

RICARDO CARNEIRO

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Title: Exploring an hypothesis: Right to the City — A theoretical frame for An analytical tool?

[slide de abertura]

Good Afternoon to all.

This presentation is made within the scope of the ongoing Ph.D. investigation, focusing on the problematic of social production of space, specifically on the process of capitalist production of the city, and the impossibility of collective construction in its context.

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Social and economic changes of recent decades, the persistence of recurring financial crisis and their social consequences led to an accelerated deterioration of people's lives and the consequent explosion of urban conflicts, bringing the city and the processes of its production to the forefront of debate.

In these, the ‘Right to the City’ became an ideal of social struggles and political movements, covering worldwide to similar motos to a wide variety of contexts, spanning a contradictory range of theoretical reconstructions and practical experimentations.

So, the question arose:

If change is necessary, can this radical philosophical and theoretical concept, revolutionary in its assence, be a frame for an analytical tool? Is it possible to comprehend — to understand the limits — of capitalist production of space, from the Right to the City?

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As formulated by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, the concept introduced the specific notion of collective transformation of the city through the social production of space from the standing point of non dominant social strata. With three deep conceptual, theoretial changes regarding the aprehsion of spatiality and of its conformation:

- first, the fact that space, territory, city and place are socialy produced, linking social relations, organization, pratices and processes to its physical embodiment.

- second, the fact the experienced contradictions, oppression and exploitation of capitalist relations were present in spatial products, linking social, economical, political and cultural inequity, segregation and discrimination to their specific places.
- third, the fact that radical change — revolutionary transformation — of space, territory, city or place, is indissociable of a radical change of social relations, organization, practices and processes.

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Converging from different cultural and social claims or specific urban demands the Right to the City has been progressively deepened and/or adapted. Although some appropriations may tend to narrow its contents, dilute its transformative principles or its critical object, it became a platform regarding a convergence demanding political engagement and collective participation on decisions over the collective future.

An example of this compromise is the World Charter for the Right to the City. Is it a compromise — demanding different urban practices without demanding a social change? Is it a step forward — bringing to popular reflection the decision over their future?

How can this help? Is it possible to take some of these developments on to the definition of an analytical tool that can assess popular interference in this process of spatial production?

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One can argue that from late sixties to present day a considerable amount of social, political and economical changes occurred. Nevertheless, as the fundamentals of capitalism remain unchanged, fundamental questions remain.

The globalization of capitalist relations introduced profound transformations, not only to the form that take social relations but namely to the perception of space, time, scale, collectivity and society itself. And, consequently, to the ways we shape our territories.

But didn't respond to the needs of the so called 99%, nor to the cry of socialization of the societal reproduction process.

At a more closer scale the contractualization of social and spatial relations and the constriction of political rights and liberties gradually disconnected the collective action and popular decision from the process of urban transformation, reducing its frame to the places and times of planning laws and regulations.

From a marxist standpoint or not, the critique and analysis of these processes has continued and recently multiplied, providing a broader insight on both the social ou spatial scales, iluminating the relations between capital and spatiality and their own relations to democracy.

Some of these scholars, researchers, militants or activists, like David Harvey, have achived world recognition and justly became a banner of the Right to the City, taking the radical conceptual scope and goals of its original formulation to the concrete processes.

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This takes us to a apparent difficulty. If, like Harvey put it, we change ourselves by changing the city, — how and to what end must we probe capitalist relations and practices towards the construction of an analytical tool, focusing on the territorial instance of previously mentioned capitalist production od space?

From marxist standing point, the analytical object of progressive approach is undoutly social and spatial practice itself. To this end, two approximation vectors were determined.

The first, whose questions and preliminary approaches are presented, refer to the deeper, global, process of capitalist production of space, its consequences and derivations to and on social practices. The form each of these dimensions, instances, practices, forms of organization and relation socialy take, projects on the process of spatial transformation distinctive nuances that draw what we perceive as territorial and urban change and our own part in that process.

In this context, property — of capital, land or others means of production, — class relations and organization, regulation, just to point a few, are of particular interest, given their explicit territorial expression and the tendency of hyper-legislation frame of today.

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On the other hand, global changes and the deepening of capitalist relations introduced or induced destructive dynamics to the possibility— better yet, the effective capacity — of popular and political action and organization, either through over-regulation, following the trend of absolute contractual relations and social processes, either by disruption of conditions of labour.

Spatial and time constrictions play, a particularly strong part in production of capitalist space. The conquest of Time, and not only Space, is a fundamental issue when looking for an horizon of collective construction, of collectivization of the production of space.

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All these dimensions of social relations appear to be deeply disconnected from the concrete processes of territorial and urban transformation, being mediated successively by different levels of regulation, which mold not only the formal relation between social agents, but allows or promotes in a more or less explicit or veiled manner, class domination over the process.

Under capitalism, regulation of spatial and political relational instances presents itself as a segregation instance and therefore an instrument to constrict popular interference on territorial transformation.

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A clear example of these restrictions is, on portuguese regulatory complex of territorial planning and urban definition, the level of implication of proprietors (the owners of capital, of land, of others means of production) and non-proprietors over the process of territorial transformation, with a much more 'lighter' interference from the ones the city is supposed built for.

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Finally, is it possible to stabilize some conclusions towards the materialization an operative analytical tool?

Synthesising the previous questions, it is possible to define the dimensions to assess, in order to accomplish:

- the possibility of social management or self-management of each given process;
- the degree of collectivization of the production of space;

- the possibility of transformation of social and spatial practices;
- the possibility of social experimentation.

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So, back to Lefebvre and the Right to the City.

What is here presented is a preliminary design of a possible analytical tool, yet to be densified, yet to be tested.

Nevertheless, it presupposes that the analytical core is not the process itself, but the social practices and relations who substantiates it.

Each of these dimensions determine a specific level of potencial popular interference — from decision to information, or even ignorance — and a social scale of intervention over the process of production of space spanning, desirebly, the whole of the social process od production of space.

The aim is to develop this preliminary design to each analytical dimension its parameters, parallel to the permanent testing of each foreseeable step.

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And since this whole thing isn't really working, and paraphrasing Beto Francisco, from São Paulo:

Until when the development of Urban to the detriment of the Human?