

The City, Urbanization and Inequality



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Abstract Taking the city and the urban environment as a starting point, this analysis looks at globalization and the inability that states have so far demonstrated to find solutions to the political, socioeconomic and ecological problems of our time. The public policy of the “30 glorious years” (1945–1975) in Spain and later neoliberal privatizations paved the way for productive accumulation to be replaced by financial accumulation, which, to a large extent, is speculative. Working- and middle-class majorities are disintegrating; broad sectors of society have become atomized and are being subject to increasingly precarious conditions. Inequalities are accentuated, and social class is becoming more diffuse. Is now the time to revive the centralized statism of the post-WWII period? It seems not. From an eminently geographical perspective, this text proposes a reappropriation of the public space of cities to pave the way to a new way of urban life. Local and regional settings offer opportunities to explore alternative forms of production and democracy.

Keywords Urban space · Public space · Urban transformations · New centralities

1 Globalization, States and Cities

The centralist state neither confronts globalization nor reinforces the local authorities that constitute its own connection with citizens. We stand by Dahrendorf’s et al. (1992) assertion that the rigidity of democratic states is responsible for their inability to adapt. This rigidity in turn provokes indifference in subject citizens. Citizens are estranged from the “state”, but at least, some sort of relationship is maintained not only through elections, taxes and repressive laws but also through social policies. In recent decades, however, the “sovereign” state has been weakened significantly. Some portion of this weakening has been due to the development of supranational organizations, including the European Union, but economic globalization has played an even greater role. Global economic-financial-commercial

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power is imposed on nation-states. International treaties and laws, tending fundamentally in favour of the so-called free market, benefit globalized economic powers. States, subordinate to or accomplices of these economic powers, have become more repressive of their citizens and are liquidating the welfare state (Borja, 2009). Social majorities protest and give the appearance of rebelling, but this rebellion constitutes a complaint more than an effective transformative process. In this context, it seems that local powers can acquire much more transformative capacity, provided that territorial institutions are rooted in mobilized citizen societies.

From this contemporary context, we must address a panorama that can be read schematically in terms of the following elements:

- (a) *The evolution of globalization: from the financial and commercial economy to social reproduction.* The biggest economic actors and their financial structures exercise very real power when engaging with governments that are inactive or that even collaborate in support of the interests of those actors. The population is seen simply as “labour”, skilled or otherwise, sedentary, or nomadic, dispersed or marginalized. Unions have been weakened; wage earners constitute the vast majority, but they have renounced the exercise a good part of their rights. Some citizens have restarted social mobilization oriented towards an alternative politics, an “alternative globalization”, towards different models of work and of relationships with the environment, rights and recognition.
- (b) *States between two worlds.* The state, taken as a static, rigid and anachronistic political-legal framework, is cumbersome and hardly effective or realistic. Nowadays, governments and parliaments, armed forces, judiciaries, centralized top-level administrations and churches (very close to the state) are more inoperative than ever in history. Caught between economic-financial globalization and city-regions, the state needs to transform itself to find a new identity beyond the historical-cultural, perhaps as an articulating element between complementary territories, connected through a political-legal system that could be more contractual than hierarchical.
- (c) *From states to cities.* Cities’ strength lies in three areas. The first of these is their dense and diverse demographic concentration. City-regions, metropolitan cities and network cities are the basis of innovation. Heterogeneity is a key to creativity. When asked what it would take to boost economic activity, an executive director from the City of London replied, “Something we already have: pubs. *This is where people meet. People who, had pubs not existed, would never have met*”. A second source of strength arises from local governments and an active and well-organized citizenry. Both of these are political powers and can confront the forces of economic-financial globalization. The combination of territorial powers and social/citizen mobilizations generates real power, which can be transferred from states to a local or regional scale, with legislative and executive powers, personnel (public sector) and financial and technological resources. Lastly, a third expression of the strength of cities can be identified in their power with respect to globalized forces, be these financial, commercial or technological, such as big data collectors. Although it was thought that, in theory, state

unions (such as the EU) would strengthen states against globalized companies, the truth is that the result was the opposite. Local powers and citizen movements can, however, find ways to reduce the privileges of the large multinationals. The current “global” situation offers them opportunities to do so.

2 Cities and Territories, Their Development Up to the Present

Cities have become increasingly important not only in politics but also in economic, social, cultural and media terms. There is no doubt that they are already complex and multidimensional social actors (Borja & Castells, 1997). However, globalization tends to kill the city understood as a collective expression of society. Today’s cities are threatened by a triple negative process: dissolution, fragmentation and privatization. These processes are also mutually reinforcing and accentuate marginality and inequality.

There is a collective response that occurs regularly in the history of the city and urban planning. It occurs when, during the process of urban growth and evolution of an existing city, priority is given to construction, when spaces are specialized due to social segregation and functional zoning. The collective response that occurs in these cases is a social and cultural reaction to the return to public space. It often mixes *passeisme*¹ and modernity, the mythification of the past and a synthesized proposal for the future, local demands and universal values. Despite its limitations, it is a timely and necessary reaction to avoid the urban disaster that is confusing the city with simple urbanization.

Pausing briefly to recount the history of cities, we face the risk of criticism from historians who may object to the simplification of reducing urban history to three major stages or eras. Proceeding nevertheless, the first of these is the age of the concentrated city, separated from its surroundings. The second is that of the metropolitan city, city plus periphery. The third is that of the contemporary city, the city “yet to be rethought” in the context of globalization. That is, the city-region, the network city, the multipolar or polycentric network city, networked into macro-regional urban systems, continental axes and global flows. While simple, the above tripartite distinction is still useful to urban planners, as it allows them to see new dynamics neither as a fatal curse nor as the objective expression of modernity, but as challenges that must be responded to. We must discover possible elements of continuity with respect to the past and distinguish what is necessary from what is excessive or avoidable in new processes. This is a necessary condition if one aims to be able to face the present challenges together with proposing new models and projects that formulate integrated responses.

¹French expression: recovery of forms of architecture from times past.

As cities developed in the twentieth century, the very low-income and informal working classes lived on the fringes of the recognized city but almost always maintained a certain cohesion with it. This cohesion was manifested through physical continuities, access to some central nuclei directly or accessible mobility. These nuclei were less powerful and had a less developed historical character than both historical and modern centralities, but they did make a certain cohesion possible. As we will see later, distances from the centre started to significantly increase in the last third of the twentieth century. An urban diffusion that overflows the city is taking place even while politicians and experts are still busy debating the metropolitan city. In this way, new areas emerge which, while composed of urbanizing elements, are no longer really a city. This urbanization eats up the city and leaves behind an urban phenomenon characterized by the very inequality which we have spoken about above, and populations with deficient citizenship or deprived of citizenship altogether. This situation brings to mind reconceptions of the death of the city and the ways in which citizens confront this tendency.

Throughout the twentieth century, a diverse combination of various factors (including the dynamics of private property, public and private prioritization of real estate programs, exclusive access by cars to “circulatory” space, limited commercial activity and citizen insecurity) led to a crisis of urban public space. Consequently, a tendency to turn public space into a specialized element, one more piece of the “infrastructure” of the city, in order to “save” or recover it, was reinforced. This is how segregated and monovalent spaces began to spread and multiply: one space for children, another for dogs, another for parking, another “for monuments”, and so on. Through this process, public space and the city lost two foundational functions from which all their potential is derived:

1. To give shape and meaning to totality, to ensure pathways and elements of continuity and to highlight the differences between buildings, city blocks and urban areas.
2. To order relationships between buildings, infrastructure, monuments, open lots, roads, transition spaces and open spaces in each area of the city, that is, functions that are located on two different scales that have been lost over the course of urbanization.

In the nineteenth century, urban planning formalized the legal distinction between private space and public space. It regulated public and private use of buildings, in order to guarantee the availability of public spaces and the diversity of functions and collective uses that could be made of these. The need to intervene in the industrial city gave rise to active urban policies oriented towards making public spaces that could be identified with an urban fabric that would shape the city. This idea is visible in the work of two urban planning figures from the second half of the nineteenth century: Haussmann and Cerdà. The former restructured old Paris and the latter designed the modern Barcelona expansion of the *Ensanche*. They responded to the above needs by ordering the city around public spaces. This was a principal element in both Haussmann’s system of avenues, squares and monuments and Cerdà’s gridded street layout.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, urban expansion permitted movement between home, work and consumption and access to central areas. Throughout that same century, supra-municipal cities were created, thanks to immigration and the media. These allowed people to be part of the life of the city without actually residing in it. The geographical expansion of cities generated municipalities with their own citizen structures, which encouraged the appearance of urban clusters without the qualities of a city.

The dominant trend in the current moment is to form enclaves within cities, multiplying segregations and social exclusion. There is a trend towards the fragmentation of urban-regional territory and to the privation of the city as a public space (Borja, 2004). In this city of sheltered minorities and tourist populations, low- and middle-class populations are dispersed throughout work areas and unused land and also further segregated by the dispersion of goods and services of social reproduction.

The revival of the culture of public space is, at present, a response not only to deficits in space and infrastructure for collective use but also due to a “specialized” conception of public space. This conception has been reinforced in recent years by an “urban planning of products”. This diminishes the concept of the urban project, which should be more than just a built commodity and instead address the environment and conditions of construction. Urban architecture can be very interesting, but it is not the same thing as urban planning and policy. Product urbanism, linked to competitiveness strategies and a certain submission to the private sector, often contributes to urban fragmentation and segregation. If guided by public authorities, however, it could become an agent for the construction of a city logic that, starting out from the current fragmentation, could redress this situation instead of worsening it, as generally happens.

This trend towards urban planning of products is justified not only by private businesses. It is also seen as a way to reduce risk, both investment risk and the risk of meeting the other, the risk of difference and heterogeneity. Safety becomes both the only desired horizon and also synonymous with homogeneity, transforming the city into a model, a non-place.

From the fashion of a weak and poor urban culture in turn of the century cities, a continuous search for mass entertainment can be identified. This entertainment tries to be risk-free and minimize contact between rich and poor, black and white, while simultaneously maximizing the financial benefits of its promoters. It includes the most recent investments in the construction of buildings for suburban shopping centres and theme parks, downtown festival markets and thematic spaces. As argued by Herbert Muschamp (1995), this category of urban businesses seeks to reinscribe the security of the values of the middle classes in the urban centre. A certain hybrid, an urban-suburban ethic that fuses suburban safety and standardization with urban congestion, offers the middle classes pleasant public spaces where they can enjoy themselves without fear. However, this kind of urban business forces the city to become an invisible fortress where the rich and poor remain polarized, but this separation is less obvious.

There is another concept of the city that accepts and approves of metropolitan chaos and of the city of non-places. Thus the “generic” city conceptualized by

Koolhaas manufactures scattered pieces throughout the territory, exalts anomie and takes for granted that the best possible order will emerge from chaos. This is functional urban thinking for private businesses, politicians in a hurry and gestural architects. The generic city is a city freed from the slavery of the centre, from the straitjacket of identity. It is an expression of today's logic and arises from reflections on today's needs. It is a city without history. The serenity of the generic city is achieved through emptying the public sphere.

Urban areas without a physical, institutional and cultural city are not cities. Furthermore, these areas give rise to speculation, corruption, exclusions and spatial injustice. There are cities with their centralities and heterogeneities, and built-up areas without a city are atomized settlements, without citizenship, whose greatest attraction is anomie. The consequences are environmental unsustainability, a decrease in average productivity, weak sociocultural integration and crises of governance (Borja, 2004).

An example of this is the *ron-d-points*, or interstitial or laconic territories (a concept used by Ingersoll, 1996) which, as atomized territories, have populations that do not regularly connect with urban centres. These are populations without citizenship, which maintain few relationships with institutions (except for education, health or specific bureaucratic processes), who, on many occasions, feel unrecognized. Consequently, while the peripheries look to the city and it is possible to speak of a relative social cohesion between the two, these *ron-d-point* territories experience isolation.

This is to say, there are problems of a lack of meaning in the city which are present in middle and upper class peripheral residential areas. These same problems are also evident in middle-lower class areas that house the excluded. This gentrifying process is exacerbated as a consequence of tourism, leisure, sociocultural facilities and shopping centres, office towers and prestigious buildings, etc. This causes a heterogeneous, diverse, vital city to change with these processes, to become "a city for sale".

The city as a place that produces citizenship, a sphere where this citizenship is exercised, is not the generic city. Generic cities have a tendency towards anomie, are privatized by fear and lack of solidarity and are socially oriented by individualistic and "familiarist" values (Sennett, 1975) (that is, to seek only the company and the closeness of the "identical"). Generic cities are simultaneously fragmented by local physical and administrative structures and by the corporate localisms of ghettos of all kinds, without common physical and symbolic references or shared meanings for all inhabitants.

No matter how much one tries to justify the generic city—the chaos city, the emerging city in the peripheries or the telepolis—on the basis of the great heterogeneity of post-industrial society, the dynamics of the market or the determining impact of new communication technologies, the fact is that these explanatory factors can be useful or adjustable for very different purposes. They can act in very opposite directions according to the values and objectives behind public policies.

In this sense, the difficulties in creating a city of public space with an egalitarian and open drive, referential elements that produce meaning, a diversity of centralities

and the ability to articulate different pieces and functions are beyond evident. In public spaces, a balance of functions between the public and the private must be produced. Public policy should determine density, uses and urban design. The private sector can develop, build and contribute land. In this conception, streets matter more than houses.

3 Spatial Inequalities

The tendency over this last period of change is different. In cities, we can see that the globalized financial economy, speculation in land and speculative construction, all of which generate spatial capital, have expanded (see B. Secchi, 1993). In turn, speculation has generated corruption and waste and has caused some sectors of the population to be exiled to the outskirts, in such a way that compact and central cities are “homogenized” for the more affluent classes.

The contradiction is that the most in need, low-income sectors of the population, other marginal subjects and immigrants, as well as some middle-class sectors outside the sphere of citizenship, are the ones who most suffer from difficulties in accessing these institutions. They therefore suffer most from spatial inequality and its consequences. Some experience increasing inequalities and others increasing levels of fear.

The environment, landscape, relationship with nature, aesthetics of buildings, public space, easy access to centralities, mobility, perception of others and recognition and lack thereof of inhabitants are all factors that contribute to this inequality. The city must offer services and quality of life throughout the entire area it encompasses, both in terms of basic services (water, energy, waste disposal, safety, mobility, environment, etc.) and other benefits (health, education, access to culture, social protection for people economically or culturally marginalized, etc). We cannot, of course, forget housing. This housing must be dignified, high-quality, functional and locally adapted. It must also reflect its social environment and respect the right of inhabitants to settle and develop their lives there.

These inhabitants of the periphery of the city should have the same recognized rights as those who reside in central urban areas. This demands that, as with all other citizens, they enjoy easy access to the agencies and offices of public institutions.

4 Social Reproduction, Spatial Inequalities and Costs to Citizens

To demonstrate the concept of spatial injustice, let us now analyse some of the costs generated by the exclusion of sectors of the population, be it in marginal neighbourhoods and marginal peripheries, or in interstitial areas, also known as “no man’s lands”.

1. Socio-economic costs. Although housing is often cheaper than in the urban centre, life on the periphery involves other expenses. The cost of transport, including the time spent in transit and the complexity of many commutes, is such that some workers choose to sleep on the street during the week instead of returning to their homes in the periphery. Cars are expensive and problematic transport alternatives and are affected by changes in the price of fuel and increases in fees and taxes. Searching for jobs in marginal areas is more difficult as far fewer contacts and little information are generally available. Similarly, accessing services is more difficult because of the costs in terms of time and money and because of the relative scarcity of information about the options available.
2. Political and administrative costs. The fringes of the city are home to many low-income, culturally marginalized and atomized groups and individuals with little access to the city centre. These people live in the margins and are not fully aware of what the state gives, takes and demands, and cannot avail of the rights afforded by public administrations. Accessing institutions for various activities at all levels of government, for example, obtaining documents, rights, or information or participating in political organizations, becomes an odyssey.
3. Cultural costs. Relative isolation, dependence on limited means of communication (mainly TV and radio), limited availability of more or less innovative cultural activities, etc.

5 Diffuse Society and Fragmented Territories. The Crisis of Citizenship and Social Reproduction

The mass movements of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries made specific demands addressing the availability of rental housing, local health centres, affordable public transport, unhealthy environmental conditions, the risk of flooding, etc. However, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, labour was the priority issue: wages, unemployment, pensions, etc. The social power of these popular movements lay in the unions. The state rolled out large infrastructure projects that generated jobs, and laws were created codifying the right to strike and granting social protection (the United Kingdom, the United States, Nordic countries, etc.).

Social reproduction in the industrial society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not understood as a set of interdependent needs and demands. Political and social institutions and the industrial and financial bourgeoisie played a role in making sure that, to some extent, some basic services were gradually “universalized”. While including transport and related infrastructure, this did not reach the entire population. Other priority goods and services were supported by the public and private sectors only on the basis of “charity”. These were accessed by only a part of the masses, and this access was precarious and very limited. It included

“social” housing, hospitals for the poor, education that was minimal or absent until the middle of the twentieth century, “poorhouses” and so on.

The welfare state, which incorporated rights and public policies, is more properly of the twentieth century and took form specifically in the wake of the Second World War. There was a tradition in England based on the precedents of the thirteenth century *Charter of the Forest*, the Poor Laws, the “levellers”, the struggle to improve the squalid working-class neighbourhoods that Engels described, and the development of trade unions that demanded housing and social protection throughout the nineteenth century. In Nordic countries, Bismarck’s Germany (in exchange for political authoritarianism), the United States of the New Deal and France of the Popular Front of 1936, etc., there were segmented social policies: care for the elderly, vacations, the right to strike, relative social security for formal workers, etc. The most global or inclusive idea was that of the “welfare state” designed by Lord Beveridge in 1942. Moves in this direction that had already occurred in the 1930s were more widely applied from 1945, supported by the Labour Party and especially Bevan. Welfare was institutionalized in the form of inclusive laws and policies over the course of the “30 glorious years” (1945–1975) in Western Europe. Operating within a different political framework, the Soviet bloc created its own version of the “welfare state” that guaranteed jobs, housing, basic services (water, energy, transport, etc.), education, health care and supported retirement. This was mostly universally accessible, although uniformity and quantity prevailed over quality.

6 Citizen Rights and Social Reproduction

The industrial city received criticism not only from the popular classes already mentioned. Middle- and upper sectors defended the coexistence of modern buildings with other older ones and demanded the opening up of attractive public spaces. Prominent intellectuals and professionals proposed and, in some cases, carried out plans and projects that made the city a source of goods and services for all its inhabitants. One very prominent figure was Cerdà, whose work in Barcelona reflected his concept of the Homogeneous City, providing housing, services and a road system accessible to all. Finally, Arturo Soria designed the Linear City, partially realized in Madrid and later in Stalingrad, now Volgograd.

The Cerdà and Soria projects were attempts to design “egalitarian cities”. Speculation and class distinction perverted, although they did not entirely unmake, these experiments. In New York, Moses, who promoted the great avenues and highways, structured the city around mobility and the great buildings that ended up defining the urban landscape. Some large Latin American cities, such as Mexico City and Buenos Aires, became dual cities with large avenues and tall buildings, contrasting with large rough areas for the lower-middle, lower-class and marginal sectors.

Despite this, in their subsequent development, public policies have not been able or have not sought to integrate the set of citizen goods and services that guarantee

social reproduction, which is at least as if not more important than social production. It is instead citizen movements that have promoted “the right to the city”.

6.1 City, Territory and Social Reproduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the “capitalist city” expressed the duality of capital and labour, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The inequality between the two blocks made itself apparent in cities, in neighbourhoods, and even between streets and buildings in close geographical proximity. However, in compact cities, a significant proportion of the popular sectors mixed with middle-class sectors in public space, integrating themselves into the political and social life of their cities. By contrast, Jorge Enrique Hardoy says, “The Latin American city is illegal”. Speaking from a Latin American context, he means that popular sectors do not enjoy citizenship status and yet they survive despite the fact that they do not receive, or receive only marginally, the goods and services that a city should provide. A significant proportion of these sectors live beyond the city, administratively and psychologically abandoned, transformed into invisible and maligned populations.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the end of the century, urbanization spread over vast territories both in Europe and in North and South America. This has meant that a significant proportion of both popular and middle-class sectors, as well as marginal and immigrant populations, now live beyond the cities and their peripheries. Living far away from everything, they are potential citizens in the non-city.

6.2 Capital Accumulation and Speculation

The speculative transactions of buying, holding and reselling primarily affect cities and territories that are partially urbanized and those that are acquired by banks and investment funds, sometimes from foreign countries. This implies that the construction of homes and offices very often evolves around the logic of speculation that seeks to generate money at an assessed cost. Consequently, cities are effectively exiling both popular sectors and a proportion of the middle class. This phenomenon even reaches into the peripheries well connected to the city centres, whose popular and lower-middle classes end up being forced into the “beyond” of the city. Thus cities lose their diversity, heterogeneity and interactions among citizens. The capitalist city is enriched, while society is impoverished.

7 The Renewal of Democracy in Urbanized Societies

7.1 The City, from the Level of the Citizen, as an Agent of Social Reproduction

As has been seen throughout this chapter, the city is where material, symbolic and cultural goods and services are all present and are interdependent on each other. For this reason, there should be nuclei in all areas or neighbourhoods, not only because of the facilities or shops but also because of the associated meeting points, identity elements and increased population diversity and social and political mobilization.

The industrial working class, traditionally considered the driver of protest movements, is today scattered, almost unrecognizable across the territory of relatively diverse neighbourhoods where employees, professionals, technicians, merchants, retirees, young people, immigrants, etc., are all part of the framework of social reproduction. The force of citizen revolutions rests on this framework and so emerges the perspective of the rights to the city. The vast urban majority, in compact cities, fragmented urbanizations or even territory excluded from the city itself, is a potential force for the conquest of citizen rights. The political awakening of these populations takes the form of claiming the right to the city as part of universal rights in the face of territorial inequality imposed by deficient citizenship.

7.2 So What Are the Challenges to Democratize Democracy from Cities?

The right to the city is a democratic reaction that integrates both the rights of citizens and urban criteria that make it possible to exercise these rights, especially in terms of the conception of public space.

The quality of public space is a fundamental test to evaluate citizen democracy. The advances and setbacks of democracy are expressed in public space, in all its political, social and cultural dimensions. Public space, understood as space for collective use, is the framework in which solidarity is woven, where conflicts are manifested and where demands and aspirations emerge and are held up against public policies and private initiatives. It is also in public space that the corrosive and excluding effects of current urban dynamics, through their presence or absence, become visible.

7.3 What Is Demanded and Denounced in Public Space?

Everything. The need for housing and opposition to evictions. Water (or the cost of water) and transportation. Accessibility and local nucleus. Cultural and sports facilities and schools. Cleanliness and safety. Transport and clean air. Open and green

spaces and clean and appealing neighbourhoods. If any of these elements or others not mentioned are missing, those that are present are compromised.

Furthermore, in public space, not only non-specifically urban (in the physical sense) rights are claimed, but also rights of another nature: social, economic, cultural and political. Employment, the denunciation of precariousness, basic income support and ongoing training; access to public education and healthcare, culture and communication (including online access); neighbourhood cultural and ethnic identity, diversity of sexual orientation and religion; and the political-legal equality of all residents in the city, that is, "citizenship by residence" (not only by nationality) all these claims, these rights, are directly linked.

If all are not enjoyed simultaneously, those rights that are accessible remain incomplete and limited, and they become denatured. The absence or limitation of some of these rights has a multiplier effect on urban inequalities. The right to the city is currently the operational concept to evaluate the degree of democracy. This right synthesizes, guides and establishes the horizon of democratizing social movements. However, to the extent that these movements need public space to express themselves, the quality of this space conditions the existence and potential of citizen demands.

7.4 The Right to the city Is Conditioned by the Physical and Political Forms Taken by Urban Development

Therefore, the materialization of this right will depend on how citizens confront the atomizing and exclusionary dynamics of current urban development processes. Conceptually, the right to the city must be linked to some of the main current social challenges:

- Precariousness at work, unemployment and the naturalization of the speculative economy.
- A shortage of accessible housing integrated into the urban fabric, evictions and ruinous indebtedness.
- The privatization of public spaces and public services.
- The waste of basic resources generated by current forms of urbanization and consumption.
- The forgetting and denial of the historical memory of popular demands and urban conquests.
- The politics of fear and the channelling of fear to fuel law-and-order campaigns against others, strangers and outsiders.
- Unequal access to information and communication, especially in the relationship between political institutions and citizens.

7.5 *Can the Right to the City be Achieved in the Current Political and Economic Frameworks?*

The revolution will be urban or it will not be at all, wrote Henri Lefebvre (1968). David Harvey (2013) wholeheartedly embraces this idea. However, revolutions occur very occasionally and are more often unsuccessful than victorious. Revolutions are not born through a social explosion, even in cases where there is a particular spark, but instead from an accumulation of inequalities, privileges and injustices. There are revolutions that can also be silent. Transformations to make social relations more egalitarian are won when political institutions open to popular classes and democratizing ideas become hegemonic in society as a whole. In the present historical moment, revolutions, noisy or otherwise, do not seem to be a democratizing process, but rather the opposite. We are living in a *de-democratizing* period that, at least in Europe and America, is readily identifiable.

7.6 *Is the Right to the City an Explanatory Concept for Urban Revolution?*

The theoretical basis of the “right to the city” is citizens’ demand for social reproduction within a framework of multidimensional democracy (spatial, political, social, cultural, economic, environmental). Democratizing urban processes seize rights linked to social reproduction, or “indirect wages” as a whole, and are linked with social production. Whether these processes culminate in ruptures or revolutions or advance progressively with steps both forwards and backwards will depend on the specific relationships between political and economic forces in more or less conflictive contexts. The point is not to wait for “the urban revolution”. Over recent decades up until today, the “urban revolution”, or more correctly “counterrevolution”, has been against the “right to the city”. *De-democratization* has taken place largely in cities and urbanized territories through spatial injustice inflicted on cities, which are subject to the laws, powers and financial resources of central states. Meanwhile, in the present, globalized financial capitalism is colonizing and disposing the urban social world. The potential strength of cities lies in two areas in tension with each other: they have a representative political institutional base and an active society that exerts pressure on political and economic forces. The way forward might be via a disruptive and noisy revolution or via a gradual and silent advance, so long as the synthesis is the theoretical banner of the “right to the city”.

7.7 *Making Cities, Making Citizens*

Without cities, there is no citizenship, or a “capitis diminutio” of rights, even if people live in urbanized territories. To act as citizens implies coexistence, diversity and recognition by others. Citizenship applies to the collective of fellow citizens, more than atomized inhabitants. There is a deficit of citizenship in compact cities since access to the goods and services of social reproduction is very unequal. Here, however, this deficit is at least visible. The slightly more integrated populations of these cities are more able to protest and to seize their rights. There is a basic relationship between city-citizenship-social reproduction and rights. However, the city continually tends to exclusions. Social reproduction continually regenerates old and new social, economic and spatial inequalities. New demands and emerging rights appear. Citizenship is reconquered every day, social reproduction continually expands, and rights must be continually exercised; if not, they become twisted. Building cities and strengthening the sense of citizenship is not the sole responsibility of public institutions and especially not of local governments.

Active citizens first make petitions and demands, carry out expressive actions and speak out, to public administrations and in the media. In a second phase, the objectives are specified, and citizens resist directly or encourage actions of resistance and insistence on demands. They seek out legal or programmatic means and demand their legitimate rights to feel represented in local and other levels of government. The scene is set for either dialogue, pacts and new regulations, or else rulers are denounced and delegitimized or overthrown. In a third phase, there is a feeling of injustice, of not being recognized or of outrage at abuses, privileges or corruption. The aspiration is to an egalitarian, just and caring society without rulers who are above citizens, nor *de facto* powers (economic, judicial, military, etc.) that are not controlled by citizens and social organizations.

7.8 *The Democratization of Democracy and Political-Legal Frameworks*

A powerful and unifying social mobilization makes it possible to propose or even to force a change of guard in political and judicial institutions with the aim of legalizing what is present, a legitimizing force. Institutions and their leaderships are conservative and, in many cases, regressive. Constitutions and general legal principles in many cases favour democratizing processes, but they are almost always very generic and contradict each other. One example is the distinction between real rights and programmatic rights. Economic forces and media and state apparatuses pressure political leaders who, in many cases, are their accomplices. In this way, citizens’ rights are perverted, limited or omitted, even where there are democratic instruments (consultations, accountability and civic initiatives, citizen control of public or para-public entities, etc.) which should sustain them. On few occasions do

citizen-driven movements produce a recognition of rights not provided for in the constitutional framework or present only in a non-operative way, such as the reception of immigrants, women's equality, protection of the environment, the real right to decent housing for all, universal basic income, the rights of nationalities, etc. Despite this, democracy is not static; it is dynamic. It is not only institutional but also social and cultural since it is from these spheres that social and cultural processes that demand political and economic changes are generated. Remember that the law liberates but, if ossified, it oppresses.

7.9 Articulated Territory: The Production and Reproduction of the City as a Sphere of Social Reproduction

Reproduction and social production form a whole. The working or wage-earning classes require direct and indirect wages linked to social reproduction. Businesses—industrial, commercial and those providing public or private services—may physically be in local territory, but many of them are elsewhere. “Producers”, on the other hand, live in the same territorial area, city, metropolitan area or urbanized region. Their demands and rights are closely related to their wages, jobs, mobility, housing, etc. The vast majority of the waged or self-employed population are both workers and citizens. Citizen-oriented and production-oriented territories are articulated and almost always intermingled. Social conflict in production and reproduction go hand in hand for the social majorities. Citizens express themselves in public space and also in sites of production, including not only the workplace but also their urban life environments. It is not a question of separating generic citizens from specific workers. In both situations, there is a diversity of social classes with different interests, but the vast majority of the population has the same needs: monetary income and access to housing, collective services, public space, etc. Active citizens and the working population make up a majority in the struggle to claim their citizenship and labour rights.

7.10 Political Organization and Recovering Active Society

Urban territory has different levels: the neighbourhood, the suburb, the city, the metropolitan environment, urbanized spaces without a city and the urban region. At each level, there are forms of cooperation and coexistence, of providing formal and informal services, of branches of public administrations and of political participation. However, the hegemonic sphere offering minimum sociopolitical guarantees is multidimensional: the metropolitan city, the urban region and the network of cities, depending on the territory. Representative political power, which determines the rules and directs big projects and the management of large services, must be

singular. However, at the different levels, it is useful for there to be associative or non-formal forms of citizenship, agents of production and public or private companies and representatives of political administrations.

The “city” in all its dimensions is both an institutional entity and a physical and social entity. Citizens in their diversity come together to seize and defend their rights. This multidimensional city must have a powerful political organization, in normative, executive, judicial, decentralized and participatory terms. But the city also has its other nature: citizenship. Active urban society is itself a force to cooperate with or to confront the government of a city or urban region. Together, however, they can establish contractual rather than hierarchical relationships with the state and, if necessary, confront it, or ally themselves with it. The multidimensional city is, or should be, a global actor. In order for this to happen, “the right to the city” can and should be truly achieved in this process.

8 Conclusion and Final Thoughts

The city is above all public space; public space is the city. It is both a condition and an expression of citizenship and of citizens’ rights. The crisis of public space is manifested in its absence and in its abandonment or degradation, in its privatization or in its tendency towards exclusion. Without a powerful, socially inclusive, physically and symbolically integrating public space, the city dissolves, democracy is twisted, historical processes that advance individual and collective freedoms are interrupted or regress, and the reduction of inequalities and the supremacy of solidarity and tolerance as citizen values are overcome by segregation and greed, by selfishness and exclusion.

Historical-cultural understanding of public space is a fundamental dimension of political and social democracy. Public space expresses the territorial dimension of democracy. It is space for collective use. It is the area in which citizens can (or should) feel as such: free and equal. It is where society is staged, where it speaks for itself, demonstrates its existence as a collective that lives together, shows off its diversity and contradictions and expresses its demands and conflicts. It is where collective memory is built and multiple identities and ongoing hybridizations are manifested.

Democratic public space is an expressive, meaningful, versatile, accessible and evolving space. It is a space that connects people and that regulates buildings, a space that marks both the character of neighbourhoods and urban areas and the continuity of the different parts of the city. This space is in crisis today, and its decline calls into question the possibility of exercising the “right to the city”.

The right to the city and democratic public space are two sides of the same coin. The current political and urban culture has revalued both concepts in our time, but institutional and media practices question them. The dominant dynamics in the cities of the developed world tend to weaken and privatize public spaces. Critical analysis is useless, and nostalgic lament of the lost past even more so if we do not

confront the economic, political and cultural dynamics that produce this contemporary city-less urbanization and denaturalization of public space.

The crisis of public space is the result of the current patterns of urbanization, which are extensive, diffuse, exclusive and privatizing. Public spaces lose their civic qualities and become mere thoroughfares, or tourist and leisure and museum areas, or they are turned into private streets and gated communities (that do not exist only in low-density suburbs) or guarded squares (video surveillance) in which the elements that favour living (benches) are removed and physical obstacles are created to prevent large gatherings. Lively and open high streets are progressively replaced by shopping centres in which the “right of admission” is policed. Centres and neighbourhoods that are not transformed following these guidelines become forgotten and sometimes criminalized spaces of exclusion. Or at the other extreme, they are gentrified and exclude popular sectors, first as residents and then as users.

This model of urbanization is a product of the convergence of interests characteristic of contemporary globalized capitalism: highly mobile finance capital, pursuing short-term profit, articulated with local financial systems; legislation favouring urbanization and real estate booms; and the private ownership of land with private agents appropriating the capital gains resulting from speculation. Local and regional governments in turn facilitate these dynamics, since they compensate for their lack of resources to meet the demands made on them through the sale of public land, urban permissiveness and the effective sale of construction permits. The “concrete block” (“il blocco edilizio”, a concept that became fashionable in the Italian urban thought of the 70s) closes the circle. These are the legacy of developers and builders who received easy loans from finance capital funds, which stimulated investment by the middle and lower classes, who in turn obtained loans through junk mortgages. A vicious circle that, when it encounters legal or social obstacles, corrupts local governments with impunity.

These tendencies in urbanization are reinforced by the upper and middle classes’ desire to distinguish themselves and mark their differentiated and privileged image and who simultaneously request the protection of exclusive areas. For their part, lower or lower-middle sectors of the population strive to achieve the (illusory) security that they believe they can find in land or home ownership as a form of saving for the future, but at high costs in the present. This is the myth that land and housing will always increase in value, and they will always be able to pay off their mortgages. Local governments, accomplices by either action or omission, find in urbanization a source of income and a certain social support. The urban culture inherited from the modern movement that decreed “the death of the street” serves as an alibi for many professionals to justify their participation in the feast.

But the party is over: urbanization in the coming years will not be able to follow the same path. It would be logical for a radical change to be implemented, for multiple reasons: the waste of basic resources and high social costs and the speculative irresponsibility with which global financial capitalism operates. It could be because it is expected that there will be a reaction from society demanding that governments act on their responsibilities, that they remember their obligation to regulate both the financial agents and large real estate agents that have received large amounts of

public money to get out of the very same quagmire they themselves created. It could be because malaise should lead to social mobilizations by those most affected by the crisis, the popular majorities who have lost their savings and/or jobs and who will demand a change of course from the neoliberal policies that have caused this crisis.

Professionals and intellectuals in general have a special responsibility in converting the current crisis into an opportunity for change in a more democratic direction. It is their responsibility to help develop radical critical thinking and to propose possible and desirable alternatives. This requires placing oneself outside the logic of institutional politics (government management, leadership of parties integrated into the system) and the official academic culture that predominates in universities today. Institutional politics and academia are characterized by extreme conservatism. Policymakers cannot conceive of or do not want to consider anything other than a return to the past. The contemporary university has forgotten its social responsibilities and has degenerated by limiting itself to producing self-referential knowledge, increasingly removed from reality. Social engagement has been replaced by a formalist methodology and by submissions to indexed journals armoured against criticism and innovation. The dominant academic ideology (in the most pejorative sense of the term) demonizes innovation, criticism, partisan positions and proposals for action in society.

In today's world, it is probably only possible to promote reforms. But for reforms to achieve advances, radical or, if you prefer, revolutionary thinking is required. This revolutionary thinking is oriented to action that modifies dynamics and behaviours that express structural inertias, including private property, land and urban areas as foci of speculation, political permissiveness and the complicity of local governments in relation to urban speculation and the ideology of fear that legitimizes social segregation and the privatization of public spaces.

8.1 Justification

This text is both a synthesis of recent works and a proposal for going beyond them by including the dynamics involved in cities confronting states and financial globalization.

It thus introduces citizenship as the basis of a democracy that cannot be reconstructed via the state or the constitution, but instead needs to be developed from within cities. The state is an abstract entity that is made concrete through the apparatuses of the political class and bureaucratic elite.

Cities as a perspective are from which to structure urban regions. They demand jurisdiction over themselves, with their own rules. Relations with the (central) state should be more contractual than hierarchical—with legislation specific to these urban entities, not dependent on “basic state laws”. Central states should transfer a large part of their financial resources and reduce administrative staff to a minimum. A Charter of Citizen Rights has no real value if policies are not applied to exercise them. Legal and financial instruments must be means to guarantee interdependent citizens' rights.

Citizen mobilization is a basic instrument to transform the policies that guarantee citizen rights. Citizen and peri-urban mobilizations and interstitial spaces, such as the *gilets jaunes*, and those of Ecuador and Chile, the United States, Italy, etc. Citizen movements should converge with local or regional governments supportive of democratization.

States are today subordinate to global economic, financial and commercial forces. In order to confront these global forces, states should not support local governments and citizen mobilizations, but rather the other way around. Local governments and mobilized citizens promote political democratization and citizen rights in the face of global economic forces. Central states should mediate with global forces while being led by local governments and citizen movements. In these processes, local-regional political institutions will be created, and pacts will be made with global economic forces.

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