


Socio-spatial segregation and the “right to the city”

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p. 412-424

revista

Geo 
USP
espaço e tempo

Volume 24 • nº 3 (2020)

ISSN 2179-0892

Como citar este artigo:

CARLOS, A. F. A. Socio-spatial segregation and the “right to the city”. **Geosp – Espaço e Tempo** (On-line), v. 24, n. 3, p. 412-424, dez. 2020. ISSN 2179-0892.

Available at: <http://www.revistas.usp.br/geosp/article/view/177180>. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geosp.2020.177180>.



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Abstract

The ideas in this article are developed according to the hypothesis that the private ownership of wealth, in its various forms, is at the foundation of the production of urban space. At this moment in the historical process, property is abstract. As such, property dominates the social relations that take place concretely in a space characterized by segregation and experienced as a negation of the city. These elements shed light on the struggles surrounding the right to the city.

Keywords: Property. Segregation. City. Urban space. Contradiction.

Segregação socioespacial e o “direito à cidade”

Resumo

As ideias contidas neste artigo se desdobram da hipótese segundo a qual a propriedade privada da riqueza, em suas várias formas, está no fundamento da produção do espaço urbano. A propriedade aparece, neste momento do processo histórico, como abstrata. Nessa condição, a propriedade domina as relações sociais que se realizam, concretamente, num espaço marcado pela segregação e vivida como a negação da cidade. Esses elementos iluminam as lutas entorno do direito à cidade.

Palavras-chave: Propriedade. Segregação. Cidade. Espaço urbano. Contradição.

Segregación socio-espacial y el “derecho a la ciudad”

Resumen

Las ideas contenidas en este artículo se desarrollan a partir de la hipótesis de que la propiedad privada de la riqueza, en sus diversas formas, está en la base de la producción del espacio urbano como momento del proceso histórico que lo torna abstracto. En esta condición, la propiedad domina las relaciones sociales que se desarrollan concretamente en un espacio marcado por la segregación y vivido como el otro de la ciudad. Estos elementos iluminan las luchas por el derecho a la ciudad

Palabras clave: Propiedad. Segregación. Ciudad. Espacio urbano. Contradicción.

In the book *Utopia*, written in 1518, Thomas More warns that “as long as the right to property is the foundation of the social edifice, the most numerous and esteemed class will have nothing in common except torment, famine and despair” (Morus, 1998, p. 63). Centuries later, property has continued its path, now abstract (that is, private) in form, dominating and differentiating individuals. In 1905, in the book *The Earth and its Inhabitants*, Reclus writes (2010, p. 43) “One overriding fact dominates all of modern civilization, the fact that the property of a single person can increase indefinitely, and even, by virtue of almost universal consent, encompass the entire world”.

As it expands, it subsumes all social relations into its logic. Ownership of the means of production and of land spans across history, becoming abstract in capitalism with its legal and, consequently, naturalized, form. Therefore, property in the modern world developed far beyond the world of objects created in the production process, taking over the city and, in this case, separating the society that produces the city, from its own construction, renewing alienation to this day. As such, the urban society experiences the city as something external, generating struggles in space, for space to live, in the city.

The hypothesis that we present in this article is that the existence of the private ownership of wealth (generated by all members of society) is at the foundation of socio-spatial segregation, which characterizes contemporary society as a form of social inequality. This perspective assumes that the production of the city as a commercial product, under capitalism, involves a dual determination of work: it is, at the same time (and dialectically), a use value (human existence occurs through the uses of space-times in the city) and an exchange value (the city is an opportunity for capitalist production, as a process for producing added value). This means that the socially-produced city, under the aegis of capitalism, becomes a commodity.

Consequently, the production of urban space creates a juxtaposition of social hierarchy and spatial hierarchy.

This juxtaposition characterizes socio-spatial segregation as a negation of the city and urban life. Segregation is also the “other” of centralization. First, we can claim that the centralization-segregation dialectic is part of the history of the city as an expression of gathering and distinguishing between people, as demonstrated by Munford (1965), when he presents the idea that the city is a place of power and control first exercised by the king, then by the State and its institutions. If centralization is renewed, constantly developing spatially over the course of history, segregation will take on the form of social class distinctions through different accesses for each person to the city.

Citizens are distinguished according to the distribution of wealth generated in each society, thus defining the way in which social relations (as well as norms and laws) are structured through the existence of property (in its contractual form). Therefore, the urban form reveals a juxtaposition between social morphology (class structure in society) and spatial morphology (the distribution of citizens in the city space, based on their class position). In summary, over the course of history, access for each person to produced goods is the direct result of the relation between the social production of wealth and the private appropriation of this wealth, highlighting the existence and the role of property in structuring social relations. In fact, the production of segregation is defined within the scope of the social production of the city, thus determining the ways in which it is appropriated in a complex set of social relations individualized over the course of history. A history that constantly reestablishes socio-spatial inequality. Therefore, the assumption that the city is a construction of civilization, “the world that man builds for himself” (Schneider, [n.d.], p. 11), supersedes the idea of the city as a stage for actions of individuals, hence, points on a world map, leading to an understanding of the city as a commodity under capitalism. In other words, if socio-spatial segregation spans the history of the city, today, it takes on new meanings resulting from the city being in the form of a commodity.

The urban socio-spatial practice

Urban life is realized as a socio-spatial practice of using places, originating in religious worship (a subjective sense not separate from objective materiality), which, over the course of history, has become urban, thus enabling the set of social relations to connect a set of places whose existence enables the realization of everyday life. In the modern world, this practice is subsumed in the logic of accumulation of capital, which means that, preferably, the city is produced in a way that allows for the process of capital valuation. On the other hand, if the city is the condition and means for this process, thus enabling the capital cycle to operate, it also transforms into a product, and in this case, a fragmented one. This fragmentation is explained by the fact that the increasing exchange value of urban land divides and parcels out space, making it available for the housing market and, consequently, private land ownership. This leads to different rents in the heart of society as a product of subordination to the exchange value and to the operation of the world of commodities, implementing one of the moments in the process of capital accumulation, buying and selling housing.

Therefore, in the modern world, there is a transition from the strange world of objects (the production of commodities guides social relations) to the reproduction of urban space as an extension of the world of commodities, encompassing all spheres of life as a condition for the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole. Therefore, the city, produced as a commodity guided by the operation of the exchange value, guides and defines all moments of life (based on the possession of housing), depriving individuals of their social component, given that the realm of exchange value guides the production of the city according to the logic of accumulation, which turns the city itself into a business. Consequently, space appears to be homogeneous due to the interchangeability imposed on it, while it is fragmented by the real estate market, which divides the city into pieces for sale. In turn, the homogeneity-fragmentation contradiction creates a hierarchy of places in the city defining uses through their functions as determined by the division of labor (social and technical). Therefore, if the homogenization process is linked to the generalization of space as a commodity, fragmentation by the market reveals the existence of the private ownership of urban land in space, which occurs as a development of capitalism in the real estate market.

Therefore, the existence of private property means dividing and parceling the city and, consequently, there is an inequality in the production of urban space that is clearly and unequivocally felt on the level of everyday life, initially in housing, which puts the inhabitant in opposition to the true existence of the private ownership of urban land. Based on the initial access to housing, other accesses are redefined, for example, access to urban goods and services and to centrality. Therefore, the segregation experienced in everyday life (in which the concentration of wealth, ownership and the power that results from it are manifested concretely) initially appears as a difference, in the forms of access to housing (as a more evident expression of the commodification of urban space), as well as in relation to urban transportation as a limitation of access to urban activities (as an expression of the separation of the citizen from centrality), as well as the deterioration/enclosure/decrease in public spaces (as an expression of the shrinking of the public sphere). This distinction becomes real as separation/detachment, constraining social relations and the way that every citizen appropriates space. This difference is revealed in private appropriation, which is determined by the distribution of wealth, hence, by the possession of wealth generated in its private form, involving all of society in different ways.

Therefore, segregation emerges in contradiction to gatherings (a deeper meaning of the urban practice) as a gateway for understanding the urban situation today. It is explained within the process of the production of urban space as a moment in the reproduction of human life on the level of socio-spatial practice, within the overall social reproduction dominated by the logic of capital. In this sense, the production of urban space involves several levels of reality as different moments in the general reproduction of society: (a) the level of the State in political domination (power is expressed by dominating space and structuring life), (b) in capital (strategies for actions aimed at its continuous reproduction, reducing the space-time for the operation of the capital cycle and creating the city as fixed capital from the point of view of the operation of the capital cycle). It is the place for alliances between the political and economic

spheres/levels to create public policies that guide the occupation of space, the construction of infrastructure, the distribution of the budget aimed at the valuation process in which urban land becomes central, and (c) the social level, that of the realization of life: the city as a need and desire linked to the realization of man, as a creative moment.

These juxtaposed and contradictorily connected levels reveal a production of space that is realized in the basic contradiction of the act of producing: social production (which, in this dimension, occurs as a moment in the creation and realization of social beings) in direct conflict with its private appropriation (in the capitalist process, space turned into a commodity subsumes forms of appropriation into the market in a moment of alienation of the socially-generated product). This assumed contradiction in the structuring of capitalist society develops in the process of establishing property, including in its legal form (the social contract), which determines who is the property owner, granting them rights and accesses. This means that, as a medium necessary between citizen and city, we are faced with the private ownership of social wealth corresponding to the socio-spatial practice of capitalist society.

Therefore, the meaning of the city as a gathering of all defining elements of human life and a simultaneity of acts and activities in its realization, as a potential use of space-times that comprise life, includes that which negates it: the production of segregation as separation, thus implying a divided social practice as an act of negating the city. In this process, the urban form emerges as an alien force in that citizens are excluded from the creative activity that constitutes man. As a result, the city is seen as an alienation, revealing the poverty of the human world, that is, the world as a source of deprivation.

The center-periphery contradiction

Centrality is a constitutive element of the city, in its theoretical and practical foundation (Lefebvre, 1968), contemplating the components and meanings of the city as a process of civilization. Gatherings/meetings as a component of urban life create a space-time reference that guides it, since they determine social relations by building references that create an identity and preserve its memory.

Historically, the city is established by bringing together a set of elements that govern and make life possible in society. Gatherings, as well as simultaneous social relations and group actions, are elements that allow every person to participate in the future of the city. Therefore, as a hub for everything that can be gathered, the existence of a center consolidates the participation of individuals and the realization of citizenship as an exercise of the public sphere, indicating the importance of public spaces that make it a concrete possibility. The probability of these spaces existing always increases with gatherings, thus enabling the construction of a collective history based on particular histories. It also carries a recreational meaning, since it is an area for meetings and social exchange, a place for parties and celebration. It is also the material expression of cumulative time, which establishes, in each moment, the real possibility of appropriation inherent in establishing citizenship, taking on a non-negligible symbolic nature. The existence of

centrality demonstrates that its potential uses have norms and restrictions that are stripped away upon the creation of a ranking of places and uses in the city.

Therefore, in its constitutive process, centrality also produced its negative. In other words, by concentrating all essential moments of urban life, it is open to activities that are specific to it, building small, generally monofunctional, centers (or encompassing previously existing ones due to expansion of the urban fabric) spread throughout the urban fabric. As such, the center deteriorates with the shifting of economic activities and services, leisure centers, places for parties in larger spaces as it spreads. This real and symbolic stripping away accompanies the growth of the urban fabric and the centralization of capital. However, there are two movements: the first is the shifting of some activities in the historical center and the shift of the population with high purchasing power, and the second is the spreading of this center as a physical extension of centrality, a fact that is present in the metropolis.

By contrast, the periphery is the “other” of centrality, its negation. The urbanization process, by occurring through industrialization, drives out and segregates a significant portion of society without access to the most expensive urban land in central areas. Industrialization produced an urbanization that generated the implosion/explosion (Lefebvre, 1968) of the historical city, which produced uncontrolled peripheries separating immense social contingents from the center (and from components of centrality that constitute urbanity and a life of relations). In this sense, the periphery initially represents isolation and separation. Therefore, use of the city as a supposed first realization of life is reversed under the capitalist logic that is imposed on life. The unequal expansion of the urban fabric leads to another inequality: the periphery creates places of concentration/dispersion. Therefore, in the reproduction of space, the periphery, today, is made complex by involving isotopes, large gated communities, industrial clusters, and heterotopias, space-times of everyday life accessed differently according to the place and class each person occupies in society. If the heterogeneous form contradictorily indicates a society of unequals clearly separated by architecture with walls and fences that leave no doubts, this fragmentation of the social and spatial fabrics indicates the necessary coexistence between different classes. This extreme submission to the needs of survival connects different people and classes through the work relation between bosses and employees (in gated communities, for example). In Brazil, the periphery is produced, in itself, contradictorily, through immense areas occupied by self-building, where slums and “occupations” dramatically reveal the existence of the private ownership of urban land as a condition and assumption of building housing. Its negative are the construction areas of “gated communities”, indicating the contradiction between homogeneous space (a consequence of the expansion of the world of commodities, which creates the foundations of an abstract identity in contradiction with local identities produced by specific historical characteristics that are merged in an experienced socio-spatial practice) and space fragmented by the private ownership of land.

In the centrality/dispersion contradiction, an urban structure imposes an order and a norm that is materialized in relations of immediacy linked to the way of life, to housing, to regulating everyday life in its various connections, and to imposing global determinations on the

level of life experience. In the course of social development, as a result of the general social work that introduces the logic of the real estate market into the production of space, the occupation of urban land emerges as a moment in the productive process of capital valuation tied to the rationale of the production process of commodities.

The urban spatial practice, in the process of implosion/explosion, manifests the extreme separation/dissociation of elements of a fragmented life, in the separation of spaces for the realization of everyday life between the place of housing and the place of work. This requires time to commute, subtracted from the time not working, and creates specific places of leisure as neighborhood streets lose their meaning for recreation and as a meeting place. Everyday life realizes the homogeneous/fragmented contradiction at the same time in which it is invaded by a regulatory system that formalizes and defines social relations, reducing them to abstract forms. This way, segregation spreads in the expansion of the urban fabric as urban space is produced under the order of capital. Segregation, as a form of inequality inherent to the production of urban space, is at the foundation of conflict in the city, enabling one to understand: (a) the components of the historical process that produces it as a condition of the realization of social reproduction founded in private property and its expansion, and (b) the way in which capitalist production transforms the existing city, establishing the reproduction of space as a necessary moment for its accumulation. Therefore, segregation highlights at its foundation a society based on a set of social relations, which, as Martins (1994) claims, has a solid basis in land ownership and a social and political orientation that firmly suppresses the possibilities for profound social transformation.

The fragmented social praxis

At the end of the 20th century in Brazil, the city of São Paulo clearly indicates a shift from producing to reproducing urban space, that is, from the “industrial metropolis” (produced under the hegemony of industrial capital and founded in the capital-work relation, social relations defined in the strict scope of the factory, and in social struggles surrounding the workday) to the “financial metropolis” under the hegemony of financial capital (life subject to urban everyday life, from the constitution of man as a consumer of symbols and spectacles that metropolitan life provides on an increasingly large scale). Over the course of this period, urbanity, subject to money and to the object of possession, underscores social relations and inhabits the imagination. There is also a trend from the internationalization of capital, with the development of the international division of labor, to the globalization of capital and society as an urban society. The expansion of this process, upon gaining productive strength, thus creating a post-modern metropolis, becomes a destructive force by emptying places of life and participation in guiding the urban government in detriment to the logic of reproduction of productive spaces as a condition of accumulation.

Consequently, the metropolis is reproduced as a productive space in itself. The mobilization of wealth directs the path of interventions in the urban space due to the connection between the political and economic, based on strategies aimed at the realization of value, thus facilitating capital accumulation in a critical phase, in which the industrial

process is no longer the specific place for accumulation to occur. Now, capital migrates to other spheres, encompassing the production of places in the metropolis as a way to realize profit. Given the expansion of property as an extension in space, all places have their accesses subject to the market, subjugating them to a new order: that of mobilizing financial capital. A hierarchy is reproduced in detail, establishing the boundaries between the strata of power, income, friendship circles, etc., revealed in all possible forms of use. On the level of practice, the expansion of property involves residences and their surroundings to accesses to sports stadiums, show and entertainment arenas and shopping centers, and includes conditions of mobility in the urban space. Restrictions on transportation isolate, anchor, immobilize and separate people who live on the periphery of society, while the constant need for flow in space, imposed by the increased speed of valuation, produces a dense but concentrated transportation network, which intensifies separations, thus preventing bodies from moving in space.

The private ownership of wealth and, consequently of urban land, as a natural result of the existence of its contractual form, is placed between human life and the appropriation of urban space (as a social construction). Based on the social structure founded on private property as a right, not only the means of production, but wealth and everything that it guarantees and legitimizes, the metropolis is fragmented and life disintegrates “into pieces” subject to the logic of commodities and its world. The uses and functions of places are easily imposed by the invisible force of norms and conventions. The Federal Constitution itself asserts property as a right. A divided practice in a fragmented metropolis conceals the meanings of the production of metropolitan space as a constitutive moment of society. Founded on a class strategy, the segregation that results from it, supported by institutions on all levels of life, subjects social relations in all space-times of everyday life, destroying urbanity, eliminating sociability, threatening urban life and the actions possible for everyone to participate in the defining paths of the city.

The shrinking public sphere in the modern world and the expansion of the private sphere is a reality that has been imposed on the metropolis. Therefore, there are less opportunities for human life within the scope of sociability, for exchanges as a consequence of gatherings due to deteriorated public spaces, or for parks/green areas as a space for passive contemplation, than there are for civic action. In this situation, they contribute representations that play an important role in dissimulating the participation of individuals in the collective project of the city. Public spaces, saturated with images, symbols of urban and modern life, act as a guiding element of behaviors and define values that organize exchanges, ranking individuals by their access to places in the city and to goods consumed. In this sense, the production of the contemporary metropolis also indicates a transition from space for consumption to the consumption of space (the production of specific places of leisure suggests as much), a time in which use and the forms of appropriation of space for the realization of life are subject to and guided by the determinations of commercial exchange and representations of commodities (and this world) as a condition for the reproduction of society immersed in the world of the mass society spectacle, as an alienated consciousness.

In the scope of private life, deprivation remains (which, for Lefebvre, is the meaning of the word private) or, better, the re-privatization of life is implemented and, by the same means, power and wealth are personalized. The construction of a restricted citizenship is revealed in simulations of social life through culture and sports, for example. The “spectacularization” (of space) and “celebritization” (of individuals) characterize this impoverishment, revealing new components of urbanity. The world camouflages frustrations, with notorious examples: on television, Big Brother (as an example of reality shows) promotes and carries out voyeurism, simulating public participation in decisions of who stays and who leaves the program, while Facebook proposes the “celebritization” of completely normal individuals, with a glamor and importance forged by posting trivial scenes and by the number of “followers” connected through the emptiness of the messages. In this process, metropolitan life is based, on the one hand, on establishing an *abstract identity* that transfigures everyday life according to a manipulative model that organizes social relations driven by the consumption of symbols and spectacles, and, on the other, on the deprivation of rights that form the foundation of and guide social relations whose subordinate condition is constantly reproduced, thus increasing the conditions of deprivation. This practice negates the realization of the human essence, since it separates the subject from the entire social process. Upon being removed from this process, individuals become lost, and the segregated socio-spatial practice constantly renews the negation of man and the city.

The struggle for the right to the city

The reproduction of the city realized in urban space produces the city as a business, in a process that is guided by the realization of the exchange value as a period of capital valuation, which makes space productive. In other words, space as a condition of economic reproduction under the hegemony of financial capital assumes a productive role. In this process, public policies become relevant, given the alliance between the political and economic sphere in developing public policies that guide the occupation of space, the construction of infrastructure, the distribution of the budget aimed at the realization of the valuation process, in which urban land gains centrality. In turn, only public authorities can expropriate, regulate the market, create and manage norms for building and zoning, as well as take action to remove the population from affluent or newly affluent areas with the spread of the urban fabric, in order to guarantee incentives so that capital is reproduced without disruption.

Therefore, the reproduction of space constantly renews the issue of the private ownership of wealth, a process that does not occur without violence, given that it creates inhumane situations of existence, as proven by the reality of tenements in central areas, slums in the gaps of the urban fabric, occupations on the fringes of the urban area. As such, property indicates the existence of man deprived of rights. This process dialectically integrates the struggle surrounding the uses of space, which is inseparable from the struggle against the despotic logic of capital and State regulation in terms of space and its domination, through direct and indirect spatial policies.

The inhumane¹ is not reduced to the simple presence and dominance of economic and political strategies. It is revealed on a broader scale, involving a set of interventions that range from how the public budget is organized and how funds are earmarked for education or health, and even to the way in which representative democracy develops, eliminating society's participation in choosing projects of change.

The production of the urban as a source of deprivation explains the existence of struggles surrounding space as a product of contradictions that are at their foundation exploding with conflicts that question its structures. But the development of the private ownership and appropriation of social wealth is limited in its real social existence and in the consciousness that emerges from brutal inequality, from disappearing conditions for exercising citizenship (when citizens disappear, involved in the world of things, transformed into consumers of goods and services, and hence, reduced to passiveness). The negative labor that emerges from the unequal (and contradictory) social praxis leads to a consideration of possibilities for developing a project for a society capable of challenging the so-called "civilizing mission of capital".

The social movements that emerge on the urban scene indicate the urgent need to supersede this situation and radically transform society, as a commitment to a more profound change in the urban experienced as deprivation, alienation and chaos. Therefore, the struggles surrounding the appropriation of urban space that emerge in everyday life signal the awareness of extreme deprivation, which does not mix with the sphere of goods necessary for life, but for the scale of fulfilling desires in order to develop a social project capable of changing lives, where the use value gains negative strength as a centralizer of actions. Defined by their opposition, urban struggles place the "right to the city" at the center of the debate.

The meaning and content of the expression "right to the city" requires a profound reflection. In the terms of Henri Lefebvre (1968, 1970), implementing the right to the city requires questioning the whole of society subject to economy and politics. For the author, the right to the city manifests as a higher kind of right, as a right to freedom, to individuation in socialization, to construction (a participatory activity) and to appropriation (very different from ownership), fully revealing use. In this sense, the "right to the city" can be understood as a practical need to supersede the use value-exchange value contradiction, which prevails in our commodity-producing society and is subsumed in its world (language, signs). This could only be rectified by superseding that which forms the foundation of capitalism. From this perspective, the right to the city is a product of a "radical lack"² that emerges against history, which transforms communal property into private property, and, as such, an abstract power into a capitalist society, dominating life. Thus, we are faced with a future outlined by Marx in *On the Jewish question*, in which a requirement for the radical transformation of society would be based on a negation of politics, because: (a) it reduces man to being a member of civil society, subject to selfishness and private property; (b) it is subject to bureaucratic control, which avoids democratic control; and (c) political parties are subject to the alliances necessary

1 The predominance of the economic is precisely what is inhumane, the essence of man restricted to one thing, money, and a social structure founded on property.

2 In the terms proposed by Agnes Heller (1983) in *The radical philosophy*.

for supporting their projects of domination. Hence, the *right to the city* proposes building a new society, putting into question urban society itself, its structures, and segregation as a predominant form of the capitalist production of urban space.

Therefore, the right to the city negates the “opposite world”, that of divisions experienced in socio-spatial practice; of representations that create an abstract identity; of an indifference to the constitution of life as an imitation of a model of happiness forged in the possession of goods; of the dominance of institutions and the market on life; of a repressive power that induces passiveness with the disappearance of specific characteristics; of everyday space reduced to the homogeneous, a destroyer of spontaneity and desires (Carlos, 2007). Consequently, superseding socio-spatial segregation must occur on the path towards building the *right to the city* as a social project.

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