

CAN CONSUMPTION MEDIATE THE RIGHT TO THE (FRAGMENTED) CITY?

IGOR CATALÃO

Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul | Brasil
igorcatalao@gmail.com

MARIA ANGÉLICA MAGRINI

Universidade Federal de Uberlândia | Brasil
angelicaomagrini@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

We have seen in Brazil the last decade as a period of expansion of income and consumption, especially by low purchase power classes. This expansion translates in decrease of socio-economic inequalities. However, the existing cities are highly marked by socio-spatial inequalities and nowadays present the tendency of increase of social segmentation. This reality questions the right to city as a possibility of revalorising the urban life and its sharing. Space is also questioned as mediation of collective life and, as a result, socio-spatial fragmentation erupts as a tendency of contemporary urbanisation. The analysis consists in questioning the right to consumption as potential substitute to the right to city and thinking about the persistence of this right in contexts marked by socio-spatial fragmentation. The presented ideas are based on concluded researches as well as on hypotheses taken from researches currently made in São Paulo state's intermediate cities. The methodology is based on contrapositions of author's ideas and interviews with citizens.

PODE O CONSUMO MEDIAR O DIREITO À CIDADE (FRAGMENTADA)?

RESUMO:

Estamos vivendo, no Brasil, um período de ampliação da renda e do consumo, especialmente pelos segmentos de menor poder aquisitivo, que se traduz em diminuição das desigualdades socioeconômicas. Entretanto, as cidades existentes são caracteristicamente marcadas por grandes desigualdades socioespaciais e, neste momento, apresentam tendência de ampliação da segmentação social. Essa realidade coloca em questão o direito à cidade como possibilidade de revalorização da vida urbana como partilha e do espaço como mediação da vida coletiva, fazendo eclodir a fragmentação socioespacial como tendência mesma da urbanização contemporânea. A análise proposta consiste, portanto, em questionar o direito ao consumo como virtual substituto do direito à cidade e refletir sobre a persistência deste direito em contextos de fragmentação socioespacial. São apresentadas reflexões oriundas de pesquisas concluídas sobre o tema assim como hipóteses extraídas de pesquisas em curso em cidades médias paulistas. A metodologia empregada baseia-se especialmente em contraposições de análises de autores e entrevistas realizadas com cidadãos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES:

Sociedade de consumo
Práticas espaciais
Direito à cidade
Fragmentação
socioespacial

¿PUEDE EL CONSUMO MEDIAR EL DERECHO A LA CIUDAD (FRAGMENTADA)?

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Sociedad de consumo
Prácticas espaciales
Derecho a la ciudad
Fragmentación
socioespacial

RESUMEN:

Estamos viviendo, en Brasil, un período de ampliación del ingreso e del consumo, especialmente por los segmentos de bajo poder adquisitivo, lo que se traduce en la disminución de las desigualdades socioeconómicas. Mientras tanto, las ciudades existentes están característicamente marcadas por grandes desigualdades socioespaciales y, en este momento, presentan tendencia de ampliación de segmentación social. Esa realidad cuestiona el derecho a la ciudad como posibilidad de revaloración de la vida urbana como algo a compartir y del espacio como mediación de la vida colectiva, haciendo brotar la fragmentación socioespacial como tendencia misma de la urbanización contemporánea. El análisis propuesto consiste, por lo tanto, en cuestionar el derecho al consumo como virtual sustituto del derecho a la ciudad y reflexionar sobre la persistencia de este derecho en contextos de fragmentación socioespacial. Se presentan reflexiones derivadas de investigaciones concluidas sobre el tema e hipótesis extraídas de investigaciones en curso en ciudades intermedias paulistas. La metodología utilizada se basa esencialmente en contraposiciones de análisis de autores y entrevistas fechas con ciudadanos.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the transformations and changes that cities and urban life have being undergone since the post-war period, especially as a result of the ongoing productive restructuring, of its direct and indirect consequences and what can be called urban restructuring (SOJA, 1993; SPOSITO, 2007), the search for the "right to city" or, more modestly, an attempt to question the permanence of its senses and possibilities of realisation, serves as a means to evaluate the directions of contemporary urbanization.

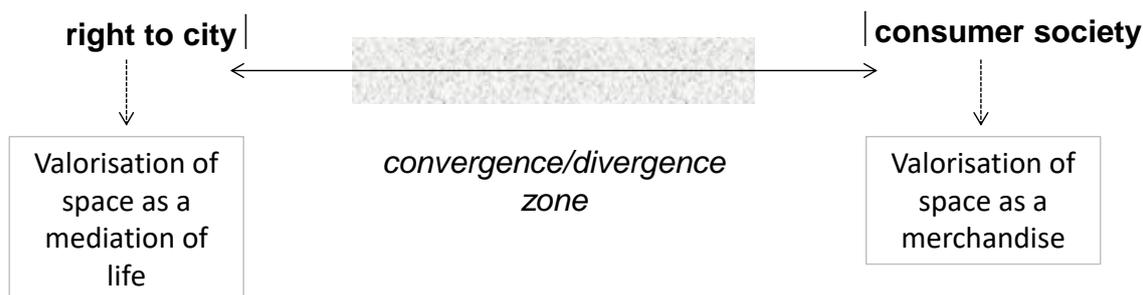
It was Henri Lefebvre (2006) who firstly thought it is necessary to discuss the right to city in a moment of great theoretical-critical and political effervescence, on the eve of the advent of the Technological Revolution and resulting socio-spatial transformations. Since then, much has been said about the theme and, in the Brazilian case, it even came to compose the agenda of social movements in the struggle for housing and a fairer city. Even so, it is not possible to speak of a direct passage from the lefebvrian right to city to its version inscribed in Brazilian law from the actions of social movements, because they are things of a different nature, which do not necessarily keep a semantic coincidence.

In lefebvrian theory, the right to city arises as a need to revalue urban life in its associative sense of space sharing, a mediation that allows social relations to be concretised. This concern of the author serves as a warning about the growing importance that consumption was, at the time, gaining in daily life, laying the foundations of a society that today it is possible to see with more clarity: "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" (LEFEBVRE, 1971, 1999).

According to Soja (1993), what the Technological Revolution – with the consecutive productive restructuring – inaugurates is a greater gain of importance of the reproduction of social relations over the relations of production or, in other words, in the triad production-circulation-consumption, it is this last one that predominates. In this direction, if the

merchandise already played a role of mediation of relations, including in this category the space itself, today this role is reinforced.

Following the lefebvrian line of thought, we can accept that the full attainment of the right to city lies at a point diametrically opposite to that one occupied by consumption, although there is a zone of convergence between both. This happens because the valorisation of space in the city, what is a necessary condition for the achievement of this right, is understood in the society of controlled consumption much more as capitalist valorisation of urban land. The following diagram graphically represents this idea, even with some risk of simplification.



The set of ideas outlined until now allows us to understand that the search for the right to city necessarily involves confrontations in multiple instances, from everyday relations to the arena of broader political and economic decisions.

In urban Brazil, at the heart of the disputes between, on the one hand, social movements and organized civil society and, on the other, hegemonic political-economic groups, with the purpose of solving the housing problem and the precariousness of city life, the notion of Right to city was incorporated into the law via the Estatuto da Cidade [Statute of City] (BRASIL, 2001). However, it is not an attempt to adapt the lefebvrian right to city to the Brazilian reality, even though there may be a coincidence of terms.

The Statute results from a long and broad process of debate and political engagement of urban social movements for the democratisation of the city and presents the guidelines for national urban policy in the following terms:

Art. 2º [...]

I – garantia do direito a cidades sustentáveis, entendido como o direito à terra urbana, à moradia, ao saneamento ambiental, à infraestrutura urbana, ao transporte e aos serviços públicos, ao trabalho e ao lazer, para as presentes e futuras gerações [...]¹.

The incorporation of the right to city in these guidelines represents a victory in terms of recognition of the nature and purpose of the city as mediation of life, which must therefore be fairer and egalitarian – notably in times of dispute with succeeding neoliberal governments since redemocratisation. Nevertheless, there is no mention to the fundamental concerns that should base a broad understanding of the right to city, amongst them the recognition of space as a transformative potentiality (SOJA, 2003). As a result, the right to

¹ Article 2 [...] I – guarantee of the right to sustainable cities, understood as the right to urban land, housing, environmental sanitation, urban infrastructure, transportation and public services, work and leisure for present and future generations [...] (free translation).

city attaches itself to the obscure idea of the “social function of property”, which indicates that it is not the same right of Lefebvre’s thought (1970, 1999, 2006). The Statute, under the pretext of looking at the left-hand point of the above-mentioned scheme to contemplate the aspirations of social movements, reached the right point, benefiting, as historically has been done, the hegemonic political-economic groups. The result is ineffectiveness in applying the guidelines and reinforcing the centrality of consumption² as a guide of city life.

Baitz (2011) explains this idea very well when he states that, despite the efforts made by the responsible agents, the application of the Statute guidelines not only did not generate the expected results, but also contradictorily promoted its inverse. The author, then, argues that the misunderstanding can only be contained in the law itself and not in its application. This misconception would concern, amongst other aspects, the subordination of the social function of property to an urban planning based on a more economic than political nature. This point of view relies on the idea that certain problems only persist because we try to solve them with economic measures when their solution necessarily passes through political measures, as Lummis (1992) asserts in analyzing the problem of wealth in the world. For him, poverty is not the problem to be faced, but wealth, which is its antagonistic generator. This idea reverses the whole perspective of reflection on why certain projects are ineffective.

Especially during the last four decades, we have seen in Brazilian cities the increase in socio-spatial inequalities³ and the polarization between the different socioeconomic classes, which contributes, in almost all cases, to the intensification of segregation and, in some of them, to the emergence of socio-spatial fragmentation. Part of this reality is due to the inefficiency of the law and/or its application, since the superficiality of the notion of the right to city contained in the Statute and its developments would hardly be able to sustain any emancipatory transformation of citizens. As a result, it was not capable of echoing neither in public administration nor in the collective conscience of the population (CATALÃO, 2013).

Based on this understanding, what is proposed below is a discussion about the relationship between the right to city and socio-spatial fragmentation. The consumption is understood as a mediating element of the analysis. Two topics compose the text, one aimed at articulating fragmentation and consumption and a second one proposed to problematise the right to city in the contemporary city. The text presents, at the end, a series of questions that close the ideas contained here and open new ways of reflection.

We call attention to the theoretical-essayistic character of this contribution, which is the result of concerns of previous research, already completed, and the development of new research, still ongoing⁴. Even so, some efforts to incorporate empirical elements are made, as they contribute to the debate, although we recognize that the empirical contribution is still insufficient to fully ratify the hypotheses we work with, but they delineate in a clear way, as we will try to demonstrate.

² Consumption, in capitalist society, can only be thought in its inseparable relation to production and circulation, based on the existence of private property.

³ Even though, in general, there may be a decrease in socioeconomic inequalities, as a recent study by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA, 2012) shows. In the context of recent Brazilian history, the period of 2001-2011 can be mentioned as the “inclusive decade”.

⁴ Mainly two ongoing research projects: “Urbanisation and socio-spatial fragmentation in non-metropolitan contexts”, financed by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), and “Economic logics and contemporary spatial practices: intermediate cities and consumption”, financed by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP).

CONSUMPTION AND SOCIO-SPATIAL FRAGMENTATION

In the context of the search for the senses and possibilities for the achievement of the right to city, under the complexity of the expression thought by Henri Lefebvre, it becomes necessary to highlight some contents that characterise the process of contemporary urbanisation and that help us to understand the obstacles placed in the attainment of this right. In addition to the legal and political limitations and the overlapping of the exchange value over the use value in the production of space, as already mentioned, it is also important to highlight the growing transposition of the figure of the citizen to that of the consumer, as Santos (2012) and Canclini (2010) say. Citizens today tend to orient their daily practices and establish their identities and desires from the private consumption of goods, spaces and symbols, what fosters individualisms that undermine the construction of constitutive values of citizenship. It is, therefore, an opposition to the right to city as it is understood as a struggle for a right to a collective and supportive life that makes the city a historical success of sharing of space and, through this, of human and urban experiences.

We can consider two important aspects that place the debate on consumption in relation to citizenship and, therefore, to the right to city. The first concerns a more general context in which capitalist relations based on the private accumulation of the wealth generated collectively and the holdings that sustain it prevent significant advances in terms of access, rupture of hierarchies and establishment of equity, which would be crucial elements both for full citizenship and for the attainment of the right to city. The second aspect concerns the characteristics of our socio-spatial formation, conditioned by the perverse and excluding way as capitalist development has occurred, especially since the military dictatorship (1964-1986). In this context, a significant contingent of people has for decades been deprived of basic rights which, in the central countries of the global capitalist economy, were guaranteed by the welfare State. This means that access to the consumption of goods, services, products and spaces today represents a late redemption of a certain possibility of integration into society, which is done in a limited way, because it is not followed by the achievement of other basic rights of public domain at levels guaranteeing social equity, such as education, health, and social security.

In this sense, in the specific Brazilian case, the expansion of the access of different social classes to consumption in the decade of 2004-2014 cannot be confused with increasing access to the city or to urban life, not even it can be understood as a precursor to a spatial justice, according to Soja's (2010) reflections. Discussions about transformations in the Brazilian social structure, for example, by increasing the income of the popular groups and the facilities related to personal credit in the mentioned decade, should therefore be followed by reflections on the negative potential that the expansion of consumption may entail. We do not affirm, however, that this expansion should not occur or, even less, that groups of lower purchasing power should continue to consume insufficiently⁵.

The endorsement that we have lived in Brazil a period of improvements in population consumption patterns (POCHMAN, 2012) must then be counterposed by the fact that this consumption continues to occur on undeniable unequal bases. Considering the quality of the products consumed, the percentage of family income committed monthly, the spaces chosen for the achievement of the different consumption patterns or even the meanings attributed to

⁵ There is also a debate about the positive potential of consumption as an element of citizenship achievement as proposed by Tascher (2010).

the act of consuming, we can observe very different situations, which highlights the need to deepen the issue.

A contribution that qualifies this debate is the one elaborated by Souza (2009, p. 43) in highlighting the production of an illusory imaginary of freedom and equality in contemporary society, which is used to justify inequalities. This imagery is based on the valuation of personal merit in a context of supposed equal opportunities. From this point of view, poverty is seen as the result of the lack of individual efforts, since the possibilities of achievement would be available to all. There is thus the arrangement of a “fair inequality” – because it can be individually overcome – that legitimises the existence of privileges for some individuals and the precariousness of the conditions of access to goods and services for others.

In other words, the centrality of consumption in the definition of daily practices and in the formulation of the ideals and aspirations of citizens ends up emptying the possibilities of a citizen's appropriation of contemporary cities by deconstructing the bases of sharing, belonging and reflection about life in society. It is, therefore, an extension of the breakdown of the social contract that historically founds the city and puts in check its permanence as the most successful human construction for life as a sharing experience (FARAH, 2011; CATALÃO, 2013).

At a time when the solution to different social problems is given in the context of individual consumption, this becomes the goal and not the means to achieve life. What moves urban spatial practices is not, then, living and experiencing the city, but rather consuming in/the city.

Our understanding of consumption covers a diversity of meanings, although the direction of our analysis is based on the significance of access to certain types of goods, products and spaces as central elements of city life. In this sense, banal consumption is a means of integration into the consumer society, since those who do not consume tend to become invisible. We are, therefore, criticizing the consumption of the merchandise based on its extension as the central mediation of life. Appropriating space, acquiring goods and contracting services necessary for survival is therefore not included in the strategies of consumption that we are problematising, considering its importance for life. We focus on the individualising and disaggregating characteristic of consumption from access to consumables in a context of restricted citizenship. This characteristic is one of the elements that, in the cities, reinforces the tendency of socio-spatial fragmentation, because it separates the citizens in terms of practices and imaginary as well as the spaces produced.

We affirm then that the socio-spatial fragmentation, observed as a tendency of the current stage of the urbanisation process – more advanced in some spaces, less in others – is configured as the antithesis of the right to city, both as regards its concretization and its persistence as an ideal to be sought.

The dialectic pairing togetherness/avoidance in its relationship with alterity has always been a component of citizens' life, with expressions in different processes juxtaposed throughout historical urbanisation, such as differentiation and socio-spatial segregation. In contemporary cities, we can observe a tendency to weaken the joints that unite the different parts of the city, following a logic of separation and avoidance, tendentially extreme in relation to the different spaces and social classes. In this sense, we identify at this stage of the urbanisation process the appearance of socio-spatial fragmentation, since the differences – even if demarcated – have always been somewhat reconciled, a fact that tends to be less and

less present in the daily life of contemporary cities, especially in Brazil for historical reasons related, for example, to colonisation and slavery.

These aspects have been verified, from different perspectives, in cities of different dimensions and roles, for example, in metropolises such as Lisbon (SALGUEIRO, 1997), Rio de Janeiro (RIBEIRO, 1999), Buenos Aires (PRÉVÔT-SCHAPIRA, 2000, 2008), Mexico City (SARAVÍ, 2008), Curitiba or Brasília (CATALÃO, 2013), and in intermediate cities such as Araçatuba (MAGRINI, 2013), São Carlos, Marília or Presidente Prudente (SPOSITO and GÓES, 2013), amongst others. Despite the singularities related to each context, which need to be sought and explained, we consider that the socio-spatial fragmentation is a process that denotes a unification of the urban segmentation logics, mediating the socio-spatial practices in different cities and indicating the consolidation of urban society (LEFEBVRE, 1999) in perverse terms.

Based on Salgueiro's (1997) propositions, we highlight four aspects that characterise, although not in a closed or univocal way, cities marked by socio-spatial fragmentation: a) existence of enclaves, represented by closed spaces, that break the unity of the urban tissue surrounding them; b) structuring of the city based on a selective multipolicentrality and a reticular spatial configuration; c) contradictory tendency to a mixture of uses in the different spaces without coexistence of relations of different socioeconomic classes; and (d) the apparent random pattern of new urban settlements, especially high-standard ones, which can be located in both the centre and the periphery. In addition, we understand socio-spatial fragmentation as a process that crosses multiple constitutive dimensions of cities, such as spatial practices of different agents and urban imaginaries, besides the morphologies mentioned before (MAGRINI, 2013).

An important analytical matrix for advancing in the conceptualisation of the socio-spatial fragmentation process is the study of the different dimensions of consumption, inasmuch as the locational choices of the economic agents and, in relation thereto, the urban practices of the citizens contain in themselves the keys to the understanding of urban life in the context of socio-spatial fragmentation. Gated communities and shopping malls, for example, are emblematic representatives of the socio-spatial enclaves in which the urban daily life of the middle and upper classes unfolds. On the other hand, popular settlements, such as those produced under the Minha Casa, Minha Vida [My Home My Life] Programme, in many cases also represent habitats based on enclosure, although the justification logics are different.

An important point to note is that the process of socio-spatial fragmentation cannot be understood only from the perspective of the production of closed or controlled access spaces. Outside these spaces, in what could be metaphorically denominate as “open city”, the spatial practices of citizens have been increasingly selective and for this reason also corroborate the existence of socio-spatial fragmentation⁶.

The complexity of the duality between the poor and the rich is another important element that we emphasise for the understanding of the socio-spatial fragmentation, since not only citizens of greater income accomplishe selective practices. Many studies⁷ have observed a generalised tendency of selection and social and spatial avoidance in the daily life

⁶ Some authors have indicated this trend. We especially highlight, but not exclusively: Ribeiro (1999), Magrini (2013), Catalão (2013), and Sposito and Góes (2013).

⁷ We are not going to give exhaustive references on the subject. For example, we would just like to mention: Jaillet (1999), Prévôt-Schapiro (2000), Costa (2002), Serpa (2004) and Saraví (2008), amongst other references at the end of the text.

of contemporary cities that needs to be better analysed.

These outcomes help to problematise the struggle for the right to city. While we create scientific analysis that reveal the need to overcome the barriers and “tear down the walls”, citizens outside them continue to strive for better income conditions to enter via consumption these gated spaces, not only the residential ones, but also and especially the consumer ones like shopping malls.

We emphasise, therefore, that the notions of sharing and living amongst different people, what is necessary for the establishment of dialogues and exchanges that strengthen citizenship and, consequently, reinforce the organic historical role of the city already mentioned, need to be rescued so that spatial justice can become effective.

THE RIGHT TO THE FRAGMENTED CITY: IS IT POSSIBLE?

Gomes (2006), analysing citizenship, presents an important direction for us to think about the right to city. For the author, space is a fundamental component for the existence of citizenship, and therefore of justice, ethics, solidarity and equity, which forces us to understand it as mediation of life instead of course accident of human existence. Contradictory, however, space also fulfills the role of mediation of everyday socio-spatial features that sustain the fragmentation of the city.

The attainment of citizenship is conditioned to the individual and effective exercise of rights in their social correlations and to the fulfillment of duties that guarantee to others this exercise. In this way, in order to ensure that citizenship is a full condition, it is necessary to treat individuals and groups with equality and justice in order to avoid the restriction of rights and oppression of the majority over marginalised groups (CATALÃO, 2013). This understanding, although of fundamental importance in the seek for the overcoming of inequalities and for a spatial justice, makes explicit the conflict inherent to fragmentation of the contemporary city, because specifically the city produced under this pattern is based on the separation of groups and the tendential impossibility of coexistence between them.

On the one hand, according to Lefebvre (1970), the right to difference bases, in a way, all other rights, especially the right to city. On the other hand, fragmentation is a process of tendential denial of the differences of others, and therefore of alterity. We have a stalemate. The city, which should firstly be the locus of tolerance and acceptance of differences, becomes the means of preventing their coexistence. If, for Gomes (2006), space marks the contradiction between the need to live together and the conflicts that togetherness creates, the fragmentation represents the crisis of this contradiction by the option (voluntary or involuntary) for non-conviviality.

There is a polarisation taking place in the peripheries – more common in metropolises, but growing in intermediate cities – between, on the one hand, “fortified enclaves” (CALDEIRA, 1997) and consumer centres under surveillance and, on the other, housing estates and precarious housing areas, and even *favelas*. This polarisation expresses the limits to the attainment of the right to difference and urban togetherness, therefore, to the city itself. In other words, socio-spatial fragmentation exists as an antithesis of the right to city. Then what role does consumption play in this relationship?

In Catalão (2013), reports of interviews conducted with residents of the metropolitan peripheries of Brasilia and Curitiba have demonstrated, either explicitly or implicitly, some

discontent with urban life, only remediable by means of an increase in income to enable a new level of consumption. Consumption appears, therefore, as a supposed marker of citizenship and justice.

In interviews⁸ carried out in the cities of Marília, São Carlos, Presidente Prudente and Ribeirão Preto, in São Paulo state, the increase in the variety of spaces destined for consumption, especially those related to large brands, has appeared as an indication of the improvement of urban life and the progress of these cities. On the other hand, the limited choice of shops and services, the absence of certain specific brands, the reduced service hours of some establishments, for example, still appear as negative points of these cities.

Accompanying this, some interviewees emphasised the lack of resources to consume certain products or services, a condition that needs to be improved in their lives. In order to understand the relationship between the right to city and consumption, the following interview is emblematic, since, when asked about the desire to attend other spaces in the city, which would be difficult to access, the interviewee responds that what he would like is to have more resources to consume.

Researcher: *E haveria em Marília algum setor, alguma parte da cidade que você gostaria de frequentar, mas não consegue frequentar porque o acesso é muito difícil?*

Interviewee: *Eu gostaria de ter mais dinheiro para comprar mais, para gastar assim... em coisas de que eu realmente gosto, eu gosto de coisa boa, sabe?... Coisas de qualidade [...]*⁹ (decorator, 49 years old, family income of approximately 4 minimum wages, living in Jardim California, Marília/SP; interview conducted on 2013).

In this same sense, another interviewee also carried out the association between appropriation of the city and consumption.

Researcher: *Há algum setor da cidade de Presidente Prudente que você gostaria de frequentar, mas não frequenta?*

Interviewee: *O shopping. Se tivéssemos melhores condições para entrar, passar um tempo lá dentro, tomar um sorvete, comer uma pizza, por exemplo, nós iríamos, nós temos vontade. Não que deixemos de comer, mas nós compramos e levamos para casa*¹⁰ (gardener, 53 years old, family income of 2 minimum wages, living in Álvares Machado/SP, suburb of Presidente Prudente; interview conducted in 2013).

Even if these statements were collected from interviews that dealt with consumption, which indicates a certain trend of directing the points of view, the statements make it

⁸ In all, 88 interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2015 in the cities of Marília, São Carlos, Presidente Prudente, Ribeirão Preto, São José do Rio Preto and Londrina, this last one in Paraná state. Different researchers from the research team dedicated themselves to this work, following a predefined questionnaire, addressing the following topics: interviewee profile, products purchased, frequency and places of purchase, means of transportation, ways of payment, changes and perspectives of consumption.

⁹ Researcher: And there would be in Marília any area, any part of the city that you would like to attend, but cannot attend because the access is very difficult? Interviewee: I would like to have more money to buy more, to spend like this... on things that I really like, I like good stuff, you know?... Quality stuff [...] (we decided to keep the original transcription of the interviews in the text and include a free translation in order to avoid misunderstandings due to colloquial oral discourse).

¹⁰ Researcher: Is there any area in the city of Presidente Prudente that you would like to attend but you do not attend? Interviewee: The mall. If we had better conditions to get in, to spend time in there, to have an ice cream, to eat a pizza, for example, we would go, we feel like it. Not that we stop eating, but we buy and take it home.

possible to formulate a hypothesis that consumption is central to the definition of urban experiences and in the composition of the citizens' wishes, that is, an emptying of the meanings of life in the city.

We identify then a transposition of the right to city for the right to consumption as a means of both the experience and the yearnings of urban life. At the same time, that access to housing was facilitated – through access to public funding, for example, through the Minha Casa, Minha Vida Programme – along with the consumption of household appliances, furniture and automobiles, for example – which were guaranteed by the credit facilities and the valorisation of salary, especially the minimum wage¹¹. Even though, significant portions of the city's population continue to live in precarious conditions without having guaranteed essential rights such as health and education. We do not advocate that advances should not be recognised, but we understand that it must be pointed out that consumption itself is not capable of establishing a more egalitarian and fair society. On the contrary, what we observe through the interviews is that for each citizen the act of consuming involves different (and unequal) strategies that must be elucidated, since the conditions that are behind this consumption are very different.

Another element that the interviews have allowed us to observe concerns Lefebvre's (2006) view that the right to city should not be considered monolithic in the face of the fact that urban life is not unequivocal and cannot be defined from the outside. We cannot preset a single standard of what the right to city should be, since there are different cities and different ways of living them. They interfere with a multiplicity and transitoriness of aspects, which not only relate to the income pattern, but which are also of a cultural and generational nature, gender and family situation, amongst other aspects that need to be better investigated.

The shopping mall, for example, appears as a centre of consumption and leisure that, although it has become popular in the last decades, notably in intermediate cities, is not attractive to the integrality of people, as was practically the case of the traditional city centre previously. Some older respondents, from different socioeconomic classes, reported that they do not usually attend these spaces, either because of lack of habit or because they do not find any identification there, while their children attend with quite regularity. The following interview excerpts demonstrate the complexity of practices and meanings associated with shopping malls, which go beyond strictly income-related aspects and could lead to a simplistic understanding that the rich attends to shopping malls and the poor does not.

Researcher: *Para você, o shopping é um espaço de lazer ou não?*

Interviewee: *Não. Para mim não, eu não gosto daquele vuco vuco, daquele movimento. Às vezes, eu vou levar os netos para tomar um lanche, para comer alguma coisa. [...] É porque eles gostam* (professor and lawyer, family income of approximately 11 minimum wages, resident in Marília/SP; interview conducted in 2013).

Interviewee: *Shopping também. Eu gosto de passear no shopping, eu e a minha filha. Já o meu marido e meu filho passam longe* (51-year-old journalist, with a family income of approximately 7 minimum wages who lives in Ribeirão Preto; interview conducted in 2014).

Interviewee: *Mulher, faz muito tempo que eu não vou nem ao Calçadão. No Prudenshopping, eu acho um desaforo tão grande, eu nem entro lá, porque eu acho um absurdo; você já vai gastar e ainda tem que pagar*

¹¹ The Brazilian minimum wage was of approximately 226 US dollars in January 2016.

*estacionamento, eu fico tão revoltada com isso. Eu nunca fui de shopping e essas coisas*¹² (56-year-old volunteer, with family income of approximately 4 minimum wages who lives in Presidente Prudente/SP; interview conducted in 2012).

Consumption, for both the poor and the wealthy classes, can be a major factor in the city – dislocations to look for specific brands, sale off, types of products, forms of payment, etc. It does not necessarily mean full access to all spaces, much of it, for example, with restricted access, and not even a greater appropriation, because they are linked to segmented practices and imaginaries.

Access to consumption, therefore, cannot be understood as access to the city and as a precursor to a spatial justice, although, in the scope of Brazilian society, its increase means a step forward in terms of improving living conditions, especially of the poorest populations.

AS A CONCLUSION: PERSPECTIVES

The set of reflections previously developed shows us possible ways to understand the city and to search for solutions to the problems identified, which we present below from the contraposition between hypothetical assertions and questions.

Being the fragmentation a condition of contemporary urbanisation, it has the tendency to settle in all urban spaces, while respecting their specificities. In this sense, we ask: how do different scales of the fragmentation process combine to produce everyday realities? How do local characteristics respond to general processes and vice versa? Are intermediate cities the ones with the greatest tendency to avoid spaces by middle-income classes? What daily possibilities exist to overcome this situation?

If fragmentation is, in fact, the antithesis of the right to city, it is the urban struggles for the establishment of this right that will represent the way to overcome inequalities and, more broadly, for the reinstitution of the collective life contract that the city historically incarnates. That is, the right to city needs to be understood more as a revolutionary struggle (HARVEY, 2014) than as access to urban goods and services.

As already asserted, consumption increasingly represents the mediation of social relations, even though, contradictorily, it fulfills the role of being one of the reinforcements of social-spatial fragmentation. This leads us to accept that it is a fragile mediation, because it is not based on strong links of sociability, but on the capacity of purchasing power, which separates and segregates the different socioeconomic classes instead of allowing an equitable collective life and solidarity. Is this, in the case of Brazil, a transitory situation, given the recent expansion of consumption in that country? How does this reality occur in countries where access to consumption has been expanded for longer? What potential exist in the

¹² Researcher: For you, is shopping a leisure space or not?

Interviewee: No. Not for me, I do not like that *vuco vuco* [Brazilian expression that represents a crowded place], that movement. Sometimes I take the grandchildren out for a snack, to eat something. [...] It is because they like it.

Interviewee: Shopping mall too. I like to walk in the mall, my daughter and me, but my husband and son pass away from there.

Interviewee: Well, I have not been to the boardwalk for a long time. At Prudenshopping, I think such an outrage, I do not even go there, because I think it is an absurd; you are already going to spend and you still have to pay parking, I get so angry about it. I have never liked mall and this kind of stuff (free translation).

access to consumption (TASCHER, 2010) that would allow the expansion of citizenship and, therefore, the production of fairer cities?

Lastly, we also affirm that, at present, the right to consumption has been presented as a potential substitute for the right to city, even though it cannot be understood in any way as an equitable right to urban life, because it does not cover elements that are essential to it. What possibilities, therefore, can be seen for future urban life in terms of reducing socio-spatial inequalities? How can one seek social justice and the promotion of equal rights without promoting spatial justice and a more equitable redistribution of the uses of space (CATALÃO, 2013)?

These questions provide guidelines for reflection and the need to rethink not only the right to city as *u-topia* (LEFEBVRE, 1999), but also the contemporary potentialities of building new subjectivities that support a more current, more engaged and more questioning citizenship. We will not go forward, at this moment, in the attempt to answer these questions, because there are still contents of the researches to be analysed. This does not invalidate the set of reflections and questions that we present in this article, which had as objective to discuss, from the field observations, the readings and analysis of part of the interviews, the theoretical elements that based the analysis.

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