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## Afterword

# The Consumer's Society in the Era of the Postglobalization

### Postfazione

### La società dei consumatori nell'era della post-globalizzazione

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**Abstract.** The article tries a general overview of the contemporary changes in the global economy. First proposes a characterization of the present period of history, advancing some of his main explanatory elements. Next, summarizes the great economic, social, political and cultural changes, discussed on the long way of more than twenty years of research at an international level. Third, it remarks some concrete changes at an urban scale. Finally, suggests the possibilities of some differential urbanization processes, on the way of the planetary urbanization.

**Keywords:** change, crisis, planetary urbanization, postglobalization.

**Riassunto.** L'articolo tenta di offrire una panoramica generale sui cambiamenti contemporanei dell'economia globale. In primo luogo, propone una caratterizzazione dell'attuale periodo storico, delineando alcuni dei suoi principali elementi esplicativi. Successivamente, riassume i grandi cambiamenti economici, sociali, politici e culturali, discussi attraverso il lungo percorso di oltre vent'anni di ricerca a livello internazionale. In terzo luogo, rileva alcuni cambiamenti concreti a scala urbana. Infine, suggerisce le possibilità di alcuni processi di urbanizzazione differenziale, seguendo il percorso dell'urbanizzazione planetaria.

**Parole chiave:** cambiamento, crisi, urbanizzazione planetaria, post-globalizzazione.

## 1. Introduction

Changes acceleration in these first decades of the XXI Century require a permanent updating of all kind of socioeconomic analysis. The last restructuring of the capitalist system since the 70's has encouraged the technical,

scientific and informational globalization (Dicken 1986; Santos 1996<sup>1</sup>). The capital accumulation at this global scale seems paradoxically collapse its own increasing possibilities (Smith 1984), disclosing the implosion of the financial crisis of 2007 and allowing the explosions of climate change and new pandemic and of political populisms and new nationalisms.

Independently of the all-possible different points of view about these relevant questions, it appears an urgent claim for new methods and concepts in order to be able to explain theoretically the reality at different scales. A complex analysis is needed from a renewed discipline of Political Economy both for a scientific explanation and for the advancement of new political proposals.

On the way of almost twenty years of international research on City, Consumption and Retail, this article tries to propose first a characterization of the present period of history, advancing some of his main explanatory elements. Next, summarizes the great economic, social, political and cultural changes, extracted from the reflections of the PRIN team (Carreras, Martínez-Rigol 2019). Thirdly, it remarks some concrete changes at an urban scale. Finally, suggests the possibilities of some differential urbanization processes, on the way of the planetary urbanization (Brenner 2014).

## 2. Reaching a Postglobalization era?

The main question to answer today is if it is already possible to speak about Postglobalization, Postcapitalism or Postcrisis. Here the prefix post is used only as a sort of an acknowledgement<sup>2</sup> of the possibility of the end of Capitalism and of his more than forty years cycle of Globalization, at least as they were known until today (Wallerstein et al. 2013; Streck 2016). In the same sense, Postcapitalism could be an easy way initially to refer to a yet unknown economic system foreshadowed by an increasing inequality among people and territories (Piketty 2013) and by the monopolization of the big informational new corporations. Since the mythical date of 1973<sup>3</sup>, different crisis affected the global economic system: oil prices growth, manufacturing delocalization,

financial crisis. All these economic crises were framed in a changing geopolitical order further analyzed on this paper. So today is possible to think that crisis could be the new restructured organization of the Capitalism as a whole. The XXI Century world could also be entering into a postcrisis or perhaps into a perpetual crisis scenario.

By the use of the post, we assume that the world is attending a new transition from Capitalism to some other system not yet well defined, as occurred before in some other secular transitions (Anderson 1974; Hilton 1976). The use of transition's analysis force to distinguish clearly which elements from the old system that is disappearing prefigure the new one. The dialectics among past, present and future is at the base of any transition.

Apparently external to the Human society there are two different big challenges that aggravate and accelerate the processes of change. The first has been the climate change with all his controversial evidences, especially the acceleration of the so-called natural disasters, and the international political debate about it<sup>4</sup>. Above all the different and irreconcilable opinions, everyday increase the popular awareness of the negative impacts of socio-economic activities on the Planet, especially among the young people. The second challenge is the recurring pandemic<sup>5</sup> every time more frequent and deepest that defy the scientific progress of the health and medical disciplines and infrastructures everywhere in the World.

In front of the explosion of these two challenges, the increasing spread of the way of life of the consumer's society that accompanied the globalization and in greater extend exploded into the planetary urbanization, is progressively questioned. After three decades of neoliberalism<sup>6</sup> seriously eroding the welfare state, especially in Western Europe, the means of collective consumption (health, education or social services) have been dramatically reduced. This fact is the base of the heavy consequences in the diffusion of the 2020 pandemic, at least in countries like Italy or Spain.

The recent increase of environmentalist attitudes and mass confinements against pandemic necessarily affects the general way of life of the consumer's society. We assist to the disclosing of different attitudes aiming for a most austere and responsible consumption. Two different and apparently contradictory trends are

<sup>1</sup> In his last book, the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (1926-2001) even suggested a popular alternative to his contemporary Globalization (Santos 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Authors are against the use of the post prefix as a qualification of a new period defined only by the contradiction of the characteristics of the past ones, like occurs with the abused terms of postmodernism postfordism, postindustrial, and many others.

<sup>3</sup> This year with the first big oil crisis is conventionally considered as the starting point of the last capitalist restructuration.

<sup>4</sup> In 1988, United Nations create the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change in order to advise governments with periodical reports.

<sup>5</sup> The most diffused were Ebola in 1976, Aids in 1981, SARS in 2002 and the covid-19 in 2020.

<sup>6</sup> The main icon could be the British government from 1979 to 1990 of Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) that take the slogan of TINA (There Is No Alternative).

in action. For one hand, it appears more and more frequently an increasing consumer's cooperativism, recycling habits, second hand goods reuse and local productions promotion<sup>7</sup>. Even some forms of the so-called circular economy, based on a new way of bartering, are often analyzed and promoted. On the other hand, different forms of e-commerce are increasing, both by the big commercial corporations (like Amazon, Alibaba, Google and Youtube) and by multitude of fragmented and individual initiatives at a global scale. These trends have deep consequences on the urban life and on the organization of cities.

Another important element is the progressive and evident weakening of democracy all around the world, even among the most developed countries. This so important political process appears on the frame of the strong economic competition for the first place between USA and the P.R. of China. The comforting three worlds of the Cold War decades do not exist anymore and there is today a clear lack of leadership with the discomfort of uncertainty.

Two main elements should be underlined, also in this geopolitical restructuring. For one hand, there is the rise of different kind of populisms. Many social movements of extreme right are developing fundamentalism, racism and essentialism everywhere in the world, side by side of different forms of left populism generating new social movements, especially on cities (Mouffe 2018). On the other hand, an increasing nationalism affects all the spheres of the political life, at the scale of the Nation state, with protectionist and anti-immigration policies. However, nationalism also appears at the intra state scales (Soudan, Scotland or Catalonia) and at international scale (EU, Mercosur, UNO or OMS crisis).

The combination of these different elements could clearly be interpreted as a transition from one system to another (Wallerstein et al. 2013; Streck 2016). All the changes associated with this transition need a lot of more detailed analysis in order to understand the present configuration and dynamics of the consumer's society.

### 3. Some recent changes on the Consumer's society at a global scale

As has been pointed out (Carreras, Martínez-Rigol 2019, 2020), the emergence and consolidation of the consumer society since the mid-20th century are analyzed

in the light of a series of general and global changes at the political, social, economic and cultural levels.

It should be pointed out that it is in light of this set of changes on a global scale that consumption has consolidated as, if not the main, one of the main generating activities of society, displacing production and work as fundamental variables (Dicken 1986), or, at most, being on par with them. Consumption has become a central and relevant topic (Carreras, D'Alessandro 2017), mainly because it has connections with social life from its triple conceptualization as acquisition (provision through the market or any other mechanism), appropriation (use to which objects are destined) and symbolization (processes that give meaning to supply and use) (García-Canclini 1995; Warde 2017).

#### 3.1 *A system that mutates appearance, but not its logic*

The logic of capital has become the engine of society. The processes of circulation and accumulation of capital, as the geographer David Harvey affirms, are today hegemonic when it comes to providing the material, social and intellectual bases of our life in common, and therefore, of our social system, called capitalism (Harvey 2014, 22).

From this statement, one could adopt the perspective that the main processes of transformation of the economic system throughout these last two centuries have been an incessant struggle of capital to escape from the straits to which time and space subject it, in his search for continuous growth, accumulation and profit, for imposing his logic all around the world. And in this process, consumption has been essential, since it is a key function to maintain the process of circulation and accumulation of capital.

The processes of circulation and accumulation, and the imposition of the logic of accumulation and profit, require, even as part of the temporary remedy for their cyclical and intrinsic crises, territorial expansion and the reduction of capital turnover time. The system mutates, adapting to the new conditions created from its growth and crisis cycles and the various technological innovations, but without losing its space predatory and time accelerating nature.

One of its latest mutations has been the much-discussed globalization, which has also been one of the main elements that has allowed the consolidation of the consumer society. Globalization, which in economic terms refers to the integration of markets, finances, technologies and States, has allowed nation-states, transnational corporations and people to extend their reach to the entire

<sup>7</sup> In Spain, the promotion of consumption at local markets is symbolically called as 0 km and 15 minutes cities are promoted.

world in a faster and deeper way, and at a lower cost than ever (Daniels, Jones 2012), giving a new twist to territorial expansion and time acceleration. The effects of this technology-based process on production have been extensively analyzed, as the production and exchange of goods and services have increased exponentially. But at the same time it has meant important changes in consumption. Needs have had to be stimulated and consumption facilitated, in order to offer a way to an unprecedented increase in productive capacity. The consumption model prevailing since the second half of the twentieth century is characterized by widespread access to a wide range of goods and services that go much beyond the cover of the needs considered for survival.

In this consumer capitalism, credit, and access to it by a large part of the population, has become one of the key elements that has allowed the maintenance of capital circulation and the reduction of its time turnover. The nation-states and corporation's economies need also to go to credit in order to finance investments in the space-time fixes that underlie the geographic expansions of capital. However, without a doubt, the access of domestic economies to credit and its socialization, as shown by Raquel Rolnik in the case of housing, has meant the inclusion of low and middle-income consumers in financial circuits (Rolnik 2013). This is one of the characteristics of the so-called financiarization of the economy. Or as it has also been described, the emergence of financial capitalism, a type of capitalism identified by the production of the financial universe in which capital can be realized from banking activity or in the financial markets themselves, regardless of the production of goods and services, and with much higher profit rates (Méndez 2018). There has been a radical change in the relationship between productive capital and financial capital (Lapavitsas 2013).

The technological revolution that globalization has brought about has therefore favored an internationalization of consumption. The new communication tools have revolutionized the ways of sale, the means of payment, and even logistics, and at the same time have promoted a series of important changes in the consumption habits of individuals and households. Electronic commerce has meant opening digital communication to traditional business relationships. There is an unstoppable increase in the use of electronic commerce as a way of acquiring goods and services by growing population groups. As a continuation of this, collaborative consumption practices are a prominent axis. Together with the modification of payment methods, it has led to a restructuring of spaces and consumption times, making consumption ubiquitous in everyday life.

### 3.2 *The increasing concentration of power in a few*

A second aspect to be highlighted is the change in the establishment of a certain world hegemony, understood as control and direction at the economic, political, military and ideological level of the world (Taylor, Flint 2002). The hegemony of the United States of America, which, starting from the cyclical interpretation of hegemony in the world-society of the North American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, begins in the middle of the XX Century (Wallerstein 1984), seems to be currently in crisis, or at least, in question, as the Italian economist and sociologist Giovanni Arrighi also pointed out (Arrighi 2005).

This interpretation highlights that despite the fact that the dominance of the hegemonic State continues to exist in various spheres, it is in the economic sphere that it acquires its maximum relevance. Especially from three processes that follow one another in chains: supremacy in productive efficiency, commercial supremacy and financial supremacy. The new emergence of China from the last quarter of the XX Century has led to the questioning of North American hegemony in particular, and in general of the Triad, which includes the European Union and Japan, clearly in the productive field, and in the commercial and financial ones.

A second aspect to be considered in the power relations among different agents is that the nation-state hegemony may be somewhat threatened by a new economic agent. The process of globalization was led by the multinational corporation, considered as the hegemonic agent. Since its emergence in the late 1960, its institutional and territorial organization has become more complex (Dicken 2003; Morelli 2010; Coe, Kelly, Yeung 2007). Today is configured as that type of company that maintains the power to coordinate and control operations in more than one State, although do not possess them (Dicken 2003). In addition, within the framework of competition that is inherent to the capitalist economic system, there has been an intense process of concentration of power and capital in them, to the point that many of these companies have a volume of sales or profits much higher than Gross Domestic Product of many States of the world.

The emergence of these multinational corporations can be seen as a counter power to the nation-states, which at times have been unable to control the corporations' actions, which freely move their investments and capital, seeking maximum revaluation. It is not even strange that those corporations are the object of a differential and beneficial treatment by the governments, to which they grant fiscal advantages, reduction of taxes or

other benefits, trying to attract their investments since it is considered that they generate work and wealth. Perhaps within this framework it is possible to read the numerous local and regional policies that have arisen everywhere, trying to relaunch territorial competitiveness, positioning these territories as the focus of attraction for the mass of capital that, in its free movement, seeks maximum revaluation.

While some particular readings of globalization announced the disappearance of the nation-state in the face of this loss of sovereignty, it has not yet occurred. The relationship between the two agents is symbiotic rather than contradictory. The Fordist and Keynesian welfare state has undoubtedly mutated. For example in the last financial crisis of 2007, its alignment with capital prioritizing the rescue of banks and financial entities, questioned on the one hand its public and redistributive nature. Nevertheless, on the other hand it showed its strength as a fundamental institutional element to maintain the principles of capitalism, and among them, the existence of the market as a regulatory element of the system. As Karl Polanyi showed in the 1940s, overthrowing the myth of *laissez-faire*, the market's institutionalization and operation requires the State (Polanyi 1944).

### 3.3 *An increasingly unequal social system*

Globalization and its technical foundation have generated a new international division of labor, through which there has been a new territorial articulation of what was configured as the center, the semi-periphery and the periphery (Lluch 1981). The value-chain of products expresses these connections of diverse spaces and agents oriented to production, distribution and consumption, to the accumulation of capital and to the extraction and appropriation of profit. In those value-chains, each territory is destined to fulfill a specific function assigned by the logic imposed by hegemonic actors (Santos 1993, 1996). This territorial specialization in specific functions is in relation to the initial comparative advantage, but it is also due to the intensification of unequal exchange flows (commercial, financial, technological and migratory) depending on the competitive capacity of each area.

At the same time, there is also a growing technical division of labor, associated with a growing specialization of activities and tasks, leading to a decrease in production costs and an increase in productivity. This same specialization and simplification means that many of the tasks can be automated, and this process highlights another of the contradictions of the system,

since the effect it can have on the relationship between constant capital and variable capital leads to a reduction in the rate of profit. A trend that Karl Marx already pointed out and that today some other economists have reaffirmed (Carchedi 2017). Adding these territorial and technical divisions to the social division of labor, a growing socio-labor and territorial segmentation is favored, in which capital finds an adequate means for the extraction of profit.

There is an increasing polarization of wealth within the capitalist system, also a polarization in the distribution of income. More than this, nowadays income do not increase despite the fact that the productivity, occupation or corporations' profits do. This has questioned the meaning of the middle class, when some part of this group of population, despite the fact that they have an income, they fail to survive. As the British economist Guy Standing explains, we have attended to the appearance of what he has called the precariat (Standing 2013). A new social class with job insecurity, unstable and temporary jobs, which contrasts with a high educational level; they depends exclusively upon a monetary wage, since those non-monetary benefits of the welfare state have been cut off; and furthermore, they cannot find a political answer to his situation.

At the same time, access to certain goods and services has constituted as an element of social differentiation and affirmation of status. This access is given, especially through the market that constitutes itself as the main mediating agent. The processes of privatization and commodification are thus necessary. Taking up the topic of the middle class, today under pressure (OECD 2019), its definition is based in their income, but also it is defined by certain patterns of consumption and access to certain goods, such as housing or education. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identified certain class practices through consumption, that is, how consumer practices are an expression of a social position (Bourdieu 1988), as well as the processes of distinction and equalization between the various groups or social classes. The consumer thus becomes at the center of research and debate, while his practices, his subjectivity and his experiences in relation to consumption are also ways of transforming individuality, community and social relations (Mansvelt 2009).

The processes of social segregation are related to the possibilities of access to consumption or the use of certain spaces for consumption. So consumption becomes a variable from which the city, urban space and social processes that occur in it can be interpreted (Zukin et al. 2009; Martínez-Rigol 2019; D'Alessandro, Martínez-Rigol 2018).

### 3.4 A cultural logic functional to the system

Our cultural system is based on objects' consumption. The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard showed how modern social life, especially throughout the 20th century, had been focusing on consumption, understood as an ordered system of codes and signs, in which objects play a fundamental role (Baudrillard 1970). There is the necessity of these signs consumption, so that individuals can show their identity, their inclusion and belonging or, on the contrary, their exclusion. This logic is a fundamental part of our system, and makes cultural logic constitutive of accumulation processes of capital.

Thus, the North American hegemony that does not seem at all clear in political and economic terms seems to remain at the cultural and ideological level. This cultural variable in hegemony is related to consumption. The creation of consumption patterns, especially in urban areas and the great world metropolises, is a clear example of how cultural processes have tended to a clear uniformity of the world, also related to the social level with the appearance of a broad middle class, as pointed out previously, today in question. The predominance of the North American way of life today has a global reach, and despite the crisis of neoliberalism, it continues as the most accepted social project worldwide and still without an alternative by the political and economic rivals of the United States. It could be argued, perhaps, that it is through consumption patterns that North American hegemony would continue today (Ornelas 2010; Carreras, Martínez-Rigol 2020).

Mobility, an aspect that for some would be the most outstanding characteristic of globalization, logically does not affect all citizens equally. Some acquire the status of potentially mobile; others remain anchored to the territory. But, even so, the increase in mobility (from migratory flows to tourism) and the use of electronic media have had an impact on social interaction and the increase in cultural trafficking. Within this frame, identities must be renegotiated under a double process of cultural homogenization and heterogeneization, as García Canclini has already shown (García-Canclini 1989). In this process, consumption has become a main element, essential in the construction of identities and lifestyles.

The contradictions presented by the development of this social project, especially in relation to the environment or social inequalities, and which could be placed within the framework of the capital-nature and capital-labor contradictions, do not seem, up to now, to be sufficiently solid as to propose a substantial change in said project. Rather, they seem to be contradictions that the

system is slowly integrating or phagocytizing, as David Harvey has pointed out in the case of the capital-nature contradiction (Harvey 2014).

### 4. Some recent changes on the Consumer's society at an urban scale

As has already been pointed out, one of the most important elements of the Globalization period was the so-called financiarization of the whole economic system (Méndez 2018). At an urban scale, this element has a clear and strong consequence on the weight of enormous price's inflation in the land market. The real state has been the real manager of the urban economies and societies. Formally, urban land does not constitute a real free market<sup>8</sup>, because of its evident physical limitation and rigidity. Nevertheless, the role of the State as regulator with his powerful weapon of urban planning succeeds to mobilize the buildings and land market, not local anymore, but international (Bernardos et al. 2014). His main instrument is the constant renovation of the urban fabric, even in many historical environments through big punctual interventions. Catalyst has been the euphemistic denomination of this new form of planning<sup>9</sup>.

For understanding urban land prices distribution there is always useful the classical Alonso's argument in his location theory, on the frame of the traditional center periphery dialectics, based on the simple distance (Alonso 1964). However, his logic radio concentric model has become more and more complex, with a similar evolution of the former Chicago school urban models. Thus, even in this case it is possible to think about a multiple nuclei of high urban land prices everywhere in the world, generated by the development of two different actions. For one hand, the urban renovation with catalyst interventions in big projects, sometimes designed by famous starchitects<sup>10</sup> (La Cecla 2004), that creates new centralities in many ancient urban areas (old factories and obsolete infrastructures). On the other hand, there is a process of urban expansion in new edge peripheral cities. In a very similar direction, many tourist resorts, in their most large sense<sup>11</sup>, concentrate big investments that increase the value of the real state at a regional, national or international level.

<sup>8</sup> If free market has existed at any time as discussed many years ago by the Hungarian social scientist Karl Polanyi (1886-1964) (Polanyi 1944).

<sup>9</sup> Chemical mythology is thus added to the Mathematical and Physical tradition in urban planning and in Social Sciences in general.

<sup>10</sup> Name that indicates a reduced group of celebrated architects working at the international level in punctual projects.

<sup>11</sup> Including a large range of typologies, as harbor marinas, beach developments, thematic parks, golf courses or ski stations.



**Figure 1.** One of the traditional and emblematic Barcelona's shop closed because the recent retail changes. Source: Moreno 2020.

A second remarkable element is the hierarchical change in the organization of the chain value into the commercialization networks. The continuous increase of the number, diversity and quantity of goods and services in the consumer's society and the implementation of the just in time new form of service has altered the traditional channels of distribution. The increasing high speed of the transportation means also has highly contributed to this process of change. Thus, logistics become the strategic activity with the subordination both of the production and the retail networks. Accumulation of capital has mainly profited few big distribution and logistics corporations, creating powerful monopolies at a continental scale. One of the best examples could be the USA firm Walmart<sup>12</sup>, the top 2019 company by revenues in the *Fortune* rankings, when in 2000 was the oil com-

pany Exxon, and years before the automobile General Motors.

A third element is the recent evolution of the retail and consumption structures at the urban scale. Since the end of the Second World War started a strong competition between the traditional urban shopping structures and the big commercial shops connected to the highways networks. It has been the era of malls and shopping centers, initiated in USA and France and rapidly diffused everywhere. The biggest shopping areas were concentrating capital in front of the small business of urban retail. There was one of the most visible economic dimensions of the traditional center periphery urban dynamics. Many cities of any size in the majority of countries experienced a real decay of their commercial centers in front of the new expansive peripheries, due to the suburbia growth with its particular form of civilization, based on the mass use of the private cars and his consequent daily mobility.

<sup>12</sup> Company created by Sam M. Walton (1918-1992) in 1962.

However, in the last decades of XX Century a movement back to the center of cities begins, both of afforded population and of their consumption patterns. The center periphery dynamics was maintained but changing its preferential direction. The movement generates a certain gentrification era, first analyzed in London and in other Anglo-Saxon cities, and later in the majority of cities all around the world (Smith 1996; Martínez-Rigol 2000; Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008).

Recently, with the hegemony of the financial capital in urban areas, this center periphery dialectics was disorganized in many ways (Carreras 2017). The intense mobility of population overruled the strict christallerian hierarchies, first in the metropolitan areas (Beavon 1977) and after at the rest of urban scales, because the planning of new centralities and the strong specialization processes in the offer of goods and services. A new theory of diffuse cities and their variable geometries has been developed by some Italian economists<sup>13</sup> in order to explain new urbanization patterns. The center of the city of course exists always but his role is not anymore that of the top of the commercial structure, but the symbolic one, often monopolized by the increasing international tourism. In this period, the commercial and consumption renaissance of city centers generate a process of demalling (D'Alessandro, Sommella, Viganoni 2016).

Finally, it is necessary to take account of the advent and increase of the e-commerce extended by the diffusion of internet uses that has relevant consequences on all forms of urban retail, changing also many of the consumption patterns. In USA at the end of the second decade of the XXI Century a great number of shops, both in malls and in the city center were closed; 9,300 in 2019<sup>14</sup>. This new phenomenon has been denominated as the Retail Apocalypse (Philipose 2019). The recent dramatic lockdown of million people in front of the covid-19 pandemic could reinforce this hegemony of the e-commerce, especially from the biggest companies. The stock exchange itinerary of firms like Amazon, Tesla or Procter & Gamble seems to announce the continuity of a new Globalization era more technologic and more cartelized, according to the analysis of the French journal *Le Monde*<sup>15</sup>.

## 5. The planetary urbanization and a social justice and welfare future

An attentive analysis of the strongest lines of thought among the different disciplines of the urban studies indicates the planetary trends of Capitalism and its geographies, since at least the last fifty years. Henri Lefébvre first announced this hypothesis of the total urbanization of society (Lefébvre 1970). A little later, Neil Smith introduced the geography of capitalism as an essential part of the production mode. A capitalism geography that reflects the trends to equating and to differentiating with the typical spatial capitalist contradictions through the unequal development. Smith criticizes Ernest Mandel asserting that the unequal development is a function of the contemporary universality of capitalism (Smith 1984). Milton Santos, for his part, explaining the state of the world at the end of the XX Century, remarks the analogy between the state of politics and the state of techniques He asseverated the unicity of technics. (Santos 2000, 23). We should not forget that all these ideas were already implicit in the book of 1845, *The German Ideology* (Marx, Engels 1845 [1970]).

In order to understand the process of the capitalist urbanization evolution and transformation until the planetary stage, it is important to remark three constitutive moments. Firstly, the period of the concentrated urbanization, during the industrial capitalism, with the reinforcement of the concentration of capital and people in one settlement, at the same time that new agglomeration appears. It is the moment of the exclusive urbanization processes of cities and metropolis. Secondly, the extended urbanization indicated all the territories and landscapes transformations beyond the agglomeration, which maintain its role of driving force of the urbanization. Extended urbanization<sup>16</sup> explains the processes of the operationalization by cities of places and territories beyond the concentrations. The implementation of this process occurs in the influence areas of metropolis and cities, in the medium cities, in the large infrastructures crossing the territory, even in the operationalization of wild areas. Finally, appears the differential urbanization processe that implies a real rupture with the inherited social and spatial order. They are different in each socio-spatial formation, because they are acting over very different spaces. They also produce new potential urban spaces that appropriate the already existing urban con-

<sup>13</sup> As Giacomo Becattini and Roberto Camagni.

<sup>14</sup> According to the magazine *Forbes*, on January, 25, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Edition of May, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> This moment of extended urbanization finds a clear relationship with the counter-urbanization process defined by Brian Berry in 1976, and the debates on the compact and diffuse city.

figurations and create new forms of urban space (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

Today the urban phenomenon appears in a more variegated, polymorphic, diverse and multiscalar nature, from these three moments. Its concrete processes are densification of the intrametropolitan networks that demand big infrastructures, restructuring of the great agglomeration's hinterlands, expansion of the industrialized agriculture and destruction of the rural forms of life, as well as the operationalization of the areas before considered *saltus*<sup>17</sup> (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

As seen, the recent processes of urban restructuring originated by the social, political, economic and cultural transformations in the 1970's force to question the traditional way of the urban phenomenon and his present hegemony known as the New Urban Era [NUA] (Brenner, Schmid 2014). The hegemony of NUA is based on the consensus that the urban problems are materialized on the cities, as a settlement typology defined by its dimension, density and diversity that allow the distinction between the city and its outside (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

Because all of this, it is necessary to conclude to discard the theoretic and methodologic tools used until today in the study of agglomeration. Analyze the urban phenomenon today demand to go far beyond, but do not leaving attention to the cities transformations, as well as recreate the useful concepts of the classical urban studies in order to explain our present and open our future (Schmid 2014, 70).

Planetary urbanization is the paradigm that consent these fundamental theoretic reorientations and new methodological proposals. Is the concept that allows the explanation of the present difference, heterogeneity and complexity of urbanization processes. Planetary urbanization, in spite of the fact that the current transformations and changes have a global range because the existence of capitalism all around our world, which surface –and even beyond– is completely urbanized at certain degree, do not implies any kind of homogenization of urbanization. On the contrary, urbanization today is not a unique global process but a complex interplay of related but contradictory processes marked by uneven development of capitalism (Schmid 2018, 2).

Differential urbanization, still in theoretical and interpretative elaboration, together with the other two moments of urbanization summarize the dynamism of today capitalist urban forms in his dialectics between

innovation and obsolescence. It comprises also all the rest of urban processes, concentrated and extended, today fastest and more dynamics, and accelerated at the same rhythm than the contradictions of the capitalism in crisis. The contradictory processes of acceleration and stagnation are territorialized into the relation between space and society, contradicting the everyday life that become more difficult, more unjust, more dangerous and less livable.

This differential urbanization is therefore a moment in the historical evolution of socio-spatial transformations. A moment when could be suspected the systemic and chronic crisis of the capitalist mode of production as known until today. And it is possible to connect it to the dynamics of implosions and explosions summarized by Lefébvre. These are constant and continuous processes of socio-spatial restructuring into and outside of the agglomeration (every day far beyond) that take place in our historical time, the present stage of the capitalist mode of production inaugurated in the 1970's. Lefébvre defined this as a great concentration (of people, activities, capital, goods and objects, tools, means, thoughts) on the urban reality and a biggest crash with the projection of multiple and scattered fragments of peripheries, secondary residences, satellites, etc. (Lefébvre 1970).

With no doubt, the main contradiction is the putting together absolute space and differential space. The first could be defined as the planning space that tends to total homogenization and seize the second, the lived space. This contradiction leads to the question of difference and inequality. It is into the everyday life where the inequality is materialized, and where the difference is expresses and mute. Demonstrate the difference, against the homogenizer pushing, could lead us to the conscience (Santos 2000).

Thus if the urbanization is differential it is also because is fostered and shadowed at the same times by the different forms of urban fight. Here is necessary to put also the conflicts and the competition at all the scales, the war of places in Santos words. Into the denial, there appears also the contestation. The differential space generated by the contradictions of the abstract space (mainly the conceived space of planning) offers also a new horizon of all that is possible. This is at the same time a theoretical and political task<sup>18</sup> (Lefébvre 1970; 1974). In this sense Brenner and Schmid affirm that urbanization is just the mean and the expression of this collision/transformation (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Along with the *saltus*, the unknown and wild where it can be assaulted, are the *ager* and the *polis*, as types of artificialization of the earth, in their Latin denominations.

<sup>18</sup> Lefébvre placed alongside induction and deduction, transduction, the reflection of the possible virtual object.

It is possible to conclude that some social change trends are consolidating. Mainly, the overcoming of the country-city contradiction and the permanent crisis of capitalism modify the vectors of the counter hegemonic movement. The triumphant postmaterialist values of the 1960's are recovered today with the subsistence as the vertebrating axis of the political combat at all the scales. The processes of differential urbanization, in their multiple forms as the logistic urbanization, contribute this recomposition. It is the case, for instance, of the mining sector in Chile which reorganization generate new political subjects from the decline of the peasantry (Arboleda 2017). New political subjects that could produce the constitution of a class for itself. It announces a necessary debate around the emancipatory possibilities that planetary urbanization consents to envisage in our horizon.

The present sanitary emergence and the forwarding economic and social cataclysm are a consolidating part of the general trend invigorated in 2008. We are confronting the sixth decade of a permanent capitalist crisis period that could become chronic for other decades. The end of capitalism seems to be more possible than ever, in spite of the unknown way of his reconfiguration and of which new system will produce (Wallerstein 2013; Streeck 2016). However, we are certain that we are very far from the pompous discourses announcing the triumph of the liberalism, and the social history is open again, if sometimes was really closed. If nothing will be the same than before, we urgently need new theoretical and methodological tools, and normative Social Sciences that could help to develop the perspectives that are today potential in the social history itself.

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