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Conceptual Notes  
for Regulators and  
Policymakers on AI Uses  
in/from the Margins.



**FAVEL IA:**

**CONCEPTUAL NOTES FOR REGULATORS AND  
POLICYMAKERS ON USES OF AI IN/FROM THE MARGINS**

**APRIL/MAY 2026**

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## Favel IA Collective co-authors

*(in alphabetical order by first name)*

Aline Teixeira dos Santos

Akili Ribeiro da Silva

Ana Carla Hilário da Silva

Ana Paula Bragaglia

Andrea Medrado

Carla Baiense Felix

Eleonora de Magalhães Carvalho

Flavia Cândido

Geisa Rodrigues Leite da Silva

Isabel Cristina Coronel Xavier

Jheny da Silva Alves Pereira

Josiane da Silva Dias

Kharine Dantas Santos Gil de Almeida

Lucas da Silva Alves Pessoa

Lucas Coaracy

Manoela Mayrink

Marcela Barba

Monique Pulla dos Santos Teixeira de Oliveira

Patrick Melo

Rodrigo Quinan

Rafael Garcia Peixoto

Thainã de Medeiros

Vitor Costa Pereira da Silva

Zuri Moura dos Santos

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**Design of the cover:** Emanuely Araujo

**Photos:** Vitor Costa

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is not enough to ask – how is the AI industry using, and how is it affecting, in an extractive manner, favela communities? In this report, we are also interested in understanding how **favela communities use, contest, and redefine AI**. Instead of seeing the favela as a target for surveillance and data extraction, we see the favela as a **political subject and as a living territory of knowledge production, memory, care, and collective intelligence**.

### Methodological Approach

This project draws from Participatory Action Research (PAR) and it is inspired by an “us by us” philosophy. We gathered community leaders, media activists, digital rights activists, and researchers to join us for open-agenda workshops in which we addressed the question: *how are favelas using AI?*

### Pillars

Acknowledging the favela as a territory of full humanity, territorial wisdom, care, memory, orality, community bonding, and collective intelligence rather than an area to be mapped, fixed or monitored.

### General overview

AI tools are not being incorporated into the daily lives of favela residents in neutral ways. AI is part of a wider structure that worsens existing inequalities. It intensifies processes of algorithmic racism, surveillance, and lack of transparency about how data is being collected. Such processes contribute to increasing the stigmatisation of communities in contexts of significant structural violence.

### What is working?

Situated technologies of care: community media, libraries, memory archives, reading projects, local platforms, informal networks of support, political pressure on governments and big tech companies.

### Demands/areas

- **Safety:** transparency, data protection, setting limits to surveillance technologies.
- **Mental health:** safeguarding mechanisms to AI as a therapist, against the exploitation of attention, and protection against stigmatisation.
- **Environment:** more regulation for data centres in vulnerable areas, environmental justice.
- **Memory and local wisdoms:** protecting territorial wisdoms and supporting community archives. CriA Project to value the knowledge of “crias de favelas.”
- **Disinformation:** challenging the narratives that criminalise favela life and algorithmic racism.

### Political direction

More transparency about how data is being used, greater inputs into technologies implemented in favela communities, stopping the surveillance of favela residents, and valuing **existing technologies of care**. Recognising that favelas can contribute to a fairer digital future. Establishing **Favel IA Collectives** with community leaders in favelas in different cities, ensuring that there is greater participation in public debates about digital technologies and AI.



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*IA ALSO REFERS TO  
“LAIÁ-LAIÁ”, A COMMON  
RHYTHMIC ENDING FOR  
SAMBA SONGS*

INTRODUCTION

**FAVEL IA**

## INTRODUCTION

# Favel IA

Favel IA started as a playful but powerful idea. IA corresponds to the Portuguese-language acronym for “inteligência artificial” (artificial intelligence). IA also refers to “laiá-laiá”, a common rhythmic ending for samba songs, as Raull Santiago<sup>1</sup>, co-founder of Instituto Papo Reto (IPR)<sup>2</sup>, reminds us. This idea sets the tone for this participatory action project, which is about dancing to the rhythm. In the favelas (Brazilian Portuguese for slums or shantytowns), this rhythm echoes amid deep inequalities and state violence. It manifests in a scenario in which technology is anything but neutral. It cuts across alleyways, homes, bodies, minds, and histories. Considering the power asymmetries between tech giants in the Global North and marginalised communities in the Global South, as is the case with the favelas, this project could focus on how the AI industry uses the favela in a sense of extraction, reinforcing dynamics of data colonialism, precarious labour, and technological dependence. However, we have decided to ask the reverse question: “How does the favela use or engage with AI?” as a way of contesting and redefining artificial intelligence. In doing so, we do not deny the realities of inequality (and indeed how favela communities are used and exploited by the tech giants). But we want to tell another story. Our aim is to shift the gaze from understanding the favela as an object of intense surveillance to seeing the favela as a producer of knowledge.

To achieve this, we foreground the perspectives of community leaders, favela media activists, and researchers. Flavia Candido, a media activist from the Marielle Franco Dictionary of Favelas<sup>3</sup>, offers an account that highlights the paradoxes of technology. After one of her texts went viral on social media, she was accused of not being the author, under the suspicion that she had used AI. She then reflected on how AI use could represent a lose-lose situation for people from marginalised communities: “If we use it, they disqualify us and say we would not be able to write without generative AI, as we are considered uneducated, low-class citizens. But if we don’t use it, we fall behind because everyone else is using it”. This sentence reveals a structure that dismisses the intellectual power of those born and raised in the favelas, or the *crias de favela*, as we will demonstrate in this report.

To analyse the diverse implications of AI use, particularly generative AI, in favela contexts, we conducted the Favel IA Project in 2025-2026, in partnership with the INCT DSI Consortium (the National Institute of Science and Technology in Informational Disputes<sup>4</sup>) the University of Exeter (and its Critical AI Centre, CrAIC), the Federal Fluminense University (UFF), and Instituto Papo Reto. The project adopted Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches to build collective knowledge about AI governance and literacy from the ground up. Favel IA shows that the favela is intelligence: memory, solidarity, and care. To dance to the rhythm is to exercise agency. In this way, favela communities claim the right to define the terms of the technologies that move through their territories, shaping how they are taken up and transformed, with people from the favelas at the forefront, transforming resistance into social innovation.

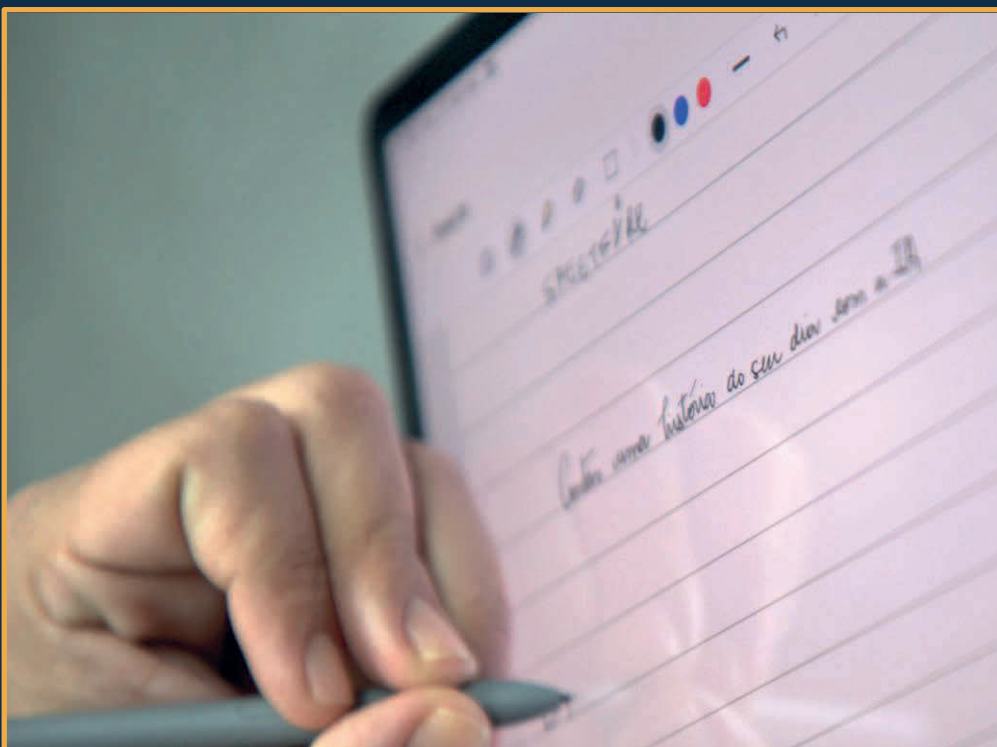
<sup>1</sup> Raull suggested the name Favel IA during our first conversation about the project.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about Instituto Papo Reto (IPR), check the report published in March 2026, which covers its history, struggles and methodologies <https://institutopaporeto.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/12-Anos-Dando-o-Papo-Reto-Formas-de-ativismo-no-Complexo-do-Alemao.pdf> Papo Reto means “straight talk in Portuguese”. IPR started as a media activist collective but has now become an institute.

<sup>3</sup> See: [https://wikifavelas.com.br/index.php/Dicion%C3%A1rio\\_de\\_Favelas\\_Marielle\\_Franco](https://wikifavelas.com.br/index.php/Dicion%C3%A1rio_de_Favelas_Marielle_Franco)

<sup>4</sup> Funded by CNPq – the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development

# FAVELAS USING AI AS OPPOSED TO BEING USED BY THE AI INDUSTRY: WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES?



# Favelas using AI as opposed to being used by the AI industry: what are the main issues?

There is a profound asymmetry between those who profit from AI and those who bear its costs. On one side, Big Tech companies accumulate profits driven by automated systems, data infrastructure, and programmatic advertising. On the other, marginalised communities, especially Black populations, people living on peripheral areas, and women from the most socially vulnerable classes, have little access to those gains.

To grasp the scale of this disparity, Meta informed its investors that in 2025 it recorded more than US\$ 200 billion in revenue, much of it driven by targeted ads, based on algorithms that process and monetise data on a massive scale<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, Alphabet reported that the revenue of Google Cloud grew by 48%, reaching US\$17.7 billion<sup>6</sup>. The growth is attributed to the infrastructure and AI solutions offered to companies and governments. These numbers reveal how AI has become one of the main engines of profitability for the technology giants.

At the same time, these impressive numbers hide deeply unequal processes. Data extraction, without transparency or consent, turns people's everyday lives into raw material for algorithmic models. From data labeling to content moderation services, often carried out by poorly paid workers in countries of the Global South, AI production chains are built on precarious labor. With their massive electricity consumption and water usage, data centres have a significant environmental impact, which directly affects the most vulnerable communities.

The risks of job losses are also unequal. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024), workers without higher education, women, and older workers face greater risk of disadvantage due to reduced access to AI-related opportunities<sup>7</sup>. This issue is particularly serious for women's employment. Many administrative, precarious, and informal occupations - precisely those most exposed to AI-driven automation - are performed by women. These unequal impacts are therefore strongly marked by generational and gender issues. Additionally, automated tools are known to discriminate against racialised minorities. The racist tendencies of facial recognition tools, for instance, have been widely documented. A report by the Network of Security Observatories, cited by Reuters, found that around 90% of the people who were arrested based on facial recognition in several Brazilian states were Black<sup>8</sup>. In social policy, automated systems for granting or monitoring social benefits often assign higher "risk" scores based on factors associated with low economic income, such as the type of housing type. Because of this, residents of working-class areas might have their benefits suspended, be targeted by unfair punishments, and become even more economically vulnerable.

Yet, marginalised groups, including women from the favelas, are almost entirely absent from regulatory discussions on AI. They are not on corporate governance councils. They are not at the negotiating tables with the public sector, and they are not in international forums. Thus, to put it simply, while profits are concentrated, risks and harms are distributed unequally.

The central issue, therefore, is not only one of innovation, but rather of distributive justice. Who decides, who profits, and who pays the price of artificial intelligence? And how does this chain affect peripheral populations and favela residents?

These are complex questions but perhaps a starting point to tackle them is to remember that AI is not neutral, and it is much more than a mere tool for economic efficiency. AI is a system that reorganises power, wealth, and economic opportunities on a global scale. When the financial and social benefits of AI are concentrated in the hands of a few corporations, while the social costs fall disproportionately on marginalised populations, we are facing a process that deepens structural inequalities. In fact, what we are dealing with is a matter of economic justice. If AI depends on the mass collection of data, and if data are produced by people in their everyday interactions, then the wealth generated by those systems should have collective and common dimension. Yet such wealth is not redistributed proportionally. Peripheral communities, Black populations, precarious workers, and women often contribute data and invisible and emotional labor to the AI economy (as it is the case with content moderation work, for example). However, they do not share in the financial gains and/or have access to technological opportunities. This reinforces a model of digital extractivism, in which value is taken from territories and bodies without equivalent return.

There are also concerns about the health of democratic systems. Decisions about how AI is developed, implemented, and regulated shape access to public services, employment, credit, security, and social rights. When the populations directly affected by these issues, such as residents of peripheral areas and favelas, do not participate in the decisions, a serious deficit of representation is generated. The lack of AI regulation deepens these inequalities, particularly when marginalised voices are absent in the few regulatory debates that do occur. This means that policies may be formulated without any consideration of the concrete impact that AI technologies have on people's lives, perpetuating historic exclusions. Ultimately, all these issues define the kind of society that we want to build. Without mechanisms for redistribution, inclusive regulation, and effective social participation in place, the tendency is that AI will reproduce and intensify existing social hierarchies. Thus, to discuss this asymmetry is not to oppose innovation, but rather to defend considerate and fair types of innovation aligned with equity, democracy, and social justice.



<sup>5</sup> Meta Investor Relations (2026). *Meta Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2025 Results*. MENLO PARK, Calif., Jan. 28, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- Meta Platforms, Inc. (Nasdaq: META) today reported financial results for the quarter and full year ended December 31, 2025. Link para o release: [https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc\\_news/Meta-Reports-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year-2025-Results-2026.pdf](https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc_news/Meta-Reports-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year-2025-Results-2026.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Alphabet (2026). *Alphabet Announces Fourth Quarter and Fiscal Year 2025 Results* MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. – February 4, 2026 – Alphabet Inc. (NASDAQ: GOOG, GOOGL) today announced financial results for the quarter ended December 31, 2025. Link para o release: [https://s206.q4cdn.com/479360582/files/doc\\_financials/2025/q4/2025q4-alphabet-earnings-release.pdf](https://s206.q4cdn.com/479360582/files/doc_financials/2025/q4/2025q4-alphabet-earnings-release.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD (2024). *Who will be the workers most affected by AI?: A closer look at the impact of AI on women, low-skilled workers and other groups*. [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/who-will-be-the-workers-most-affected-by-ai\\_14dc6f89-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/who-will-be-the-workers-most-affected-by-ai_14dc6f89-en.html)

<sup>8</sup> Nunes, P. (2019). *Intercept Brasil. Exclusivo: levantamento revela que 90,5% dos presos por monitoramento facial no Brasil são negros*. <https://www.intercept.com.br/2019/11/21/presos-monitoramento-facial-brasil-negros/>

*“AI SYSTEMS ARE TRAINED  
IN EXISTING DATA THAT  
REPRODUCE HISTORICAL  
INEQUALITIES AND RACIAL  
HIERARCHIES”*

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**HOW ARE FAVELA COMMUNITIES  
BEING AFFECTED BY THE  
AI INDUSTRY?**

# How are favela communities being affected by the AI industry?

The favelas are often portrayed through binary media representations. On one hand, they are presented as chaotic and unsanitary spaces. On the other, they are exoticised through representations that romanticise the precariousness of everyday life in/of the favela (Valladares, 2000)<sup>9</sup>. Another binary representation appears when a favela is framed as a separate, distinct area, a kind of anti-city. Here, the favelas are portrayed as the epicenters of crime and violence, reinforcing negative stereotypes. This dualism feeds the narrative of the “divided city” (Ventura, 1994)<sup>10</sup>, echoing a simplistic dichotomy in which clear boundaries separate the favela from the asphalt, or paved non-favela areas. Such representations stigmatise favela residents as enemies of the state, legitimising aggressive policing and policies aligned with neoliberal ideals that present themselves as legitimate for eradicating poverty. In response, social movements and grassroots communication practitioners have focused on generating less simplistic media representations of their own communities.

The reality is that favelas are not detached or dissociated parts of the city. Favela residents do not represent a statistical minority either. Rio de Janeiro has a population of 6.2 million people, of whom approximately 21.7% live in favelas (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE Census, 2022)<sup>11</sup>. Yet, even if they house a significant percentage of the population, the criminalisation of favela areas is often used by the authorities to justify a so-called “war on drugs,” which victimises Black youth in many territories. In the first four months of 2020, the year in which the WHO declared the Covid-19 pandemic, the Rio de Janeiro police killed 606 people, a 43% increase compared with 2019 (Nascimento, 2020)<sup>12</sup>. The numbers are truly shocking. Police were responsible for 35% of all deaths in the state of Rio de Janeiro in April 2020. More than three quarters of the nearly 9,000 people killed by Rio’s police over the last decade were Black men. Nationwide, in 2024, 6,243 deaths attributed to police violence were recorded (Souza, 2024)<sup>13</sup>. Police violence has thus become, in its own way, endemic and perhaps even more insidious than the pandemic itself.

In October 2025, while we were carrying out the second round of Favel IA workshops, Operation Containment, a police operation conducted in the favelas of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha, left more than 120 people dead, including four police officers, making it the deadliest police action in the city’s history (Phillips, 2025)<sup>14</sup>. Human rights organisations and social movements strongly condemned the operation, pointing to serious investigative failures. Forensic experts were reportedly prevented from analysing the crime scenes, raising grave concerns about extrajudicial executions in predominantly Black, low-income neighbourhoods (Human Rights Watch, 2025)<sup>15</sup>.

Having described the scale of police violence, we also consider the social and technological context in which favela populations live. Here we present some data on internet access and use in favelas, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. It is estimated that 90% of favela residents in Brazil use the internet regularly. Smartphones represent the main device used by around 99% of residents. Among favela residents, 85% use social media daily. WhatsApp is the main tool for communication and the circulation of news (Data Favela, 2023)<sup>16</sup>. In general, there is little research and no systematic mapping of the specific use of artificial intelligence, and especially generative AI, in Brazilian favelas. However, our examination of the available literature reveals four recurring and relevant themes for understanding the ways in which the AI industry affects life in the favelas in Brazil.

**a) Algorithmic racism**

Brazil has profound racial and economic inequalities, which strongly shape the way AI technologies affect people. Unsurprisingly, AI systems end up reproducing structural racial inequalities (Silva and Rodrigues Silva, 2024; Internet Lab, 2024)<sup>17</sup>. Many automated systems are deployed in public services, security systems, and digital platforms, where they reproduce these structural discriminations. Although white and Black people represent almost equivalent proportions of the population (47.3% and 50.7%, respectively), the Black population is disproportionately concentrated in the most economically vulnerable segments of society. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE Census, 2022), Black people make up 70% of the poorest 10% of the population. Also according to the census, on average, Black and mixed-race Brazilians earn only half the income of their white counterparts. Although favelas are inhabited by both Black and white Brazilians, in Rio de Janeiro's wealthier neighbourhoods only 7% of residents are Black. As with social and economic inequality, algorithmic errors also disproportionately affect Black people.

In conclusion, AI systems are trained in existing data that reproduce historical inequalities and racial hierarchies. This happens all over the world, but it is particularly serious in Brazil, given the histories of discrimination against Black populations. To make matters worse, algorithmic discrimination emerges even without explicit racial data. Machine learning models can still reproduce racial biases even when race is not used as an explicit variable. For example, a study of credit scoring models in Brazil showed that variables related to location and socioeconomic condition function as proxies for race, and models trained on those data end up indirectly discriminating against the Black population (Vilarino and Vicente, 2020)<sup>18</sup>.

**b) Surveillance in/of marginalised areas**

The use of facial recognition in policing and surveillance systems, and how they affect Black and socially marginalised communities has been well-documented. Several studies show that false positives are much more frequent for Black people: around 90% of arrests made through facial recognition involved Black people. Researchers argue that security technologies are often introduced without transparency or adequate accountability mechanisms. As a result, these systems end up reinforcing dynamics of racial profiling and mass racialized surveillance in marginalised neighborhoods (Data Privacy Brasil, 2024<sup>19</sup>; Peron et al., 2024<sup>20</sup>; AISur, 2025<sup>21</sup>).

**c) Lack of diversity in tech development**

AI researchers and workers in the tech industry in Brazil are predominantly white, urban, and middle-class. By contrast, Black researchers and residents of favelas and peripheral communities are underrepresented in the development of and research on AI. This lack of diversity has serious implications, leading to technologies that do not consider the realities of marginalised communities, racialised groups, and historically excluded populations (Internet Lab, 2024<sup>22</sup>; Santos, Baldassarre and Magalhães, 2026<sup>23</sup>; Soares Seto, 2025<sup>24</sup>; UNESCO, 2025<sup>25</sup>).

**d) Governance gap**

AI applications are developing at a fast pace and AI regulatory efforts often cannot keep up. This situation is also evident in Brazil, where a national regulatory framework for AI is still under development. Currently, Bill 2338/2023 represents the most comprehensive proposal for AI regulation in the country, but it remains under discussion. The debate includes the adoption of risk-based regulation for high-impact systems, algorithmic impact assessments, transparency requirements regarding public-sector uses of AI, and the creation of protection mechanisms against discriminatory automated decisions.

Several researchers and civil society entities such as the Coalition for Rights on the Internet (CDR)<sup>26</sup> have argued that AI regulation in Brazil should explicitly incorporate anti-racist and human rights principles, rather than focusing exclusively on promoting innovation and economic growth (Data Privacy, 2024<sup>27</sup>; Figueira et al., 2024<sup>28</sup>). The CDR has been a strong advocate for AI regulation. Recently, it has contributed to the development of the Digital Statute of Children and Adolescents (Law No. 15.211/25), or Digital ECA, led by Instituto Alana (a CDR member).

The Digital ECA is a legal milestone designed to update the protection of children and adolescents in response to the new challenges posed by the digital environment. The new legislation emphasises shared responsibility among social actors. This means that protecting children in digital environments is a duty shared by family, society, the State, and platforms, reinforcing the principle of safeguarding the best interest of children and adolescents online<sup>29</sup>. Many of the regulatory debates echo tensions between technological development, public security policies, and demands for social justice (ALSUR, 2024)<sup>30</sup>. More broadly, a clear governance gap can be observed, in which social movements and trade unions seek to participate actively in shaping these regulatory frameworks, demanding greater inclusion and democratic control over the use of emerging technologies such as AI.

## But what about the favela using AI?

During the early stages of the co-development of the Favel IA project, we realised that little is known about how favela residents use AI, particularly generative AI. We decided that this could serve as a driving question for our project, functioning as an analytical counterpoint to contrast with - and complement - what is already known about how the AI industry and Big Tech companies exploit marginalised communities in the Global South.

Before addressing this question, we conducted a literature review on the use of AI in favelas and other marginalised urban contexts. We identified studies focusing on technical applications related to territorial mapping and the spatial analysis of favelas through AI-based technologies. One example is the study by Liu et al. (2025)<sup>31</sup>, which incorporates a semantic segmentation procedure for understanding three-dimensional (3D) scenes of favelas, using a dataset obtained through a Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) device. The authors aimed to capture the favela's internal spatial complexity, contributing to data-driven planning, and the development of more socially equitable infrastructure in these areas. The team stated that the project was planned with community participation. However, the study did not provide details about the participatory or co-design methodologies used.

For this report, we are particularly interested in research that discusses the relationship between AI and agency from the perspective of popular digital sovereignty in the Global South and/or through a decolonial perspective (Natale et al., 2025<sup>32</sup>; Lehedé, 2024<sup>33</sup>). Here, sovereignty is a concept that applies not only to states and corporations, but also to social movements, workers, and communities seeking to build their own technological alternatives. In this sense, experiences linked to social movements, such as the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST) in Brazil, illustrate efforts to appropriate and develop technologies in favor of collective autonomy (Grohmann, 2025<sup>34</sup>; MTST Technology Center, n.d.<sup>35</sup>). However, these studies do not deal specifically with favelas and their uses of AI.

Research that combines an analysis of data use (though not AI specifically) with the notion of the popular (i.e. "of the people") is also insightful. Jeppesen and Sartoretto (2026)<sup>36</sup> edited a special issue that includes studies of counter-mapping initiatives by community groups that appropriate, collect, and use data to reveal and reshape their spatial realities. The concept of data insurgency, developed by Furtado and Renski (2019) in a study of favelas

in Fortaleza is also helpful. The authors discuss how communities can employ autonomous strategies to produce data that challenges the state's broad monopoly over information. Their research suggests that alternative methods of planning, collecting, and disseminating data can better reflect community values and strengthen their right to the city (Furtado and Renski, 2019)<sup>37</sup>.

This perspective aligns with projects that explore Citizen-Generated Data (CGD), a practice consolidated since 2017 especially through the work of *data\_labe* and collectives from favelas and peripheries (see Gilberto Vieira da Cruz Júnior's doctoral thesis, 2025, p. 146)<sup>38</sup>. These collectives critically appropriate the concept of citizen-generated data to develop their own methodologies for knowledge production. For them, data generation is more than a technical tool associated with institutional citizen science. Rather, it represents a form of situated activism through which communities produce information to confront data colonialism, denounce inequalities, and affirm their own narratives about the territory. Wikifavelas, a wiki platform that aggregates knowledge that stems from favelas, represents another important example. In this way, we can infer that AI in the favelas, when integrated into projects of citizen generated data, can also function as a tool of resistance and social autonomy, while also creating opportunities for digital literacy and community-led data production (De Souza, De Faria and Conceição, 2025)<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Valladares, L. P. (2000). *A Gênese da Favela Carioca: A Produção Anterior às Ciências Sociais*. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 5(44): 5-34.

<sup>10</sup> Ventura, Z. (1994). *Cidade Partida*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

<sup>11</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE (2022). *Panorama do Censo 2022*. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2022. Disponível em: <https://censo2022.ibge.gov.br/panorama/?localidade=BR>. Acesso em: 6 abr. 2026.

<sup>12</sup> Nascimento, K. (2020). Instituto de Segurança Pública divulga dados de abril. Instituto de Segurança Pública, Notícias, 26/05/2020. <http://www.isp.rj.gov.br/Noticias.asp?ident=438> (accessed 16/11/2021).

<sup>13</sup> Souza, F. (2024). *Polícia Matou mais de 17 Pessoas por Dia no Brasil, Doz Estudo*. CNN Brasil. [https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/brasil/policia-matou-mais-de-17-pessoas-por-dia-no-brasil-em-2024-diz-estudo/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/brasil/policia-matou-mais-de-17-pessoas-por-dia-no-brasil-em-2024-diz-estudo/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>14</sup> Phillips, T. (2025). *Brazil to Seek Independent Inquiry into Deadly Police Raid that Killed 121 people*. *The Guardian*, 4 November 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch (2025). *Brazil: Serious Investigative Failures in Deadly Rio Raid, 31 October 2025*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/31/brazil-serious-investigative-failures-in-deadly-rio-raid> (accessed 09 December 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Data Favela, 2023. *Relatório Raio X da Vida Real*. <https://datafavela.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/DATAFAVELA-Raio-X-da-Vida-Real-v10.pdf>

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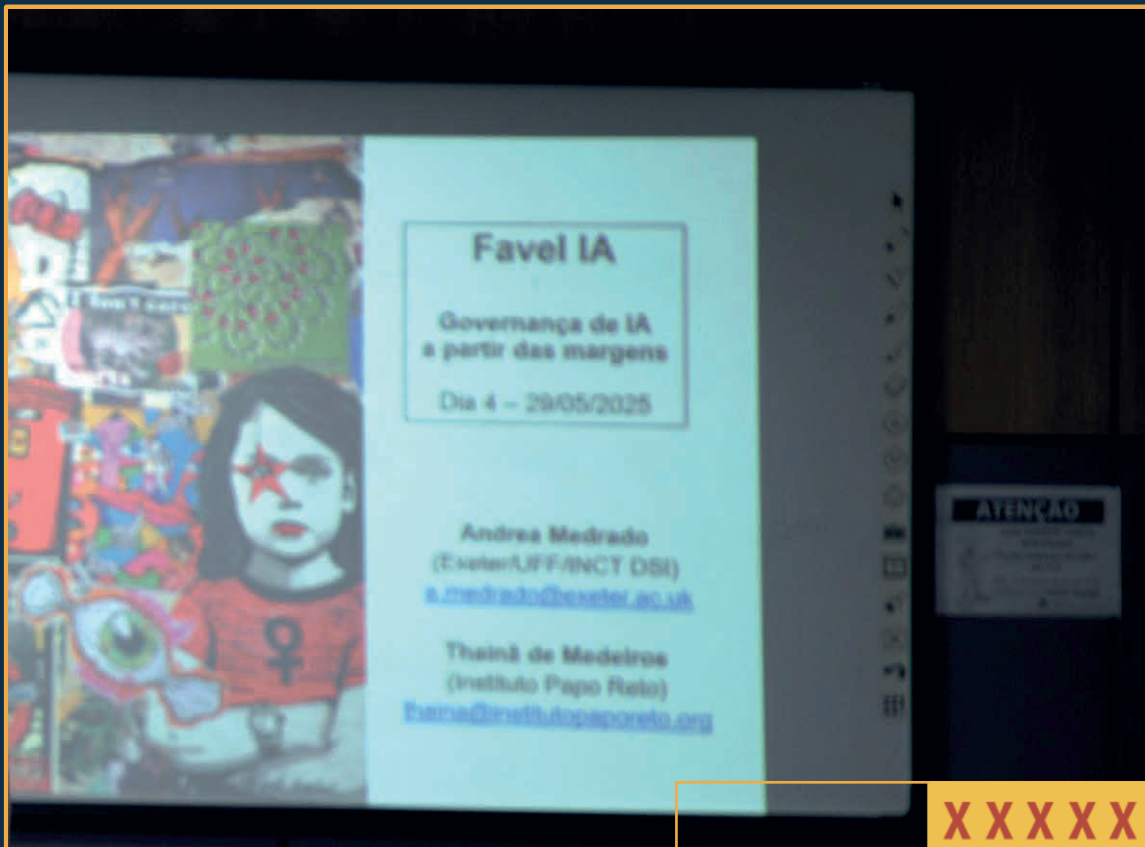
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*WITH FAVEL IA IT WAS POSSIBLE TO FOLLOW MORE CLOSELY THE PHILOSOPHY OF "US BY US"*

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR): REVISITING LATIN AMERICAN TRADITIONS OF MILITANT RESEARCH**

# Participatory Action Research (PAR): Revisiting Latin American traditions of militant research

AI technologies are often identified as fast and efficient solutions to social, economic, and environmental problems. At the same time, they raise several questions: what are the environmental costs of data centers? What labour is required to train AI models and how are workers compensated? How are prejudices and biases being encoded in AI models?

The answers are often similar: although there are legitimate concerns about how AI is being developed in the present, it nevertheless represents an inevitable future, a one-way road we have already embarked on. But is this really the case? What if, instead of focusing only on AI as an inevitable future, we revisited our recent past, in the 1970s and 1980s, when Latin American scholars were developing politically progressive methodologies to formulate critical questions related to power, justice, and equality?

Starting from this provocation, we carried out a pilot project at the University of Westminster in which we brought together undergraduate and graduate students, tech activists, and digital media professionals from minoritised backgrounds in London to analyse what we understood as AI for the social good. But whose social good would that be, exactly? (Medrado and Verdegem 2024a<sup>40</sup>; Medrado and Verdegem, 2024b<sup>41</sup>; Medrado and Verdegem 2024c<sup>42</sup>). To do this, we drew inspiration from Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the work of Latin American scholars such as the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1972<sup>43</sup>; 1995<sup>44</sup>) and the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1987<sup>45</sup>; 2003<sup>46</sup>).

PAR emerged in different regions of the world as a response to top-down developmentalist approaches. Unlike the North American tradition of action research (Whyte, 1994)<sup>47</sup>, there are strands of PAR which were developed in response to the needs of twentieth-century social movements, particularly agrarian reform and anti-colonial struggles in several countries such as Tanzania, India, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia (Rahman, 2006<sup>48</sup>; Vio Grossi, 1982<sup>49</sup>).

Despite contextual differences, PAR evolved through bottom-up processes co-developed with marginalised groups. In Latin America, PAR represents an attempt to combine theory and practice to confront unequal social realities. One of its essential characteristics is the rejection of asymmetries that often shape research processes. For PAR, there are no distinctions between subjects and objects of research - all participants are active subjects of knowledge. When studies on participatory AI, for example, point to the need to treat all actors involved as equal partners, they demonstrate a commitment to what Freire calls critical pedagogy. The aim of this approach is to challenge the banking model of knowledge production, in which students (or those being researched) are treated as blank pages to be filled in by teachers (or researchers).

In addition, authors such as Fals Borda (2003) have questioned the distinctions between “doing,” “thinking,” and “feeling” (or hands, brains, and hearts) in processes of knowledge building. He developed ideas around *sentipensante* (feeling-thinking) approaches. Derived from the combination of the Spanish words *sentimiento* and *pensamiento*, *sentipensante* refers to combining mind and heart to guide the journey in the right direction, confronting its

many setbacks (Fals Borda, 2003, p. 9<sup>50</sup>). This is a call for a different approach to be adopted by researchers, educators, activists, and intellectuals: an approach that directly opposes the cold and supposedly neutral attitude of the Eurocentric positivist scientist. In this way, knowledge is not obtained only through doing, nor in opposition to thinking, nor in opposition to feeling. All knowledge is feeling-thinking, which can be acquired through respectful and empathetic dialogues.

A central dimension of dialogue in Participatory Action Research is that respect between researchers and co-participants is not built only through attentive listening. Of course, a horizontal dialogue without hierarchies is an excellent place to start. But beyond that, we must find the willingness and possibility for co-participants themselves to conduct the conversation, define its direction, and establish the main questions. This principle was essential to the Favel IA project. In the pilot project before Favel IA, “AI for Social Good?”, although we were inspired by PAR, the need to fit within the requirements of a funding call from an English university required us to define an agenda and a research problem from the outset rather than allow our research co-participants to define them with us.

With Favel IA, however, it was possible to follow more closely the philosophy of “us by us,” (nós por nós) which is key to the work of the favela media activists with whom we collaborated, especially Instituto Papo Reto (IPR). In this context, members of IPR were the authors of the research problem that would guide the project. With the research funded by INCT-DSI, it was possible to maintain a relatively open agenda, which helped us formulate a simple but fundamental question: we know a great deal about critiques of artificial intelligence as extractive and exploitative technologies. In other words, we know how big players in the AI industry use favela communities for profit. But how do favela communities use AI?

Before delving into this question, we should clarify that the AI we are referring to most predominantly is generative AI. We therefore present here a brief definition of generative AI. Put simply, generative artificial intelligence refers to a set of AI algorithms and models capable of producing new content, including texts, images, videos, and problem-solving strategies (He, Cao and Tan, 2025<sup>51</sup>).

Having presented an explanation of the methodological approach, we now provide practical information about participant recruitment and the organisation of the workshops. The participants (total = 21) were recruited by Thainã de Medeiros of Instituto Papo Reto. Participants lived and/or were from several favelas in Rio and/or Niterói, such as Alemão, Maré, Penha, and Santo Amaro. The researcher Monique Paulla also worked as a co-organiser of the workshops, inviting women leaders of the 94 community. Additionally, the graduate programs in Media and Everyday Life (PPGMC) and Communication (PPGCOM) at UFF opened registration for seven participants, prioritising students who were born and raised in favelas. At the time the workshops were organised, participants were between 24 and 55 years old, including Black, white, mixed-race, and Indigenous people. Here, we follow the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE, based on five In categories: branca (white), parda (mixed/multiracial), preta (Black), amarela (yellow/Asian) and indígena (indigenous). In terms of gender, most identify as cisgender, with two transgender participants as well (one trans woman and one trans man). Their professions are varied and include areas such as care, education, health, communication, research, social work, law, and administration, resulting in a group with diverse profiles. The table below presents the demographic data of the participants. To preserve participants’ identities, and for research ethics reasons, the names shown are pseudonyms.

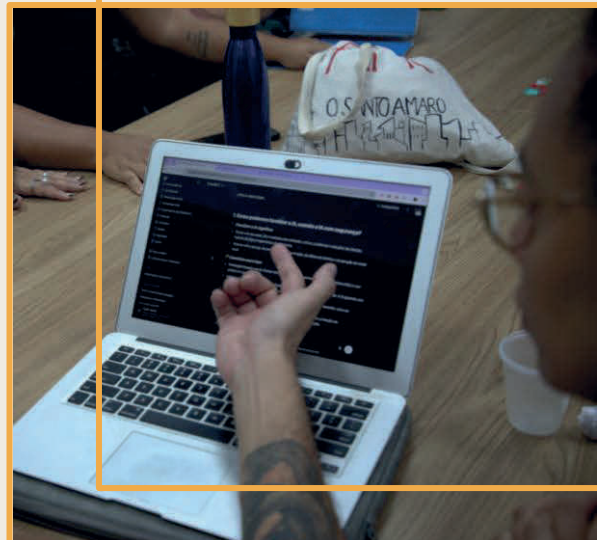


TABLE 1

# Participants

Demographic data of workshop co-participants

PARTICIPANTS

21

AGE RANGE

24–55

COMPOSITION

Plural and  
multidisciplinary

Name	Age	Profession	Race according to IBGE	Gender
Alana	39	Specialised support teacher	Black	Cisgender
Alex	26	Lawyer	Black	Transgender
Anita	49	Caregiver	Black	Cisgender
Claudia	55	Teacher	White	Cisgender
Elisa	46	Researcher	White	Cisgender
Fernanda	44	Teacher	Black	Cisgender
Isadora	44	Designer	Brown	Cisgender
Jéssica	48	Community health worker	Black	Cisgender
Joana	49	Caregiver	White	Cisgender
Katia	26	Social worker	Brown	Cisgender
Leonardo	30	Administrator	Indigenous	Cisgender
Luciano	32	Student	White	Cisgender
Madalena	35	Journalist / doctoral student	White	Cisgender
Marina	34	Researcher	White	Cisgender
Mirela	38	Public relations professional	Black	Cisgender
Pedro	32	Communications coordinator	White	Cisgender
Rogério	31	Researcher	White	Cisgender
Ronaldo	31	Researcher	White	Cisgender
Thiago	42	Activist	Brown	Cisgender
Vinícius	24	Communication	White	Cisgender
Zara	25	Researcher and political articulator	Black	Transgender

The names presented are pseudonyms, for ethical research reasons.

We carried out two rounds of workshops at Federal Fluminense University. The first round took place between May 26 and 30, 2025, with all participants present. Over the course of five days, the workshops unfolded around the following themes:

### Day 1) My day with AI:


We invited participants to describe how AI is present in their everyday lives, through a story, poem, or image. We held a large sharing circle so that they could exchange these stories. The workshop facilitators - Andrea Medrado, Thainã de Medeiros, and Monique Paulla used slides to guide the conversation.



Figure 1: “My day with AI” exercise used on the first day of the workshops

### Day 2) Empathy and lived experience:

We revisited the “my day with AI” stories told the previous day. We asked participants: which story do you empathise with? And why? Starting from this collective exercise in empathy, we discussed: a) how structural inequalities shape our relationship with technologies; b) how empathy can operate as a transformative political practice; c) what key questions these exercises generated. For example, one of the stories was about how one participant had written a personal “venting out” story and posted it online. The story generated malicious comments from people who believed that a text *“written so well could never have been written by someone from a favela”*. Several participants identified with this story, which triggered questions about AI’s writing style and the opportunities and difficulties these tools bring to favela residents. Initially some participants felt uncomfortable with the use of the word “empathy”. As one participant put it, *“every time I hear the word ‘empathy,’ it comes from some middle- or upper-class person wanting to feel good about themselves for doing a good deed. But favela residents who mobilise every day in solidarity with one another never get the credit”* (Pedro, communications coordinator, 32 years old, Nov. 17, 2025). It was therefore important to situate “empathy” in a Freirean context, in a more political sense, as taking the side of the oppressed.



**Meu dia com a IA  
(exercitando empatia)**

Vamos voltar às contribuições do Meu dia com IA.

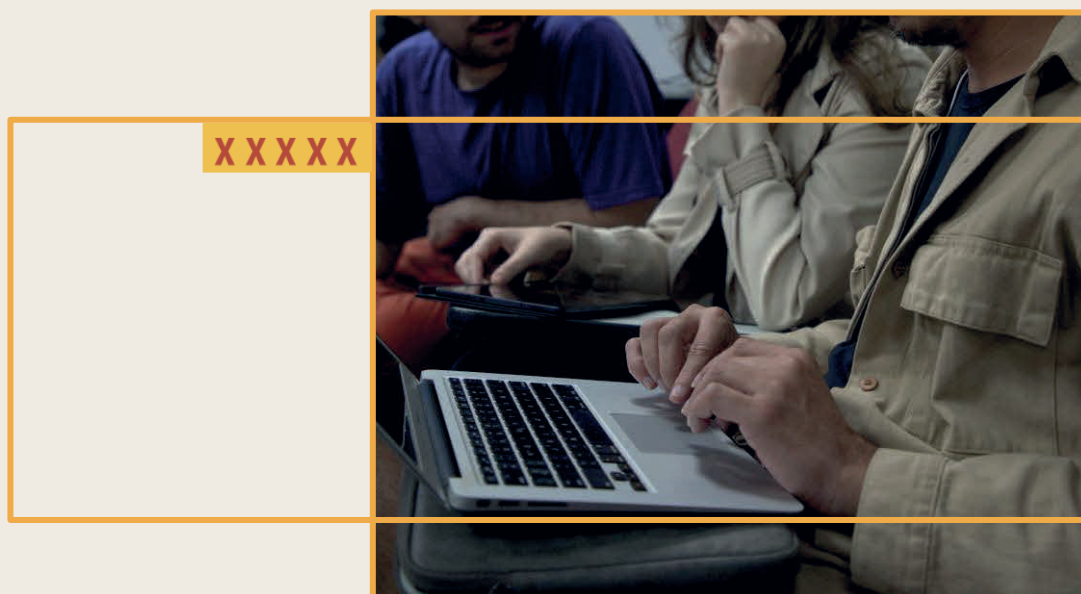
Individualmente - Identifique uma contribuição que desperta sua empatia. Por que? Como esta contribuição pode despertar um processo de conscientização em você?

Em grupo – Com base nessa troca, vamos criar uma lista coletiva de problemas e questões.

Figure 2: Empathy exercise used on the second day of the workshops

### Day 3) Reformulating AI

Collectively, we built a list of problems related to AI. Initially, we asked the participants to create a list with three main problems. However, participants decided to work with a broader list, containing twelve questions, since they considered all of them essential. We therefore divided the larger group into four smaller groups, and each group became responsible for answering three or four questions (see list below). Participants used generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Gemini, and DeepSeek) to answer the questions. We then held a collective discussion in which we analysed, criticised, and reformulated the different answers provided by the AI tools.



## QUESTIONS DISCUSSED COLLECTIVELY

- 1 Can we choose not to use / refuse AI? Who has the right to refuse?
- 2 Will our jobs be replaced by AI?
- 3 What are the impacts of AI on creativity and writing skills? Possibilities? Dangers? Are we losing our voice in favor of generic, soulless text?
- 4 In what ways does AI affect our human agency and autonomy?
- 5 What tensions exist between AI as an instrument that makes life easier and AI as something that expands control and surveillance?
- 6 Are AI tools worsening inequalities? Reflect on questions of access, profit, ability to use, and structural issues as well (including generational inequalities and gender inequalities).
- 7 What kind of AI will reach the favela? What are the consequences?
- 8 How will AI interfere with my community's tradition?
- 9 In what ways does AI alter notions of what is real and what is false? And what are the implications of this?
- 10 How can we 'favelise' AI, using AI safely?
- 11 What are the dangers of AI as an instrument for diagnosing physical and mental health?
- 12 What are the relationships between advances in AI technologies and advances of the far right?

### GROUP ORGANIZATION

- Grupo 1** – questions 1, 2, and 3  
**Grupo 2** – questions 4, 5, and 6  
**Grupo 3** – questions 7, 8, and 9  
**Grupo 4** – questions 9, 10, 11, and 12

### Day 4) AI governance from the margins:

We presented an overview of AI regulation in Brazil and in other international contexts, including the European Union's AI Act. We organised participants into smaller groups. Each group was responsible for analysing specific legislation, preparing critiques and suggestions. The groups also used ChatGPT, DeepSeek and/or Gemini to facilitate their understanding of the legislation, provided that they also analysed and critiqued the limitations of those tools.

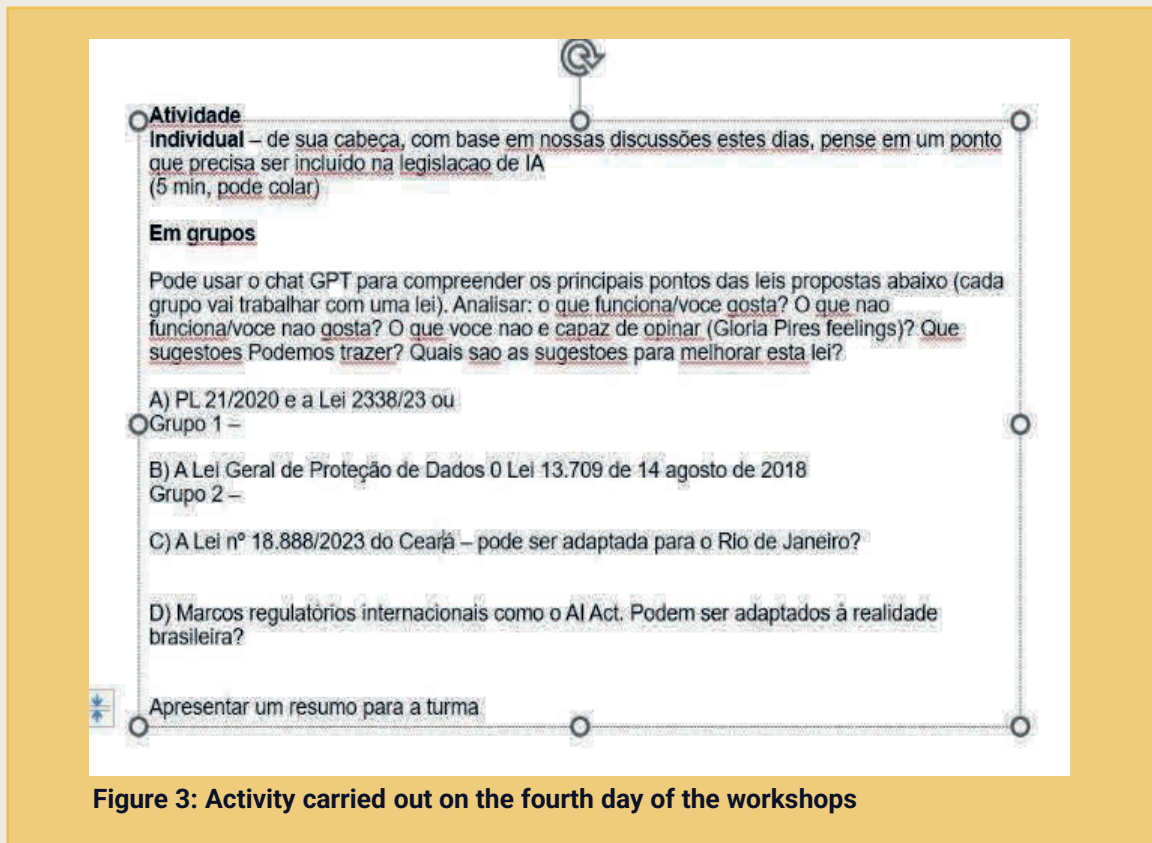


Figure 3: Activity carried out on the fourth day of the workshops



#### Day 5) What types of AI do we want (if we want them)?

We dedicated the last workshop day to formulating principles and ideas for legislators and policy makers. We started working on a collective document, which was refined during the second round of workshops. This second round had been scheduled for 27 and 28 October 2025. However, we were all affected by a large-scale and violent police operation in Alemão and Penha on October 28. The operation was considered one of the deadliest in Rio de Janeiro's recent history, with more than 120 people killed, making it impossible to hold the activity that day.

The second meeting was therefore rescheduled for 17 November 2025 (Andrea Medrado connected remotely). The first round also took place in a context of violence, as it was held in the week before a police operation in the Santo Amaro favela, during a June festival, which resulted in the death of Herus Guimarães and left five other people injured. This reality of violence and instability had a strong impact on all our discussions about technology, security, inequality, and governance.

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<sup>42</sup> Medrado, A. and Verdegem, P. (2024), *Pesquisa-Ação Participativa em Estudos Críticos de Dados: Analisando IA a partir de uma Abordagem Sul-Norte*. *Revista Mídia e Cotidiano*, 18(2), 109-139. <https://periodicos.uff.br/midiaecotidiano/article/view/63054/36923>

<sup>43</sup> Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed (Pedagogia do oprimido)*. New York: Continuum.

<sup>44</sup> Freire, P.; Macedo, D. (1995). *A Dialogue: Culture, language, and race*. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(3), 379-390.

<sup>45</sup> Fals Borda, O. (1987). *The application of participatory action-research in Latin America*. *International Sociology*, 2(4), 329-347.

<sup>46</sup> Fals Borda, O. (2003). *Ante la crisis del país: Ideas acción para el cambio*. 1ª ed. Bogotá: Panamericana.

<sup>47</sup> Whyte, W. (1994). *Participant observer: An autobiography*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

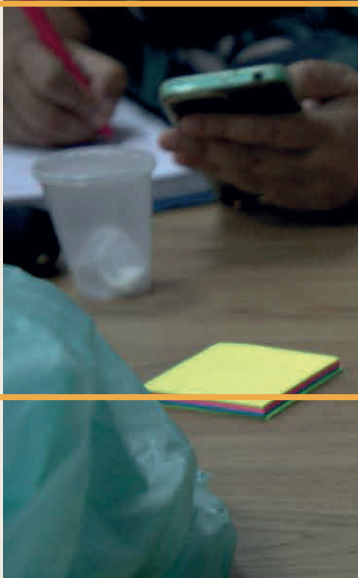
<sup>48</sup> Rahman, A. (2006). *Roots of action research and self-reliance thinking in Rabindranath Tagore*. *Action Research*, 4, 231-245.

<sup>49</sup> Vio Grossi, F. (1982). *Peasant participation, adult education, and agrarian reform in Chile*. In: Hall, B.; Gillette, A.; Tandon, R. (Eds.). *Creating knowledge: A monopoly* (pp. 153–174). Nova Delí, Índia: Society for Participatory Research in Asia.

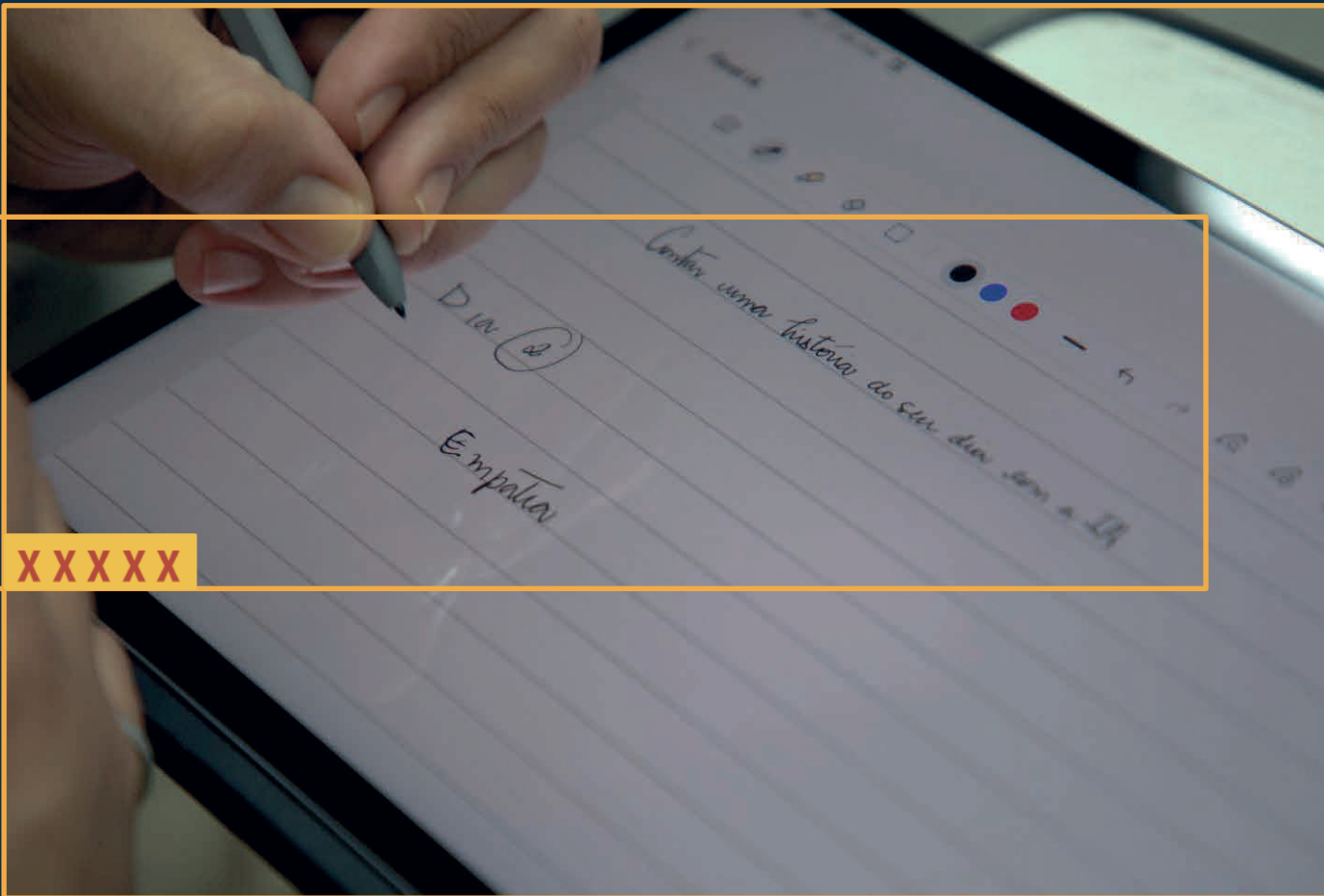
<sup>50</sup> Fals Borda, O. (2003). *Ante la crisis del país: Ideas acción para el cambio*. 1ª ed. Bogotá: Panamericana.

<sup>51</sup> He R, Cao J, Tan T. (2025). *Generative artificial intelligence: a historical perspective*. *National Science Review*. Feb 21; 12(5), p. 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/nsr/nwaf050>

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# WHAT ARE THE PILLARS THAT TRANSLATE THE MAIN VALUES OF THE FAVELA THAT BIG TECH COMPANIES AND GOVERNMENTS SHOULD KEEP IN MIND?



# What are the pillars that translate the main values of the favela that Big Tech companies and governments should keep in mind?

Discussing artificial intelligence in the favelas without guaranteeing access to the internet, digital devices, and literacy processes reveals a major contradiction. The absence of infrastructure turns technology into yet another vector of inequality rather than an instrument for expanding rights.

*Often, we don't have access to good-quality internet. We become very dependent on whatever, whenever we can get access to the internet and the community loses out.*

Jessica  
Community health worker, 48 years old, 17 Nov 2025

At the same time, while acknowledging these structural inequalities, when we look closely at the favelas, together with our co-participants, we begin to see them less as places defined by shortages, and more as complex, lived spaces with knowledge, possibility and agency. While the state is failing the favelas in its guarantee of rights and services, the favelas cannot be understood solely in terms of what is missing. Indeed, the favelas represent territories of full humanity, where people work, pay taxes, and take an active part in routines of care and everyday intelligence.

Additionally, the favelas are not homogeneous spaces of exclusion. The logic of face-to-face contact appears as a structuring element of life in the favela, not only as a form of sociability but also as a survival strategy in the face of the historic absence of the state. There is a strong sense of recognition of one's neighbor, of the person nearby, which is mediated by physical presence and community memory. These territorial and affective bonds cannot be captured by automated systems or formal databases, as Joana explains below:

*In my community they said that I'm starting to look like an AI. They can ask me anything and I seem to have all the answers for all the children in the community. I do know all of them, I know their clothing sizes, their shoe sizes, their birthdays, their favourite colours, everything. We're never going to be able to put all our children into a spreadsheet. Unless there is a person behind it entering those data and that person is someone like me. AI will never be able to capture all these things about the kids, our database in our heads.*

Joana

Community leader and caregiver, 49 years old, 17 Nov, 2025

In our debates, we discussed the concept of “*cria de favela*”. Renata Souza, a researcher and State Deputy for Rio de Janeiro, born and raised in Favela da Maré, notes that to be a *cria de favela* implies explicitly associating oneself with one’s marginalised roots as a source of pride and strength. *Cria* also comes from the verb ‘*criar*’ or to create, and to actively nurture possibilities to turn things around for a positive outcome (Souza, 2018, p. 63<sup>52</sup>; Medrado and Rega, 2023, p. 42<sup>53</sup>).

Thainã de Medeiros, in turn, defines being a *cria de favela* as something that can add to a person’s “geographic capital”, or a set of practical, relational, and territorial forms of knowledge that can only be acquired through everyday life in a favela. This “geographic capital” includes knowledge of alleyways, safe routes, networks of help, care, and protection. In this way, each ‘*cria*’, or each person born and raised in a favela represents a living database, stored in collective and individual memory, impossible to be fully translated into spreadsheets, algorithms, or machine-learning models.

These discussions reinforce that the logic of “us by us” as a social technology of the favela. “Us by us” also represents a form of organisation based on orality, empathy, and mutual recognition, which are essential tools for survival in contexts marked by structural violence and the absence of adequate public policies. A spirit of collectivity also matters a great deal in the favelas. As Fernanda puts it: “*The favela only works because no one is alone. Technology needs to keep pace with that very collective rhythm*” (Fernanda, teacher, 44 years old, 17 Nov, 2025).

Zara adds that:

*AI will never be able to comprehend and communicate our orality and our philosophy of us-by-us. We are always speaking, expressing ourselves from a place of needing to survive. This is almost like a dialect that we, as favela residents have, even if this dialect changes from a favela to another favela, from a state to another state, from a region to another region. But collectively, we, as crias de favela, perceive our bodies as belonging to favela territories, but online technologies and AI include, cannot fully grasp this.*

Zara

Researcher and activist, 25 years old, 17 Nov, 2025

In our debates, AI appeared less as a solution and more as a tool, being treated pragmatically. Some participants reported using AI as practical source of support, for example, in mediating the formal style of writing demanded in institutional contexts, such as writing professional emails. Yet these “pragmatic” uses did not imply in a replacement of local knowledge. The participants emphasised that any technology entering favela territories must respect local knowledge and community bonds, rather than attempting to reorganise or reshape established ways of life. As Fernanda explained, “*favelas cannot survive without these bonds. They are not merely emotional or symbolic, they are essential to survival. Therefore, big tech and government initiatives these affective and community ties into public policy*”. (Fernanda, teacher, 44 years old, 17 Nov 2025).

Zara complements this perspective by noting that:

*The favelas do not need to be saved. We have our ways of living that work well for us, we have our very own knowledges that one cannot find in the asphalt (non-favela) areas, we have our humanity. The problem is that this very humanity is denied by the State when the State only enters the favelas to kill us and to take away the few rights that we have. This is why we have developed us by us as a technology of resistance to safeguard our humanity.*

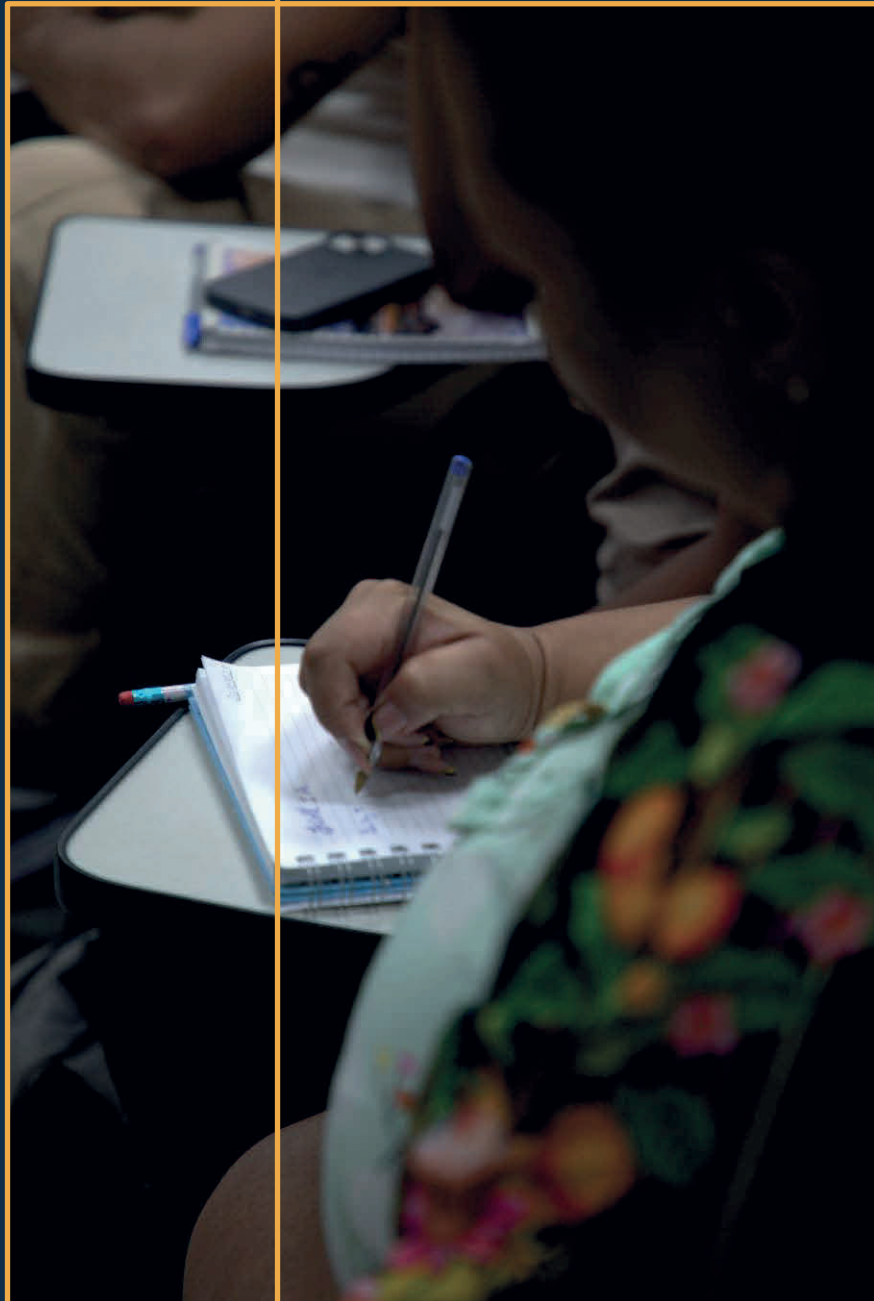
Zara

Researcher and activist, 25 years old, 17 Nov, 2025

If AI is often celebrated as a system capable of learning, adapting, and responding to complex contexts, we want to suggest a different way of thinking about the favela, one that moves beyond the usual negative stereotypes. The favela itself represents a collective intelligence, which has already operated for decades as a sophisticated system of continuous learning, based on community memory, orality, empathy, and territorial adaptation. It is therefore urgent to shift the debate on artificial intelligence from an exclusively technical terrain. In other words, we need to recognise the favela as a producer of knowledge and collective intelligence, not as a space to be corrected, mapped, or surveilled.

<sup>52</sup> Souza, R. (2018). *Cria da Favela: Resistência à Militarização da Vida*. Rio de Janeiro. Núcleo Piratininga de Comunicação.

<sup>53</sup> Medrado, A. e Rega, I. (2023). *Media Activism, Artivism and the Fight Against Marginalisation in the Global South*. London: Routledge.



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**WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE  
LESSONS THAT WE CAN  
LEARN FROM TECH ACTIVISM?**

# What are the positive lessons that we can learn from tech activism?

Drawing from their experiences, participants share positive views about activism that starts from lived experience, grounded on the authority of those who have an insider knowledge of local realities. To put it simply, technology that “brought” to the favela as a ready-made solution does not work.

Rather, favela communities are keen to reaffirm the legitimacy and value of their territorial knowledge. When residents occupy spaces for debate, public consultation, and political advocacy, the favela resituates itself to a place of decision making rather than as a mere target for public interventions. As one participant puts it:

*Cultural activism, social activism in the peripheries, activism in the university, in the school... these are diverse tools for creating different types of technology, technologies of orality, for example, which stem from the peripheral communities, to fight for social justice in places that sometimes our physical bodies cannot reach, to occupy the spaces that the state also does not reach.*

Zara

Researcher and activist, 25 years old, 17 Nov 2025

Here, the word technology means more than a device or software. Technology refers to language, to forms of collective articulation, and memory production. Activism works when these social technologies begin to contest the very meaning of digital technologies.

Favela movements are also concerned with putting pressure on big tech, even if this proves extremely challenging. We believe that social movements can have important achievements by:

- Taking part in public consultations;
- Questioning algorithmic decision-making criteria for public policies;
- Denouncing racism and other forms of discrimination and bias;
- Producing counternarratives as responses to processes of erasure of favela knowledge and disinformation.

Fighting for regulations against racist AI-driven facial recognition represents an example of tech advocacy. This struggle illustrates how favela communities are not passive in relation to how big tech can interfere with their lives, confronting the ways in which they are perceived as targets for surveillance and policing. This was a recurrent theme in our PAR workshops with participants asking: “*how can we intervene in this scenario of AI being used as yet another tool for our oppression?*”? To respond to these surveillance technologies, the participants provided several examples of what they called **technologies of care**, such as:

- Independent profiles and community media;
- Local newspapers;
- Community libraries;
- Favela historical archives curated by residents themselves;
- Literacy projects;
- Digital platforms created by residents themselves
- Informal networks of protection, care and information.

*... and the most important thing: when we devise our technologies of care, this shows to big tech that the favela is not asking for favours. We are simply asking for respect.*

Fernanda  
Teacher, 44 years old, 17 nov 2025

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These initiatives work because they operate through community bonds, trust, and mutual recognition between residents. Effective tech activism is therefore the activism that strengthens these already existing community infrastructures (rather than replacing them).

At the same time, residents did acknowledge some examples of how everyday technologies, in the more traditional sense of the word, can work for them. Jessica, for example, illustrates how digital tools provided by the Federal Government improved her work routine as a community health worker:

*The SUS (Brazilian national health system) apps work well. Nowadays we no longer need to write everything down on paper at the clinic. We have tablets and that does help.*

Jessica  
Community health worker, 48 years old, 17 Nov

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Here, technology - as it is commonly understood in the sense of digital tools - works when it solves concrete everyday problems, reduces bureaucracy, supports local workers, and broadens possibilities for training and professional development. As Jessica points out, the SUS platforms themselves offer courses and certifications, showing that technology can contribute to making the lives of workers in the favelas a bit easier without erasing the role of human bonds.

However, such uses are connected to issues of infrastructure. As we have already mentioned in earlier sections of the report, problems related to unstable or non-existent connections surfaced at different moments in the workshops. This led us consider the importance of developing technologies that can operate offline or under conditions of low connectivity. At the same time, participants demonstrate awareness of the limits of existing platforms. WhatsApp, for example, appears as an ambiguous tool: it broadens access to online communication, but it also restricts what participants referred to as their “informational universe”, increasing residents’ vulnerability to disinformation.

At the same time, access to technology can enable favela residents to navigate vocabularies that might confer them symbolic capital, as exemplified by Alex, who was born and raised in a favela but managed to obtain a university degree in law.

*People from the favelas and peripheral areas might not know some of the fancy words. I, for example, did not know the word ‘philanthropy,’ but it was just a new word for something I already do. Technology does give us access to these dominant vocabularies.*

Alex  
Lawyer, 26 years old, Nov. 17

While recognising these positive possibilities, participants were also skeptical about how the same digital tools that can help with efficiency can be used to collect data from vulnerable communities in ways that are not socially reciprocal and that fail to consider how favela communities are affected by state violence. In this way, for our participants, tech activism also includes an activism of protection, which involves knowing when and how to refuse the so-called technological innovations. Participants were also aware of the risks of incorporating AI tools into their daily lives uncritically. Joana, for example, draws attention to how the use of AI could damage one’s essence:

*AI gives us an air of superiority. We feel more intelligent and more useful. But we need to keep our feet on the ground. [...] A good AI for the favela would be one that does not steal our essence as a community.*

Joana  
Community leader and caregiver, 49 years old, Nov. 17, 2025

Therefore, tech activism is about much more than guaranteeing online access and digital infrastructures for favela residents. It is about setting protective limits and avoiding the extraction of data for purposes that are not aligned with the favela's ways of life. Collecting information about the favelas without a sense of common purpose may not result in initiatives that benefit the community through improved services, more active participation and greater involvement in decision-making.





## PROBLEM AREAS AND DEMANDS FOR GOVERNMENTS AND BIG TECH COMPANIES

# Problem areas and demands for governments and Big Tech companies

For our participants, AI represents more than an abstract field of innovation. Rather, it generates concrete everyday tensions. The demands addressed to governments and Big Tech companies emerge from critical areas at the intersection of technology, inequality, and structural violence.

## a) Security

Participants expressed concerns about facial recognition tools, territorial mapping, and the image capture of favela residents without consent. These tools were perceived as reinforcing practices of criminalisation and stigmatisation of the favelas.

*“AI only seems to get confused with Black people! We need to preserve our data and not let it leak!”*

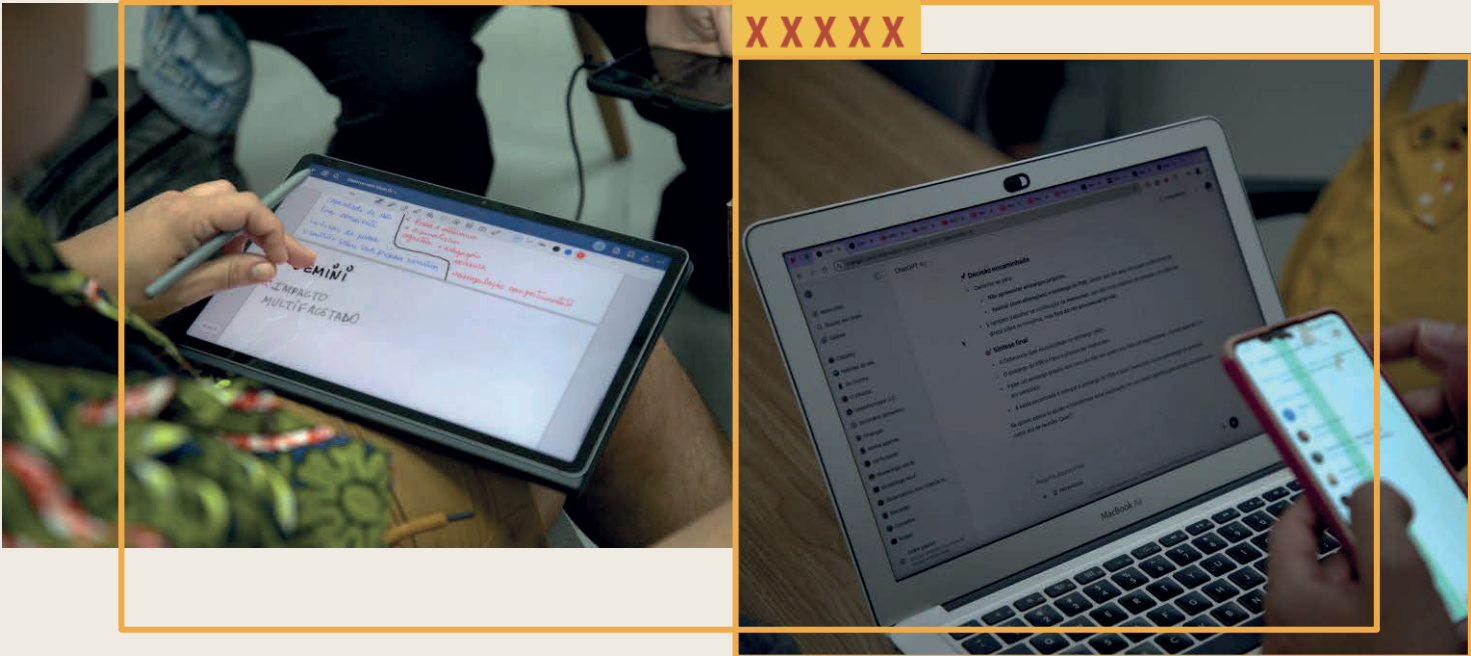
Joana  
Community leader and caregiver, 49 years old, 17 Nov 2025

*“With any technology that arrives in the community, what we see is a lack of transparency about what is being collected.”*

Ronaldo  
Researcher, 31 years old, 17 Nov 2025

*“... you can't just go around taking photos of other people in the street! There needs to be a law for that.”*

Jessica  
Community health worker, 48 years old, 17 Nov 2025



Participants also called attention to the issue of territorial racism, with technologies being used to reinforce historical inequalities. Automated systems that discriminate against addresses in or close to favela areas (for example, for deliveries) illustrate this problem. Participants also stressed that the problem is not restricted to the use of technologies but also concerns those who develop them and the frames of reference that guide their programming. As discussed earlier, systems of facial recognition are often built from databases and parameters that do not reflect Brazilian racial and territorial diversity. This leads to systematic errors, especially against Black people and favela residents. In this sense, racism emerges as a structural dimension of technological design. In this context, the central demand is not only for more regulation, but for a paradigm change: technologies must not be tested in favelas as experimental laboratories. Rather, they must be subject to consultation, veto, and social control by the affected communities.

## **b) Mental health**

During the first round of workshops, residents shared stories of their use of ChatGPT to seek advice on mental health issues, deal with grief, sadness, or conflicts with neighbours. Initially, they did not realise that they were providing sensitive data that would be used for profit by platforms that should not be fully trusted. After a few days of debate and reflection, they built a collective awareness about the risks of attributing therapeutic properties to generative AI. Participants also discussed the importance of humanised care for such delicate issues, especially in vulnerable communities such as favelas.

Additionally, the circulation of unverified content in contexts that are seriously affected by state violence, social instability, and precarious services posed another reason for concern. Participants shared their worries about algorithmic logic, and the spread of misinformation and how these can amplify states of constant alert, fear, and emotional exhaustion. This impact manifests in several daily community routines:

*Living a life under pressure is obviously not good for our mental health. We also suffer when we are confronted with disinformation all the time: fake news about police operations, water shortages, schools being closed, incidents of violence that did not really happen, life is hard enough as it is without these confusing pieces of information” [...] “Santo Amaro, Alemão, Penha. Police violence also causes mental and physical illnesses for us and our territories. Big tech definitely doesn’t help when it allows fake videos to circulate, false narratives, discourses that criminalise the favela as if the favela were a kind of public enemy. Instead of protecting us or reassuring users, it just amplifies our stigma.*

Fernanda  
Teacher, 44 years old, 17 Nov 2025

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Other participants also talked about platforms and their addictive properties, overload, and frequent interface changes that stimulate compulsive use.

*Our mental health is tied to this constant search for pleasure. When we lose contacts, or information on social media, we become sad and depressed. Social media keeps changing its layouts so that we always want to stay on it, we are hooked. We need some regulation for this.*

Alex  
Lawyer, 26 years old, 17 Nov

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Platforms are thus perceived as environments that exploit attention and emotion as resources, producing cognitive and affective overload in territories that are already marked by a significant degree of emotional pressure.

### c) Environment

When discussing environmental issues, participants note how the expansion of technological infrastructures is always associated with historical inequalities. To put it simply, the more economically vulnerable a territory is, the more it tends to be affected negatively by the environmental costs of developing AI tools. Here, participants were able to name this explicitly as environmental racism. The favelas have been severely affected by this issue, with the recurrence of landslides, flooding, heat waves, and precarious infrastructure.

One participant points out that these risks are not natural or random. Rather, we can find a repeating pattern as the disasters “*always happen in the same places*” (Zara, researcher and activist, 25 years old, 17 Nov 2025). At the same time, the participants note that AI tools could be useful to recognise such patterns and potentially mitigate climate disasters, functioning as a warning and protection tool for favela communities.

*Data servers in places that already suffer from drought, such as Ceará and Rio, are abusive, honestly, it shows a total lack of respect, a lack of legislation. This is Big Tech lobbying. We need legislation that prohibits this from happening in Brazil.*

Isadora  
Designer, 44 years old, 17 Nov 2025

Based on our discussions, we concluded that AI legislation in Brazil should not be limited to generic human-rights principles. It should be explicitly anti-discriminatory, anti-racist, and anti-misogynistic, also incorporating the right to natural territories as a dimension of digital rights. As one participant put it, this is not only about protecting individuals, but also about recognising the right to land and to collective life in territories as being part of technological governance.

### d) Erasure of community knowledge

During the two rounds of workshops, participants talked about how digital technologies operate with an information model that privileges formal records, structured databases, and standardised categories. This operational mode tends to render invisible the territorial knowledge, collective memories, and forms of knowledge built in community practices. Participants stressed that the valuable wisdom that can organise everyday life in the favela cannot be found in spreadsheets, but rather in people’s living memory and in the recognition of territorial, social, and cultural bonds.

*AI cannot capture the knowledge of someone born and raised here, the knowledge that is totally tied to a territory; you do not learn it in school or at university, [...] it is formed in practice.*

Thiago  
Activist, 42 years old, 17 Nov 2025

This “cria de favela” wisdom involves knowledge about people, their life trajectories, networks of help, geographical routes, water sources, and possibilities of support. These represent dimensions that structure survival and collective care but escape the technical formats of data. Thus, participants are concerned that systems based only on what they call “formal data” will result in reductive and simplistic ways to comprehend the favelas.

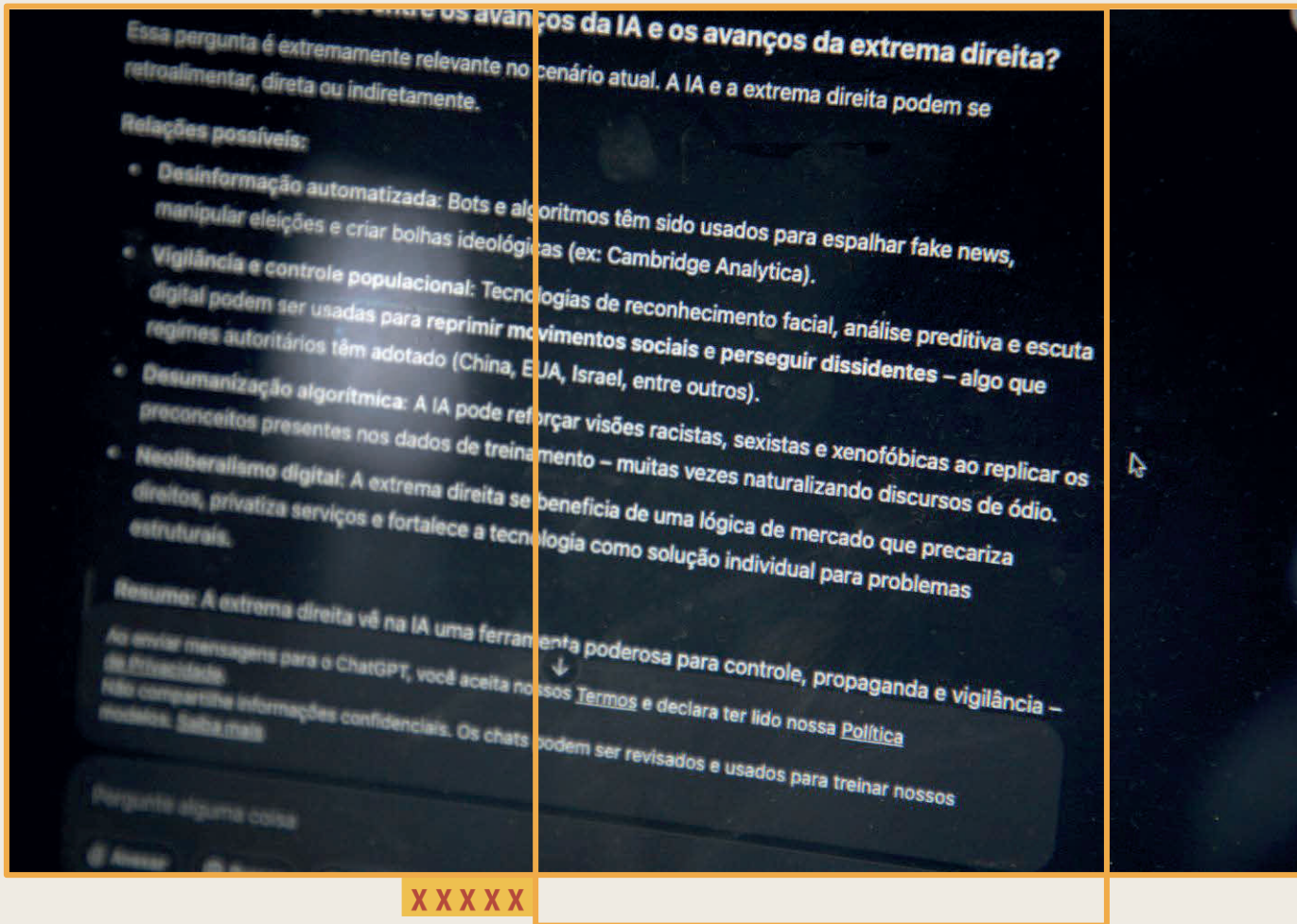
At the same time, memory represents an important practice of resistance. Community libraries and records produced by residents themselves are mentioned as infrastructures that can preserve histories and oppose stigmatising narratives about favela communities.

*The community library is like a breath of air. It teaches us about critical reading, it teaches us about knowledge that we can trust, and it creates a protection network. It does the work that Big Tech refuses to do, really. We do our part, but they need to take responsibility for the impact that they cause in our lives since they profit so much from us.*

Fernanda  
Teacher, 44 years old, 17 Nov 2025

#### **d) Disinformation**

Disinformation represents what participants called a “transversal problem”, affecting security, mental health, and the organisation of everyday life. For favela residents, disinformation means much more than an informational error. It turns people’s routines upside down, produces fear, and worsens already existing vulnerabilities. The circulation of rumors about police operations, the interruption of public services, and episodes of violence can have concrete effects. It interferes with people’s mobility, getting out and into the favela, it prevents residents from going to work, and children from going to school, and it generates psychological suffering.



As noted earlier, in contexts where there is limited internet access, many people depend almost exclusively on a single platform to get information, which reduces the possibility of comparing sources. One participant mentions that when someone relies almost entirely in a messaging app like WhatsApp, their “informational universe” narrows. They become more exposed to unverified content, without access to tools for checking information. Here, participants also criticise the logic of platforms because engagement and speed of circulation seem to matter more than a concern with potentially harmful content.

*WhatsApp nowadays makes things easier for those who have poorer internet quality to access AI. But at the same time, it is such a limited platform. We have many digital platforms, and many people only have access to WhatsApp, almost as if WhatsApp were their internet. This raises questions about the types of information that a large part of the favela population is receiving*

Zara  
 Researcher and activist, 25 years old, 17 Nov 2025

TABLE

## Critical tensions and demands for the governance of AI and digital platforms from favela perspectives

PROBLEM AREAS	SUMMARY	DEMANDS
<b>Security</b>	When tech is unregulated and territorially detached from the community's local realities, it tends to deepen inequalities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To prevent the use of facial recognition and automated surveillance tools without inputs from the communities;</li> <li>• Legislation on the use of people's images and limits on data capture in favela territories;</li> <li>• Public and territorial auditing of automated systems;</li> <li>• More transparency regarding the data collected from favela communities and their purpose;</li> <li>• The establishment of a National Tech Policy for Living Territories, requiring Big Tech companies and governments to incorporate the pillars of the favela into their policy proposals, respecting public consultation with associations, community libraries, and grassroots collectives.</li> </ul>
<b>Mental health</b>	Digital platforms operate on the principle of the search for pleasure, thus leading to dependence on their products. In addition, circulating disinformation can increase anxiety, especially when public security or climate issues are involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of a National Digital Mental Health Policy. Within this policy, Big Tech companies should be required to direct resources to a program of community mental health workers inspired by the Brazilian community health worker model. To return part of their profits to the communities from which they extract data and resources, the private sector would collaborate with the public sector in training programmes for community mental health workers so that humanised care can be offered to residents. This would allow greater support for the technologies of care that already exist in the favelas;</li> <li>• Regulation of the algorithmic logic that prioritises and monetises engagement. Allow the creation of Favel IA councils that can request audits of algorithmic systems. Common types of audits include technical, legal, ethical, social-impact, and audits to detect algorithmic bias;</li> <li>• Financial support for media education initiatives;</li> <li>• Oversight of practices that stimulate dependency and informational overload;</li> <li>• Clear regulation to combat disinformation on digital platforms.</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	Extractivist data centers are being built in regions of the Global South already seriously affected by the climate crisis. This is connected to issues of environmental racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental regulation of the installation of data centers and AI infrastructures;</li> <li>• Limitation (or prohibition) of extractive technological activities in environmentally vulnerable areas;</li> <li>• Explicit inclusion of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory principles in AI laws, incorporating the right to the territory as part of digital rights.</li> </ul>
<b>Memory</b>	Systems tend to recognise data that is formally recorded as "data" that counts, producing the erasure of territorial knowledges, community memories, and forms of knowledge based on lived experience and local bonds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of territorial knowledge as a rich source of informational heritage.</li> <li>• Establishment of the CrIA Project. Public and private funding would be directed to support libraries, community archives, local memory initiatives, and technologies of care, led by community leaders and/or Favel IA collectives;</li> <li>• Participation of community organisations in data curation and governance;</li> <li>• Data policies that do not replace territorial bonds and knowledge with purely automated records.</li> </ul>
<b>Disinformation</b>	The rapid, engagement-based circulation logic of platforms amplifies the sharing of unverified content. This contributes to disorganising life in communities that are already vulnerable, intensifying fear and anxiety, and directly affecting security, mobility, and access to services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulation of the algorithmic amplification of sensationalist and unverified content;</li> <li>• Accessible reporting mechanisms for residents of peripheral territories;</li> <li>• Financial support for community libraries and media education projects;</li> <li>• Transparency regarding content moderation and the criteria for allowing the circulation of content in vulnerable territories.</li> </ul>

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# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

# Concluding thoughts

This report focused on understanding the relationships between favelas and AI, analysing how favela participants use these technologies, and how such technologies affect communities by changing their daily habits and generating concerns about their future, addressing issues that ranged from job losses to surveillance. We also conducted debate on how to produce conceptual notes for regulators and policy makers.

The favelas already function as forms of collective intelligence that precede artificial intelligence. Communities are producers of valuable knowledge, relationships, and memories. As our discussion about the “crias de favela” suggests, the favela is a space of geographic and historical capital.

The debates showed us that the debates on AI cannot be separated from debate about precariousness and urgent priorities, such as access to basic infrastructure, internet connectivity, and security. The Operation Containment, which took place on October 28, 2025, was yet another indication of how favela residents often struggle for their literal survival. Participants agreed that this operation was a massacre, setting the tone of a serious discussion about the right to live and exist in our final round of conversations.

Although a tone of skepticism shaped our discussions, participants also showed a certain ambivalence towards AI. They admitted, for instance, that a tactical use of AI could reduce hierarchies of power, with one participant describing how AI “makes us feel more intelligent,” and others highlighting its potential to reduce bureaucracy, support everyday work tasks, and facilitate activism.

In any case, the conversations were dominated by feelings of anxiety and apprehension. The issue of territorial racism was particularly concerning, with participants sharing their fears surrounding facial recognition technologies and databases that contain systematic errors, targeting Black people and favela residents. During the debates, we recalled that these technologies are already being used at events such as concerts and football matches, with the police using them to make arrests.

Participants’ concerns also included issues related to mental health. Participants shared stories of using generative AI as an adviser or therapist, as well as being addicted to stimuli caused by the constant search for pleasure (embedded in many apps by design). Additionally, the high environmental cost of AI and the unsustainability of these technologies were mentioned. There was also a general feeling that, for those born and raised in the favela, you are doomed if you use AI and doomed if you do not use it. When you use it, people know can tell, and they will talk about these AI uses in a derogatory way to minimise favela residents’ efforts and knowledge. But if you do not use it, you fall behind. This realization triggered tensions and contradictions.

Furthermore, community leaders who had devoted years to technologies of care felt that this kind of work was not valued and that they could not keep up with technological change. These technologies of care do not receive enough recognition, so they felt they were being left behind, when in fact they were doing work that is fundamental to the social fabric of the community.

Disinformation was also identified as one of the main problems surrounding AI, with algorithmic logics favouring false, misleading, and unverified content. Participants reported rumors about police operations, service interruptions, and episodes of violence, which had negative effects by disorganising routines and producing psychological suffering.

The Favel IA project, therefore, allowed us to engage in a valuable exercise of dialogue, echoing voices that are often not heard. Change has been fast and aggressive. OpenAI launched Chat GPT in 2022. In 2026, major changes can already be observed in how favela residents engage with generative AI in their daily lives.

We hope that this is only the beginning for Favel IA; that these conceptual notes will generate advances in regulation; that participants will become multipliers and continue being proactive in the fields of AI literacy and governance; and that some much needed practical and social changes will happen. It is not enough to include the favela in debates about AI as a market, as data, or as a territory of technological testing. Rather, it is essential to recognise it as a political subject, as a producer of knowledge, and as an active actor in the decision-making processes about the futures of artificial intelligence. The next step is to transform Favel IA into something broader, built upon the lessons learned from this first phase, potentially moving towards a South–South Favel IA that promotes exchanges and dialogues with favela communities in other countries of the Global South. Ultimately, we continue to navigate between dancing to the existing rhythm and inventing new ones, aware of the limitations that surround us, but also recognising that, in the favelas, the power of creation and collective building has always set the tone.

