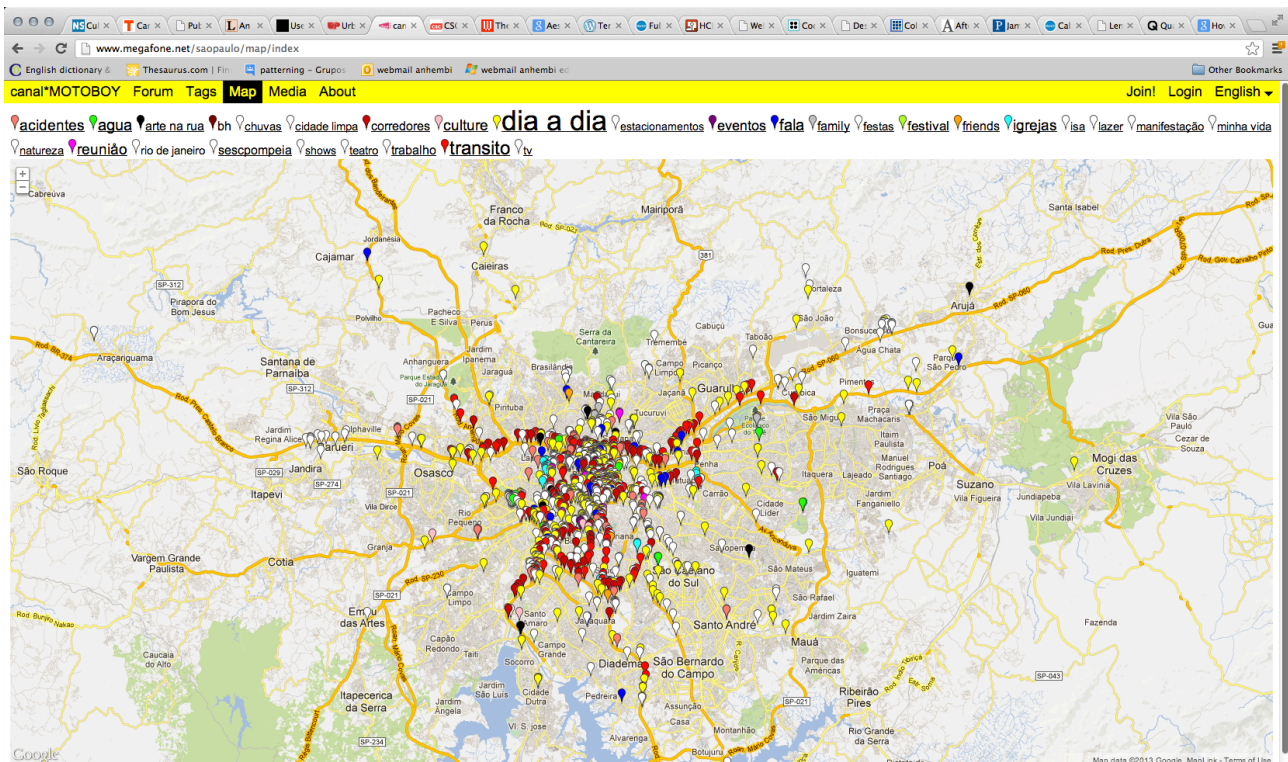


Figure 2: The view map. Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/map/index>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

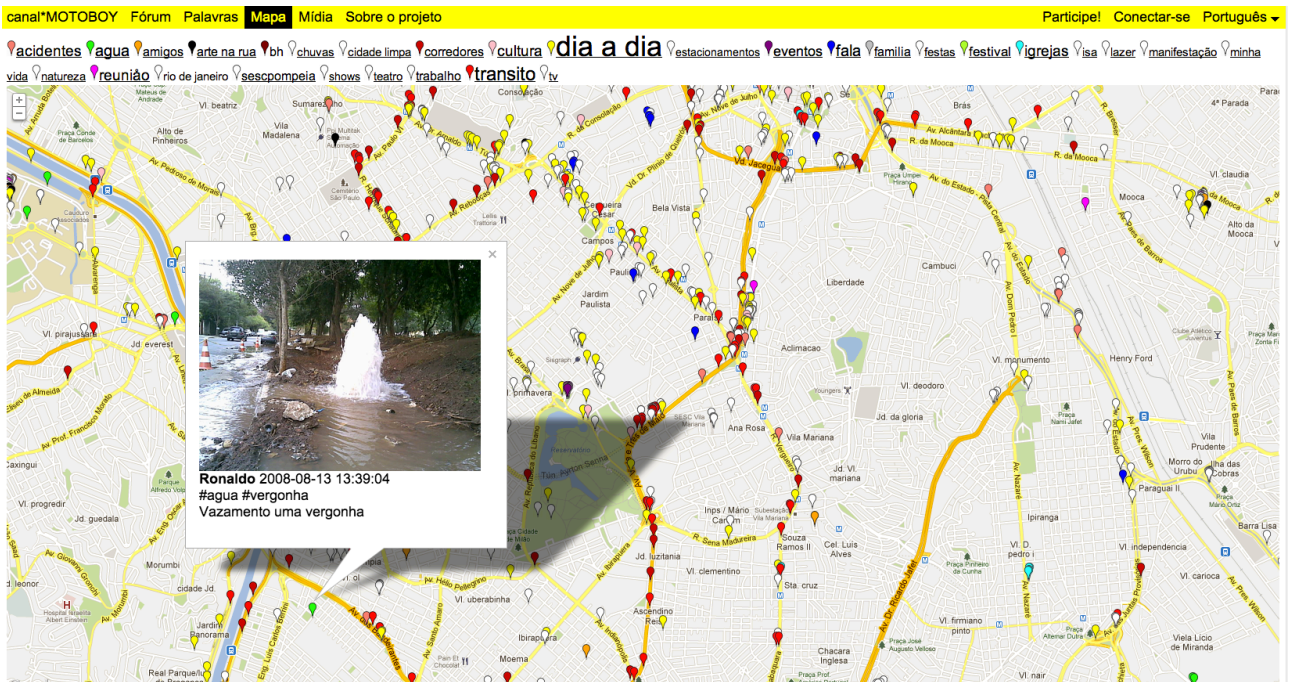


Figure 3: Geolocalised photograph on the map. Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/map/index>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

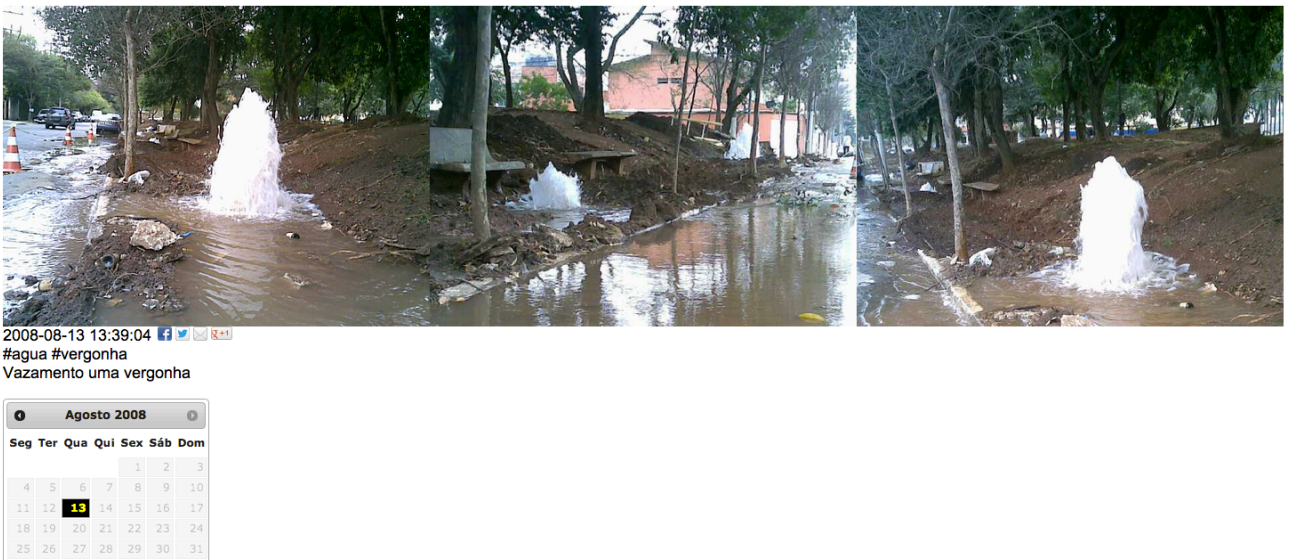


Figure 4: Ronaldo’s photograph about the specific urban problem. Available at: [http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1740%2C1985&author\\_id=24](http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1740%2C1985&author_id=24). Accessed on March 19, 2026.

One intention of image and video narratives, for example, the figure 5, posted by Ronaldo, is to share daily actions as ways to perform everyday activities and routines in big cities, and so, it proposes modes of reading surrounding urban areas. People drive cars, buses, and motorcycles for different reasons – for example, part of their job or for leisure; and they choose certain everyday itineraries as possible physical occupations – displacements between localities. They now check the Web to reorganise possible routes and avoid getting stuck in traffic jams or being stopped in flood areas. Usually, the city plans offer defined routes, but the localities conforming to mobile

devices connected have established other informational layers over them; those online accesses allow users to run, in real time, data analyses and decide how to go – spatial directions; they are attributing temporary filters to their everyday routines.

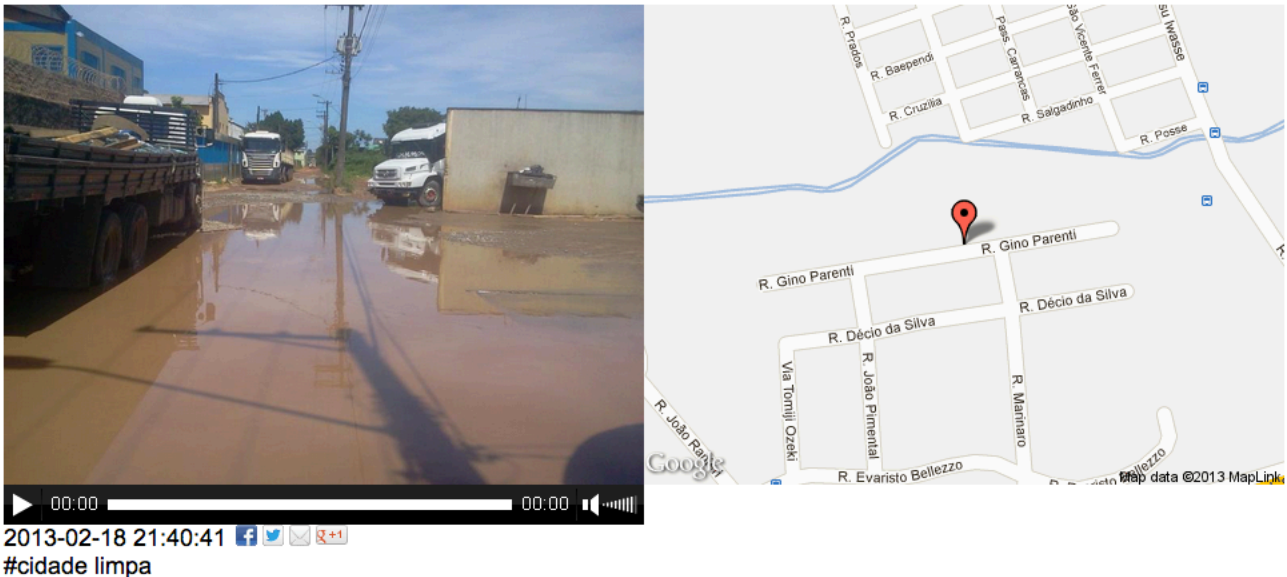


Figure 5: Geolocalised photo about the flood problem. Available at: <https://megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1568>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

The proposal for describing certain narratives is to provide more detail and clarify the initiative and objectives of the Canal\*MOTOBOY project. In the city of São Paulo, ‘nine to five’ culture is not dead; everyday routines in urban areas have challenged people to reinvent physical arrangements and displacements, intertwining different space and time relationships when connected to the Web. It is increasingly common to see the same behaviour, such as when people are stuck in traffic and start checking other routes on their GPS, answering emails, taking photographs, or posting on Facebook and Twitter. So, contemporary practices of behaving mediated by technologies compose the urban physical landscape with informational contents, and some narratives are about this hybrid condition of living.

The urgent question is urban mobility, and motorcycle couriers are a response to that social demand. They are always ready to attend to our rush of receiving documents, gifts, pizzas or medicines. In Brazil, and more specifically in the city of São Paulo, they drive in a characteristic way: racing along the high-speed corridors formed by rows of vehicles, usually stuck in heavy traffic [figure 6]. They alternate between the brake and the accelerator, trying to avoid those drivers who travel slowly and give no space in these corridors. Despite local laws to minimise those behaviours, in the city of São Paulo, they insist on weaving through the traffic. Aldemir Martins de Freitas, President of Motorcyclists Workers Union of São Paulo (Sindimoto-SP), nicknamed German,

explains their rush and behaviours, saying streets are motorcycle couriers' office, where they have to show their capacities and abilities. For him, the dispute over space on streets among vehicles is quite normal (Mendonça, 2011).

Even though they are not specialised in urgent deliveries over distances, they do not want to be stuck in congested avenues, because the amount of money earned is proportional to the number of deliveries made per day. "The majority chooses the profession attracted by the freedom and the ease of working on the street: it requires a motorcycle and does not require a complete high school. They can earn more money than other technical professionals" (Rocha, 2013). For example, Francisco Malaquias has worked as an autonomous motorcycle courier for 5 years, and even deciding their agenda, he usually drives till 150 kilometres per day; Michel Alves is another member of this labouring class; he has worked for 15 years, and often he goes 300 kilometres per day. Some are happy with their jobs, while others want to save money for a safer life in the near future. "Speeding, adverse working conditions (exposure to bad weather conditions, alternations of work shifts, and long working hours), and payment according to their performance, that is, according to the number of deliveries made, are factors that may be posited to be related to accident occurrences (Silva et al., 2012). Therefore, if the job is an easy way to make money, on the other hand, the intense work journey is responsible for road accidents.



2007-07-23 12:36:03

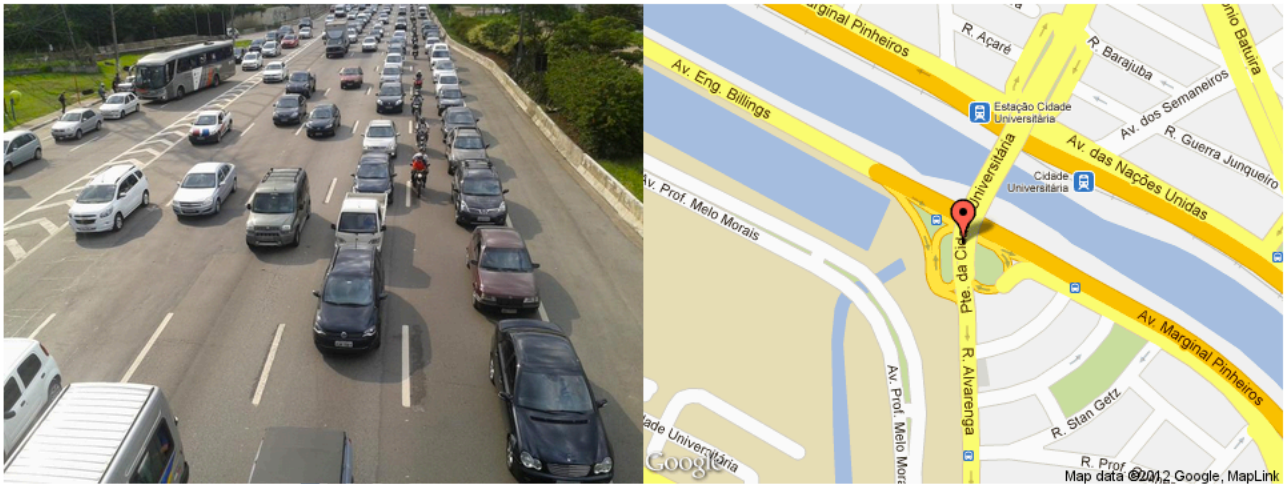
#transito

Caminhão com excesso de carga lateral trafegando pela esquerda, falta fiscalização, pois motoboys acabam se enroscando nesses excessos e acabam caindo.

Figure 6: Alexandro's photo presents his perspective of riding between cars and trucks. Available at: [http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?author\\_id=32](http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?author_id=32). Accessed on March 19, 2026.

A common strategy of driving is a long single file [figure 7], in which all the motorcyclists in a group ride in one track of a lane – one behind the other; usually, a group is more visible to other drivers than one, and they can predict what a rider in a group will do because all members generally maintain fixed positions and fixed intervals between riders. The drivers can only note motorcycle couriers by the sound of their honks, since high speed turns them into a blurred image. So, the

sound becomes a sign to respect and worry, even if you are not aware of motorcycles. “The driver of any vehicle who doesn’t give the right of way to them will be cursed, kicked, and likely lose their rear view mirror to a motorcycle handlebar or a gloved fist” (Whitaker, 2012). Another common behaviour is to follow ambulances and police cars because they have a tendency to overtake other vehicles; so, motorcycle couriers quickly occupy the space behind these cars before their lines are redone.




**Neka** 2012-12-07 17:59:11   
#transito #dia a dia #corredores

Figure 7: Neka’s photograph of Marginal Pinheiros and the everyday traffic. Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?date=2012-12-07&tags=1711>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

There is only one reason to make motorcycle couriers stop running: accidents; it is common to have them between motorcycles and other vehicles, and unfortunately, they are often fatal. “Authorities say three motorcyclists die every day in Sao Paulo” (Whitaker, 2012). And doubtless during those moments, a characteristic behaviour of helping themselves happens; the solidarity is the people’s response to balance the dominance of cars over motorcycles [figure 8].



Figure 8: Beiços’s photograph and an audio recorder about the accident. Available at: [http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1554&author\\_id=34](http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1554&author_id=34). Accessed on March 19, 2026.

The parking, a nonproductive component of contemporary cityscapes, evokes an urgent challenge to rethink the integration of cars, buses and motorcycles, and the critical space they occupy in urban systems [figure 9]. In São Paulo, it is no different, and if we want cities with greater coherence, less congestion and better environmental performance, it is necessary to redesign not only modes of spatial occupation but also urban mobility. Usually, motorcycles share parking with other vehicles without much discussion about adequate spatial utilisation; more proper parking places and safety are among the main concerns of motorcyclists during their manifestations. They disagree with those public decisions and ask for their rights as citizens.

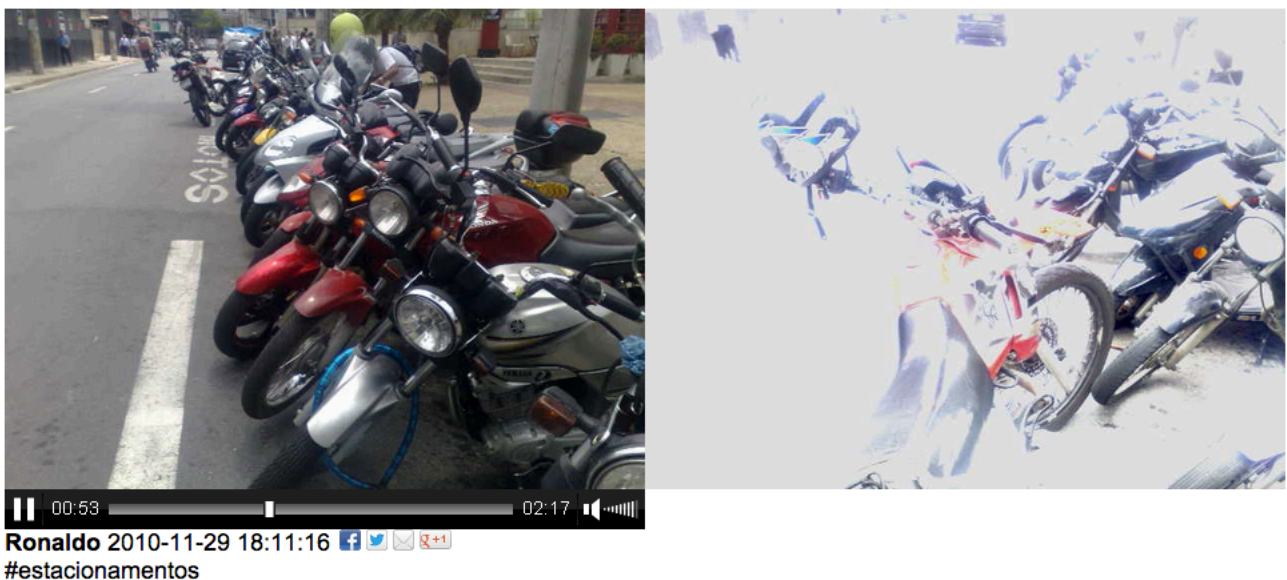
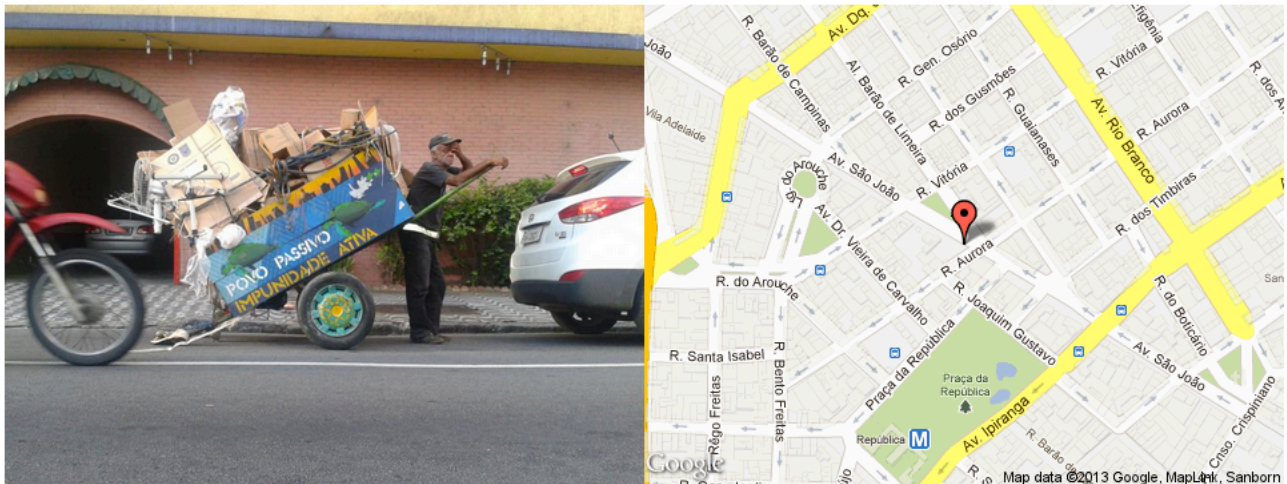


Figure 9: Parking and its urban problems. Available at: [http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1757&author\\_id=32](http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1757&author_id=32)

Another important theme of the Canal\*MOTOBOY project concerns cultural aspects; specifically, in certain areas of the city of São Paulo, the coexistence of social and economic diversity reflects the Brazilian ability to adapt to changing situations. Figure 10, posted by Neka, shows an informal worker and his creativity in remixing parts of objects to construct a pushing cart. The informality of the job is a common claim, and the website's content highlights the possibility of informing and organising people around distributed network models to establish non-hierarchical social relationships and to create labour relationships.







**Neka** 2013-02-27 18:09:11      
#cultura #dia a dia

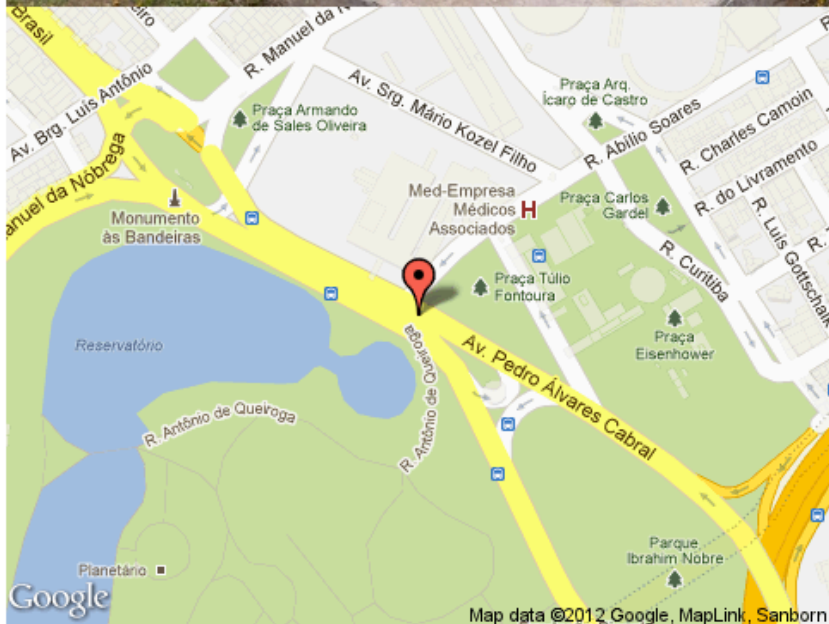
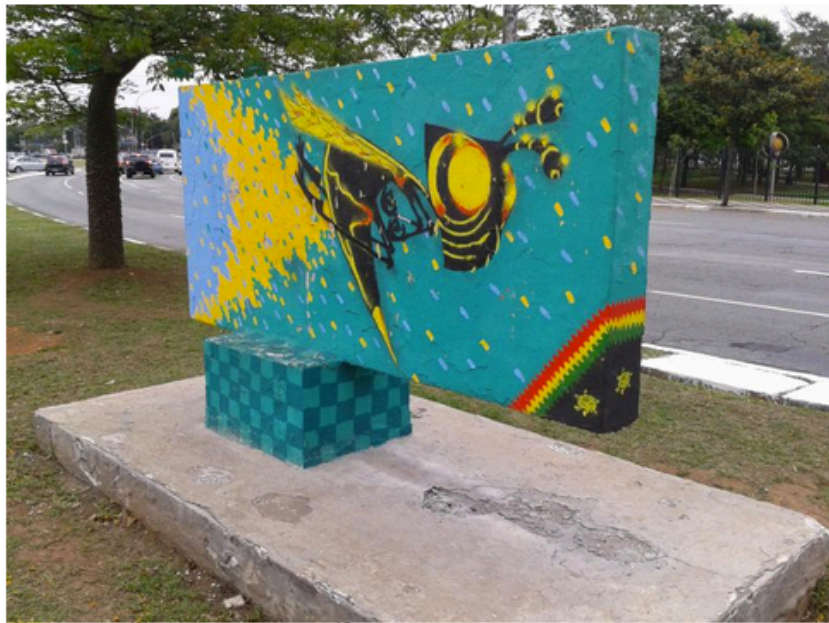
Figure 10: Neka posted on the 27th of february of 2013 and chose 'culture and everyday life' as a tag for her photograph. Available at: <https://megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?date=2013-02>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

Graffiti is an artistic expression common among motorcycle couriers, and Izu, the most well-known artist, has his work spread throughout the city of São Paulo [figures 11 and 12]. The bee is the symbol, chosen by him, to signify the collective group and its strength as a social and ideological organisation. According to Neka (Figure 8), one of the most active members, Izu, wants to remind everyone that the collective is like a beehive, and each member plays an important role in pollinating others and the whole city. As a slum dweller, he believes that his graffiti can pollinate the grey of São Paulo with colour; so, for sure, positive influences can come from his home and contaminate the city.



Neka 2012-08-28 09:57:19 [f](#) [t](#) [+](#)  
 #cultura #arte na rua #amigos #dia a dia #fala #canal\*motoboy #izu

Figure 11: Izu's graffiti. Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?date=2012-08-28&tags=14%2C1545>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.



Neka 2012-11-11 11:48:55 [f](#) [t](#) [+](#)  
 #cultura #arte na rua #izu

Figure 12: Izu's graffiti. Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?date=2012-11-11&tags=1545>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

Izu participated in the First Week of Motorcycle Couriers Culture, during which he discussed his engaged artwork. During the Second Week in 2010 [figure 13], they presented the first book organised about the origin of the Collective and the life stories of those professionals. The book was edited by Aeroplano, Rio de Janeiro, with Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda as the editorial curator, and funded by BR Petrobrás and the Ministry of Culture.



Figure 13: The Second Week of Motorcycle Couriers Culture was publicised by them (Bahiano's photograph). Available at: <http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?date=2010-05-17&tags=14>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

Those educational activities are managed by The Curatorial Group, which meets regularly to evaluate and to propose cultural events. The idea is to show the universe of their interests, music, dance and other artistic or non-artistic productions, related in some way to their labour activities. During those moments, they collaborate with other groups created under the larger project "Megafone" and share experiences in political and economic contexts as well. The last one organised was the Exhibition and Seminar "Aesthetics of outskirts, Art and Culture on the borders of the metropolis" [<http://www.esteticasdaperiferia.org.br/programacao/seminario-3>], in August 2012, during "The Third Week of Motorcycle couriers" [figure 14]. The idea was to think about edges within the city – virtual lines and zones which separate distinct social groups, economic classes or labour activities. The next step for the Group is to propose an art exhibition on the processes of creation, developed together with Collectives and Art Groups from the peripheries and funded by Partner Institutions.

## Mostra e Seminário Estéticas das Periferias Arte e Cultura nas Bordas da Metrópole Apresenta: 3ª Semana de Cultura Motoboy



### Programação:

#### ABERTURA:

Sarau Literário  
Roda de Samba  
Grupo Biografia do Samba  
Homenagem à "Mulher Motociclista"  
Confraternização  
Local: Ação Educativa  
Espaço Cultural Periferia no Centro  
Rua General Jardim, 660 – Vila Buarque Centro  
Data: 22/08 – das 18:30h às 22h

#### DEBATE:

Tema: "Vida de Motoboy"  
Mediação: Ronaldo Simão da Costa  
Vídeo: "Do outro lado da cidade" Glória Marti/Anton Abad, 2008 São Paulo/Barcelona  
Grafite: Grupo OPNI  
Local: CCSP – Centro Cultural São Paulo  
Rua Vergueiro, 1.000 – Paraíso  
Data: 23/08 – das 19:00h às 21:30h

#### SHOW

"Poeta dos Motoboys, convida...!"

#### Rapper e Ativista Marcelo Veronez, o Poeta dos Motoboys, recebe como convidados:

Us da Rua – Rap  
Ponto C – Hip Hop  
Revolução Periferia – Rappers  
DJ Erry-g

**Local:**  
Centro Cultural da Juventude CCJ – "Ruth Cardoso"  
Av. Deputado Emilio Carlos, altura nº 2.200 - Imirim  
Data: 24/08 – das 19h às 22:00h

**Campanha do Agasalho:**  
Doe um agasalho

**Entrada Franca**

#### PALESTRAS

Palestras com motoboys e motogirls autores do livro Coletivo Canal\*MOTOBOY Biblioteca Municipal de São Paulo  
**Locais:** Biblioteca Gilberto Freyre - Rua José Joaquim, 290, Sapoemba      Biblioteca Érico Veríssimo - Rua Diógenes Dourado, 101, Parada de Taipas  
Data: Dia 22 (qua) – 15h      Dia 23 (qui) – 14h  
Biblioteca Jovina Rocha Álvares Pessoa Avenida Pe. Francisco de Toledo, 331, Artur Alvim  
Dia 24 (sex) – 15h

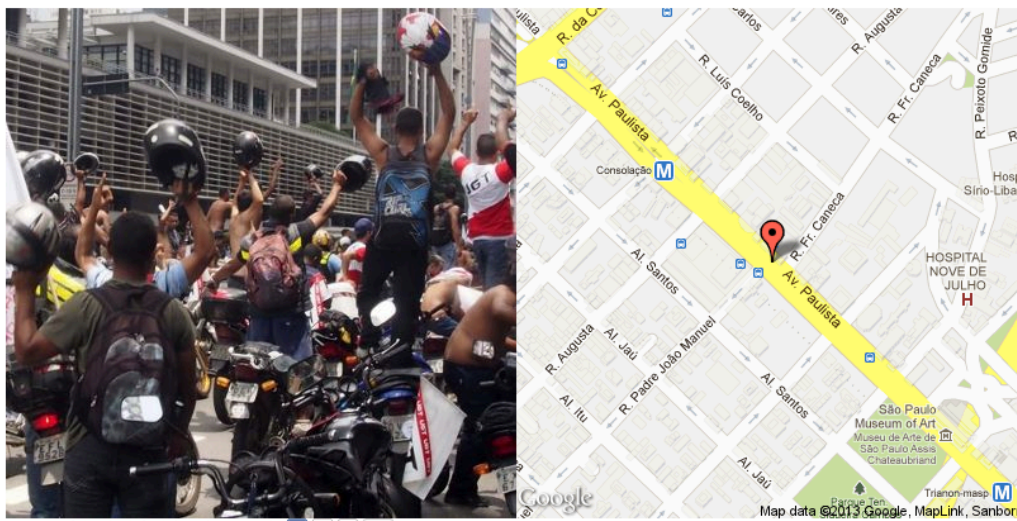


Figure 14: Exhibition and Seminar Poster. Available at: [http://blog.fabiomagnani.com/?page\\_id=15651](http://blog.fabiomagnani.com/?page_id=15651). Accessed on March 19, 2026.

The forum is the main political interface where users discuss their everyday problems. The last question raised concerns decisions by the Brazilian Federal Institution to regulate the job of motorcycle couriers. Several debates between the government and the syndicate of motorcycle couriers have taken place and this website is another possible public space to discuss about proposals of labor laws. According to Neka, on the 26th of February, 2013, 21:34:31, [<http://www.megafone.net/saopaulo/forum/message/index>], the moment is very important to reflect on and guarantee the rights of the labouring class, because laws have not yet been implemented. For her, the motorcycle couriers' collective was created and structured based on the understanding of

horizontal management – a kind of cooperativism - and, therefore, they are organised workers defending their interests.

The website is used to organise and store records of labour manifestations [figure 15], but as an open public digital space, it is expected to get collaborations from Web users in general. These can fill out the form and choose the mode of their contributions: participation or interaction, writing texts in the Forum part for debates, or commenting on other postings, and uploading photographs, videos, and audio on their personal channel, respectively. The proposal is to emphasise people’s capacity to act more critically in the digital context, amplifying and projecting motorcycle couriers’ interests and activities. It is a social category stigmatised by society, because not all motorcyclists work as couriers. Thieves take advantage and use the same behaviour and modes of driving to rob vehicles, taking with violence bags, purses, and anything else in sight. For Magnani (2012), only through cultural production is it possible to make people understand other perspectives and modes of life; he argues that it is necessary to respect and listen to motorcycle couriers in Brazil, as with other social minority groups. It is important to include everybody in this discussion, regardless of social class, academic level, gender, or motorcycle engine power.



**Neka** 2013-02-03 19:15:49   
**#motoboy #manifestação #eventos**   
 Manifestação dos motoboy em São Paulo (01/2/13) Foto: Michael Fernando Santos de Sá   
[Um comentário](#)   
**rodrigo santos:** precisamos de mais tempos prefeito e governador. 2013-02-04 08:57:50

Fevereiro 2013						
Seg	Ter	Qua	Qui	Sex	Sáb	Dom
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28			

Figure 15: The last Manifestation in São Paulo (Neka’s photograph). Available at: <https://megafone.net/saopaulo/message/index?tags=1742&date=2013-02>. Accessed on March 19, 2026.

The physical space, as material support for social practices, has incorporated historical and technological characteristics that constantly transform it through the simultaneity of uses and meanings. This dynamic and complex condition – the juxtaposition of distinct information and diverse temporalities of urban life - defines the contemporary urban space, which can no longer be exactly discerned because many activities can be carried on at the same time, thus configuring an overlapping construction of reality. In conclusion, the internet and its specific distributed mode of sharing and collaborating on information emphasise the non-hierarchical characteristic of the collective and position the website as a social locus of discussion. In this case, the website is another channel for receiving opinions, comments, and suggestions and, in some ways, for giving a voice to many people who are not usually considered by the mass media and the political sphere. The digital domain, in some way, articulates exchanges and blurs borders for the collective practice of another urban design.

## Notes

[1] “Motorcycle couriers are workers who transport goods or products (e.g., documents, food, medications, mineral water, or gas bottles) or carry out small services, such as paying bills or making deposits in banks. This occupation has been seen as a work alternative for young men who do not have other job prospects, and a growing number of new workers has been engaging in it” (Silva et al., 2012).

[2] Geolocation is the identification of the geographic location of an object or person in the physical world. It usually works by automatically looking up an IP address on a WHOIS service and retrieving the registrant's physical address.

[3] The Google Places API lets you query for detailed place information across categories such as establishments, prominent points of interest, geographic locations, and more. The Google Places API is also integrated into the Google Maps API as a JavaScript Library [<https://developers.google.com/places/>].

[4] The CLT is a standard legislative regulation related to labour laws and labour procedural laws in Brazil.

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### **Credits and Project Teams**

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**Special thanks to** Regina Silveira, Augusto Stiel Neto, Inês Raphaelian, Ana Tomé, Marta Rincón, Alex Pilis, Lucas Bambozzi, Karla Brunet, Roc Parés, Juan Antonio Montiel, Sergi Botella, Gerald Kogler e Philippe Bertrand

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**video documentary** Glòria Martí

**curator** Eliezer Muniz

**coordinator** Ronaldo Simão da Costa

**computer programming 2007** Eugenio Tisselli **2012** Matteo Sisti Sette

**project** Antoni Abad 2007