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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide a brief overview of different latitudes of the globe to understand how the growth of cities was conceived throughout the 20th century. It revisits a range of authors and concepts that shaped our understanding of how to characterize urban expansion areas, emphasizing both spatial forms and social relationships. The discussion begins with the growth of the peripheries during the European industrialization process at the beginning of the 20th century, to later reach the diffuse urban model that has proliferated in the Global North countries since the mid-20th century. The concept of peri-urban space is examined, including its origins and controversies, with a focus on the conflict between urban expansion and rural areas. Finally, the article explores the perspectives that emerged in Latin America regarding urban expansion, highlighting debates on how to characterize the transformations during the last third of the 20th century.

Keywords: Urban expansion. Urbanization. 20th century.

Expansão urbana em perspectiva: notas teóricas sobre formas, processos e modos de pensar a urbanização contemporânea

RESUMO

O presente artigo procura fazer um percurso por diferentes latitudes do globo para averiguar como foi pensada a expansão urbana ao longo do século XX. A proposta retoma uma série de autores e conceitos que abriram caminhos para pensar como caracterizar as áreas de expansão das cidades, com um interesse que enfatiza tanto as formas espaciais quanto as relações sociais. Começa com o crescimento das periferias no processo de industrialização europeu na virada do século XX, para chegar logo ao modelo urbano difuso que se estende nos países do norte global desde meados do século XX. O conceito de espaço periurbano é trabalhado em seus origens e controvérsias, em tanto coloca no centro o conflito da expansão do urbano sobre o rural. Finalmente, se abordam as leituras surgidas na América Latina em torno a expansão urbana, com foco nos debates sobre como caracterizar as transformações do último terço do século XX.

Palavras-chave: Expansão urbana. Urbanização. Século XX.

Expansión urbana en perspectiva: notas teóricas sobre formas, procesos y modos de pensar la urbanización contemporánea

RESUMEN

Este artículo busca hacer un recorrido por distintas latitudes del globo para conocer cómo se concibió el crecimiento de las ciudades a lo largo del siglo XX. La propuesta retoma una serie de autores y conceptos que abrieron el camino para pensar cómo caracterizar las áreas de expansión de las ciudades, con un interés que pone el énfasis tanto en las formas espaciales como en las relaciones sociales. Se inicia con el crecimiento de

las periferias en el proceso de industrialización europeo a principios del siglo XX, para luego llegar al modelo urbano difuso que se extiende en los países del norte global desde mediados del siglo XX. El concepto de espacio periurbano es trabajado en sus orígenes y controversias, en tanto coloca en el centro la dimensión conflictiva de la expansión de lo urbano sobre lo rural. Finalmente, se abordan lecturas surgidas en América Latina en torno a la expansión urbana, con foco en los debates sobre como caracterizar las transformaciones del último tercio del siglo XX.
Palabras clave: Expansión urbana. Urbanización. Siglo XX.

INTRODUCTION

Cities are today a central phenomenon of the world we live in. The global population is increasingly residing in cities, and in recent times we have witnessed significant growth, dynamism, and concentration of urban agglomerations. According to Harvey (1996), the 20th century was the century of urbanization: at the beginning of the century, it was estimated that only 7% of the world's population was urban, while today data shows that 54% of the world's population lives in cities[1], and this trend is expected to continue, reaching 70% in the next 30 years. Additionally, in the early 20th century, there were only a dozen cities with populations exceeding one million, whereas today, more than 500 cities worldwide exceed this number (Harvey, 1996). Moreover, more than 100 cities surpass 5 million inhabitants. We are facing a process of "planetary urbanization" (Brenner, 2013), given the advance and expansion of urbanization worldwide. What Lefebvre had foreseen as "the urban revolution" in the 1970s seems to be becoming a reality.

In Latin America, this phenomenon is even more pronounced: while in 1925 only 25% of the population was urban, by the early 21st century, this percentage had risen to 75% (Lattes, 2001), underscoring the accelerated urbanization experienced throughout the 20th century.

As Lencioni (2008) points out, it is crucial to differentiate concepts with scientific rigor. The concept of "city", beyond its polysemy, primarily denotes an entity which is linked to the agglomeration of a group of people who settle in a sedentary manner in a location with a market and public administration. "Urban", on the other hand, is a more diffuse concept that refers not to an entity, but to a phenomenon, a broad process generally associated with the industrial development of capitalist societies. Topalov (1979, p. 39) defines "capitalist urbanization" as "[...] a process where productive forces are socialized; establishing the broad, social conditions necessary for the expanded reproduction of capital". By "broad conditions", the author refers to the production and circulation of both capital and labor.

In the tension between focusing on the "city" (as a social form, as a "thing") or the process of "urbanization" (as a social dynamic), we adopt Harvey's perspective (Harvey, 1996), which proposes a dialectical thinking and considers the process in a more fundamental way, although understanding that processes are always mediated by the elements they produce, consolidate, and dissolve:

[1] World Bank data (Banco Mundial, 2023).

> Urbanization must be understood, then, not as an entity called "city", but as the production of specific and heterogeneous spatio-temporal forms embedded in different types of social action. Urbanization, understood in this way, is necessarily constitutive as well as constituted by the social process. It loses its passivity and becomes a dynamic moment in the social process of differentiation and change. (Harvey, 1996, p. 52).

Having clarified this, this article aims to highlight the processes of urban expansion, with the intention of exploring theoretical tools to understand this accelerated process of urbanization at a global level.

In recent decades, there has been a growing political and academic concern regarding the dynamics of transitional spaces. These spaces that are divided into rural and urban areas have become increasingly relevant, becoming the subject of numerous debates. They are spaces situated on the urban fringes, where historically rural lands have extended, beginning to adopt urban uses and thus undergoing incipient urbanization processes which, in many cases, do not fully consolidate.

Therefore, the proposal is to systematically review a series of authors and concepts that have laid the groundwork for understanding how to characterize urban expansion areas across different regions of the globe throughout the 20th century. These provide analytical tools for examining both: on the one hand, the spatial aspects of these areas (such as rural and urban land uses, connectivity with the central city, and urban morphology) and, on the other hand, the sociological dimension concerning in the dynamic of these spaces (inhabitants, living conditions, and social conflicts and distinctions that emerge).

Given their role as epicenters of capitalist development and hubs of academic conceptualization, what happens and what is thought in Europe and the United States is considered a crucial—though not sufficient—reference to begin a journey through the different pathways through which urban expansion and growth phenomena are understood. Identifying the specific places and historical moments in which concepts and approaches were coined helps to recover their contingency and contextualize their emergence, thereby situating categories and concepts within their historical and spatial contexts, and thus challenging the certain universality attributed to knowledge constructed in certain northern latitudes (Segura, 2021). An initial exploration through these conceptualizations allows for a deeper understanding of the reflections to understand the debates and the central capitalist world's way of looking.

Thus, the journey begins with three countries of the Global North (England, France, and the United States) at the turn of the 20th century, when capitals began to show the growth signs that a while later would lead them to become central metropolises of global capitalism. The English suburbs, the French banlieue, and the North American rural-urban fringe—with their marked differences—are concepts used in a context of strong industrialization and the rise of a Fordist accumulation model, which facilitate the identification of the characteristics and processes unfolding on the urban fringes.

In the mid-20th century, a new type of city began to take shape, along with transformations in the accumulation model. Debates about diffuse cities sought to account for low-density expansion over the peripheries, where the urban form transitioned from compact density

to sprawling, amorphous, broad, dispersed phenomena. First in the United States, and in different European countries a few decades later, concepts emerged to explain beyond the morphological characteristics of expansion and the social changes occurring as certain social sectors moved to areas farther from urban centers.

The idea of peri-urban space gains strength in the last third of the 20th century to characterize the expansion of urban uses over rural spaces, centrally led by middle-class sectors attracted by nature and wide green spaces. As it is a category increasingly disseminated in Latin American literature, the origins and controversies in the use of this concept and its inherent limitations are explored in this article.

Finally, we delve into what has been occurring in Latin America in recent decades. Numerous authors began to speak at the end of the 20th century of a "new city model", unfolding in line with structural reforms within the framework of transformations in the capitalist accumulation mode. In this line, the impact of these transformations is conceptualized within the framework of "urban fragmentation" with an emphasis on the rupture these new dynamics imply.

The methodology employed involved a bibliographic review structured initially around academic works dedicated to systematizing theoretical fields of debates on urban expansion, primarily produced in Argentina and Brazil. Subsequently, a review of authors and theoretical currents was conducted to recover primary sources and contextualize the dialogues in which they emerged. Without intending to be exhaustive, the presentation aims to be an overview of a series of key concepts and authors, addressing the question of how urban expansion has been conceptualized in the 20th century in certain Western countries. These frameworks serve as reference points for Latin American urban studies.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Ebenezer Howard (1898) significantly influenced British urbanism and shaped perspectives on city outskirts by introducing the concept of the "garden city". Revisited throughout the 20th century in various studies, this concept proposed a balanced distribution between the population concentration in cities and the nature of the countryside, aiming for an equitable allocation of economic, social, and cultural elements between the two nuclei. Patrick Geddes (1915) was also one of the pioneers in the Anglo-Saxon world in addressing the city's surrounding space, coining the term "conurbation" for the first time. Despite a significant biological bias, his work marks a critical antecedent in regional studies, a characteristic approach of 19th-century Europe. Lewis Mumford joined them, on the other side of the Atlantic, and made the expansion of cities under capitalism one of his central concerns, recovering elements from the two previous formulations to propose the idea of a "regional city", a grouping of large and small cities, towns, and districts in a controlled territorial balance (Fernández Salgado, 2012).

These three urban planners from the late 19th and early 20th centuries gained relevance for being among the pioneers who systematically addressed the need for a balance between the city and the countryside, amidst the expansion of industrial cities and their ensuing social consequences. Each of them sought to develop alternative planning models to tackle urban issues aligning with the tradition of thinkers who tried to reshape physical space

to "influence" or transform social processes, upholding a conceptual framework where spatial form was considered paramount and decisive over social factors (Harvey, 1977). This approach would later be conducted by theories that considered social processes as central elements in spatial configurations, highlighting the inherent tension between the social and the spatial. The following discussion delves into viewpoints that seek to maintain this tension, recognizing their mutual interdependence and challenging linear interpretations that prioritize one over the other.

The Industrial Revolution and the transformations that led to the emergence of a capitalist mode of production are fundamental milestones in the construction of modern cities. This era is extensively documented in literature, which explores the link between industrialization and urbanization. As early as the mid-19th century, Engels (2010 [1845]) pointed out urban growth by analyzing the living conditions of the working class in England, illustrating an initial configuration of urban surroundings driven by the establishment of the workforce necessary for productive development. Thus, reflecting on the connection between Manchester and its surroundings, the author introduces the concept of the suburbs:

> The new city [...] extends beyond the old part [...]. There is no urban aspect here. Rows of houses isolated or forming a set of streets rise intermittently, like small villages on the clayey and bare ground, where not even grass grows; the houses, or rather the shacks, are in poor condition, never repaired, dirty, and have basements that are damp and unhealthy. The alleys are unpaved, have no sewage system, and house pigsties in the small yards or pigs roaming freely on the slope. The paths are so muddy that they can only be traversed without bogging down at every step when the weather is very dry. (Engels, 2010, p. 96-97).

The advancement of the industrialization process marked the growth of areas around urban centers for workers' residences, notable for their poor conditions. This led to new urban configurations that were paved in previous rural environments, often keeping the persistence of agricultural activities, thus setting the so-called suburbs.

In France, the financial and industrial centralization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries also promoted city growth, shifting the residential functions from the center of Paris to emerging industrial areas in the peripheries. Increasingly more workers were recruited from adjacent departments and large contingents settled in the outskirts, attracted by the labor demand. This created significant contrasts between the central city and the suburbs, leading to the term banlieue to designate the latter:

> The small banlieue are the domain of low wages, coarse and rude jobs [...] And in the South, beyond these poor and foul-smelling neighborhoods [...], on the other side of the barrier, far from the capital, in a poorly equipped area, whose access for a long time was only by dirt roads, these shapeless communes extend where an unstable population lives, whose number and occupations can never be clearly determined. (Chevalier apud George, 1950, p. 212).

Studies on the Parisian banlieue sought to account for the key factors of occupation and human activity in this new city extension area, where infrastructure, landscapes, and even odors reflect the poverty of the working classes. This peripheral expansion took place in rural areas, advancing on productive agricultural belts; consequently, researchers analyzed the impacts and modifications in rural life, with a particular focus on the survival of small intensive family farms (Lebeau, 1959), as well as the political conflicts arising from these changes (George, 1950).

The development of the banlieue was marked by population growth and the configuration of new types of habitation. These areas are associated with a lifestyle shaped by favorable economic conditions at both regional and national levels, improvements in services and infrastructure, and smoother connections with the city. Thus, the transformations of certain rural villages into urban suburbs were studied, explaining the retreat of the countryside as factories and urban development advanced, leading to the submersion of the rural world due to urban growth (Lavandeyra, 1949). As Bidou (1982) develops, the idea of the banlieue embodies a dual distance: the physical distance of the periphery from the center, and the social distance, characterized by the dependence and subordination of its residents to those in the center. This negative connotation, suggesting an inferior hierarchy of surrounding spaces, persisted during the period of industrial city expansion but acquired other meanings with the spread of diffuse cities.

Like the French banlieue, the concept of rural-urban fringe (Wehrwein, 1942) emerged in the United States to describe the transitional area between urban and agricultural land uses. In this way, it sought to capture the proliferation of residential, industrial, and commercial activities on the city outskirts. In this context, infrastructures and transportation services played crucial roles as vectors of expansion and growth promotion. The rural-urban fringe refers to rural territory intersected by urban land uses along railways and highways, where agricultural activity coexists but undergo modifications, prompting concerns about their organization (Clout, 1976). Wehrwein's (1942, p. 222) frank description of the inhabitants of these spaces reflects the uncertainty surrounding this new phenomenon:

> These souls all live in the same environment: not in the city, not in the countryside, but in the wilderness—The wilderness is not an integrated and orderly nature, but a disordered civilization. We call this the metropolitan environment.

From these examples in England, France, and the United States we observe how the processes of metropolization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to the development of various categories to address the emerging phenomena of urban expansion (Valenzuela Rubio, 1986). Concepts such as suburb, banlieue, or rural-urban fringe emerged to characterize the growth of central cities, which eventually evolved into the nodal metropolises of contemporary capitalism.

DIFFUSE URBAN GROWTH MODEL

Although urban expansion processes were evident since the early 20th century, it was in the post-World War II period that a new pattern of urban growth emerged, characterized

by diffusion and dispersal. The so-called "Golden Years" of economic prosperity in the core countries, marked by sustained economic growth, a strong welfare state, and a Fordist-Keynesian accumulation model, led to massive suburbanization phenomena across several core countries.

The concept of urban sprawl, spread from the United States reality, describes a process of low-density occupation of the peripheries, facilitated by private automobiles and highways as primary transport arteries shaping urban space. One of the most significant aspects of this transformation was the demographic shift in suburbs: it is the middle and upper classes who will settle in these new spaces, attracted by private developers and specific market offers.

As Hall (1996) outlines, the proliferation of automobiles began in the early decades of the century in the United States, spurred by the mass production methods of the Fordist industry. However, it was only after the World War II that this new type of city expansion accelerated and consolidated. Residential neighborhoods proliferated in the periphery, influenced by the development of new highways and zoning regulation of land uses that facilitated the creation of homogeneous residential areas and maintained property values. Additionally, mortgage finance policies, and finally, the "baby boom" further fueled the demand for spaces where children could grow up peacefully (Hall, 1996, p. 302). It was a process driven by market rules and state policies targeted towards certain sectors, ensuring that those who moved to the periphery were white middle and high-income families, attracted by family homes with gardens, embodying the ideals of the "American dream" (Leopoldo, 2017)[2]. This process excluded half of the population, primarily poor and black, who lacked access to housing with such amenities or the promoted lifestyle.

This new diffuse urban configuration only reached European cities several decades later, definitively expanding as a new pattern between 1970 and 1980. During this period, low densities predominated in extensive residential areas, and the industrial decentralization proliferated. Thus, "[...] increasingly autonomous pieces are configured that juxtapose discontinuously and among which interstitial spaces, urban voids [...] proliferate, producing a final effect of generalized reduction of gross densities" (Monclús, 1998, p. 7).

Until then, traditional city centers and even the peripheries of central cities were characterized by vertical, dense, and compact expansion during the major population cycles and urban growth between the 1940s and 1970s (Monclús, 1998). This implied stark contrasts for European cities, which, unlike American cities, were dense and continuous until then.

It should be noted that these authors are examining a process largely driven by the pursuit of "new lifestyles", where the middle and upper classes found satisfaction in the outskirts of cities through a residential model driven by the market desires, where "happiness" was sold in the shape of individual housing with gardens, garages, and pools. This became feasible with improved circulation possibilities on highways and private automobiles, shortening distances to workspaces and service centers. Consequently, residential movements in these areas generated demand for certain services that contributed to the diffuse urban configuration: shopping centers, leisure and sports facilities, hypermarkets, and cinemas emerged as service islands on the outskirts of cities.

[2] For an analysis of the impact of this lifestyle in Latin America, see Leopoldo (2017), Chapter 1 (1.3).

According to Dematteis (1998), the explanatory keys for this transformation lie in changes in the accumulation model in industrialized countries, characterized by flexibility in productive organization and labor, and a proliferation of horizontal connections within a more global context.

From the 1970s onwards, a series of transformations in the world order sparked a structural change in the accumulation model, significantly impacting urban configurations. The capital internalization process began to deviate from the traditional center-periphery scheme to the establishment of a new division of labor where high-value-added jobs, qualified labor, and strategically important industries remained in the hands of core countries. Meanwhile, the most basic stages of the production process, as well as the most polluting activities, were outsourced to other countries (Ciccolella, 2011). The exhaustion of the Keynesian-Fordist accumulation and growth model led to the emergence of new ways of productive articulation. A regime of "flexible accumulation" arose (Harvey, 2008 [1989]), characterized by the sharp increase of new financial elements and markets. This marked a new phase of capitalist modernization, articulated around the advancements of information and communication technologies, and widespread economic liberalization (Mattos, 2010). Beyond the nuances that may exist among different authors when characterizing this change in accumulation patterns, there is a consensus that these elements fostered a diverse urban dynamic compared to the one that used to prevail, reshaping cities through new spatio-temporal arrangements that imply profound modifications in cities.

Far from erasing the divisions of the traditional city, this city without boundaries (particularly in physical and functional terms) is characterized by differentiation and limits, especially tied to social and administrative fragmentation (NEL-LO, 1998). The transition from intensive to extensive urban growth, far from promoting greater equality, has led to new forms of segregation, multiplying barriers among urban residents.

In the search of a concept that can transcend the extreme dichotomy between rural and urban, the English sociologist Pahl (1966) introduced in the 1960s the concept of rural-urban continuum to analyze the transformations in rural villages in Britain resulting from the influx of urban population. Thus, his central focus was primarily a sociological question emphasizing the transformations in social relations among groups, rather than strictly delineating physical spaces or demographic structures. These spaces were seen as ideal locations for social analysis given their small scale and social heterogeneity, which facilitated a deeper investigation into lifestyles and social status of groups—attributes that are often harder to grasp on large scales and distances. Suburban towns and small rural villages, transformed by the arrival of urban residents, served as social laboratories where shifts in social structure and interaction dynamics could be observed. Viewing the rural-urban continuum as a process allowed Pahl to conceptualize a network of interconnected social webs forming a complex structure, where social roles and relationships emerged as central elements.

THE PERI-URBAN CONCEPT

Similarly, studies problematizing the concept of peri-urban space began to spread in the 1960s. The concept of peri-urban space emerged in this quest for new frameworks and categories to conceptualize these forms of urban growth, leaving behind the outdated dichotomies that

are no longer explanatory. Coined by Racine (1967), the concept of peri-urban referred to the disjointed peripheries of the United States, characterized by a chaotic and disorderly configuration (Valenzuela Rubio, 1986). The term gained prominence specially through French literature, which extensively studied and problematized peri-urban spaces during a post-war economic growth context. This era saw the rise of a new market driven by the middle classes, leading to the emergence of a "petty bourgeoisie" with significant purchasing power (Langumier, 1982). The period also witnessed the doubling in motorization rates and growth in labor and income variables. In this context, French agglomerations underwent extensive and diffuse growth during the 1960s and 1970s, with peri-urban spaces expanding to distances of 30 to 40 kilometers from city centers. Expansion areas became a privileged location for the urban issue, and served as economic, political, and social laboratories. Langumier (1982) emphasized the need to understand the phenomenon of peri-urbanization, intimately linked to this phase of rapid development, where it is necessary to consider both a sociocultural element, related to a phenomenon of displacement of the middle classes to certain rural areas near cities; and an economic element, reflecting the logic of capital expansion that integrates rural lands into the accumulation process.

Jaillet and Jalabert (1982), in turn, interpret the transformations through the lens of the social production of space, considering different aspects. Firstly, and in line with Langumier, they emphasize the need to look at the movements and periods of acceleration and transformation of capital, noting the connection between economic growth periods and displacements to peri-urban spaces. During phases of growth such as the establishment of industrial hubs, and the recompositing of work systems), there is a proliferation of private residential spaces and an increased demand for housing associated with a suburban "way of living", similar to the Anglo-American middle-class model. This is the second element they propose to focus on, as housing production appears to be linked both to state financing policies and to real estate actors' rationale. In the 1970s, the main offer of the real estate system was individual housing, which coincided with the devaluation of agricultural lands and the valorization of peri-urban spaces.

Two key elements repeatedly emerge in French studies on peri-urban areas, explaining their distinctive nature. On the one hand, the role of the middle classes in shaping these new configurations, as actors who build a unique and distinct project within these spaces. Peri-urban spaces would be interesting places in terms of economic investment but especially as spaces for structuring the identity of a social group that does not have its own space. If factories belong to the working class and city centers are governed by the logic of the dominant classes, the middle classes would have available space in the peri-urban area to develop their lifestyles, worldviews, and values (Bidou, 1982). On the other hand, and as a result, these developments raise questions about local power dynamics and the disputes in government articulation that impact these spaces. The middle classes that arrive strive to build spaces of legitimacy and influence the ways of construction of these spaces, often encountering traditional rural residents who respond in different ways.

In the 1980s, faced with the slowdown in growth and the transition to a new accumulation model, the French peri-urbanization process began to decline, highlighting the need to consider cities as the main nodes driving accumulation processes.

In addition to the French diffusion, the term peri-urban encompasses various debates that took place in the last decades of the 20th century. Valenzuela Rubio (1986) reconstructs the central problematic axes, addressing the potentials and limits of the concept.

Firstly, there is a debate about defining the forces that shape these spaces: while some authors emphasize the national and international dynamics of productive forces, others suggest considering local forces and the inherent conditions of each city. Secondly, there is the issue of agricultural survival, which leads to questioning land rent as a key element. As urban areas expand seeking greater profitability, productive rural areas also persist, often at the expense of labor intensification and precariousness, creating complex networks of income differentials and benefits for specific actors.

Finally, the author highlights debates related to land use induced by urban transfers and the conflicts that arise from them. Residential use occupies the largest land area, based on population fluctuations from both urban areas and rural migrants settling on the city's outskirts. Strategies by producers and real estate developers that attract high-income sectors with promises of tranquility and nature create a scattered, expensive, and low-density urban structure, which also includes leisure and recreation uses such as country clubs, golf courses, shopping centers, etc.

The main difference between these new concepts—rural-urban continuum, peri-urban—and the previous forms—suburb, banlieue and rural-urban fringe—is that, in this case, urban expansion does not occupy the entire space since it occurs in a fragmented way, blending with the persisting rural areas. There is no advance in the form of a frontier or urban front, nor consolidation and subsequent incorporation into the city; therefore, the tension between rural and urban elements predominates, with interpenetration at specific points. Additionally, while the earlier concepts were coined to describe processes driven by poor workers, the newer terms account for the incorporation of middle and upper classes into the city's peripheries.

Unlike other conceptual categories, the peri-urban concept and the peri-urbanization process place the conflictive dimension at the center of the debate, fueled by the dispute over different land uses (Valenzuela Rubio, 1986). While these authors primarily focus on geographical analysis, the emphasis on the conflict allows for analyses in other disciplinary fields as well, since different land uses are motivated by various actors and groups coexisting in spatial contiguity with divergent resources, possibilities, strategies, and living conditions.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE "NEW CITY MODEL"

Starting from the 1950s and 1960s, an important field of debate emerged around the Latin American urban space. Gorelik (2005) argues that there was an invention of the "Latin American city", a set of traditions, thoughts, theories, and institutions, between the post-World War II period and the early 1970s, which outlined the most productive moment of analysis about the Latin American city. This production engaged with and was influenced by two main currents of thought. In the 1950s, the ideas of American functionalism, associated

with the Chicago School of Urban Sociology[3] [[Q7: Q7]] became influential. Based on Durkheimian functionalism and social Darwinism, they conceived the city as an environment where individuals compete and adapt, generating cooperation and interdependence of functions that would explain the differentiated distribution in space. Their concern was centered on behaviors at the micro level and on the issue of urban lifestyles. Many of their studies highlighted the cultural dimension of social ties, investigating culture, deviance, and disintegration. For these currents, urbanization was a privileged field of development and modernization, which had to be achieved through urban planning.

On the other hand, in the second decade (1960s), urban critical theory (the conjunction of the French School of Urban Sociology and Anglo-Saxon and North American Critical Geography, with Marxist foundations) became the central reference. Two relevant elements constituted a fundamental change: firstly, they proposed an "epistemological turn" by ceasing to think of space as a reflection or receptacle of the social, and instead began to consider it as a constitutive part of social dynamics. Secondly, by recovering the Marxist tradition and the contributions of Henri Lefebvre, urban critical theory broke with certain past traditions by postulating that space is not natural or merely reflective, but rather an "active moment" of the accumulation process (Harvey 1990). The production of space is posited as an intrinsic mechanism of the capitalist process and a necessary condition for the expanded accumulation of capital (Lefebvre, 1970; Harvey 2013; Topalov 1979). In this vein, the theory of dependency strongly emerges in Latin America, which, unlike the previous decade, pointed out the peripheral insertion of the region's cities into global dynamics.

Based on these influences, the 1950s and 1960s were important decades in the production of theories, analyses, and concrete proposals resulting from reflections on the specificity of Latin American cities. These readings shifted from a focus on modernization and development to one centered around dependency (Segura, 2021).

This fruitful period in terms of knowledge production and thought about cities was interrupted by military dictatorships that, starting in the 1970s, imposed a series of structural reforms in the region. The authoritarian regimes initiated a path of structural transformations that would deepen in the 1990s.

In line with global dynamics, the core of these structural economic reforms is articulated around a new pattern of accumulation. The logic of accumulation now focuses on the financial sector as the axis of capital valorization, to the detriment of the industrial sector, which, although incipient, had experienced expansion in previous decades. Many state-owned enterprises were privatized, and the state's management capacity was significantly dismantled, giving rise to a neoliberal regime with a strong impact on territorial configurations.

Mattos (2010) and Ciccolella (2012) propose an interpretation of these transformations and their impacts on urban space through the theoretical lens of the Los Angeles School[4]. These authors argue that, like other global metropolises, major Latin American cities are

[3] The Chicago School of Urban Sociology—later known as Urban Ecology—emerged in the United States between the 1920s and 1940s. Robert Park was one of its main proponents.

[4] At the end of the 1990s, a current of thought emerged in the United States based on the study of the city of Los Angeles. Its proponents argued that this city represented a new urban model characterized by dispersion, discontinuity, and the presence of multiple centers, marking a type of urbanism characteristic of contemporary globalization. In contrast to the model of the Chicago School, Los Angeles was seen by these authors as the new norm in urban processes (Segura, 2021).

undergoing reconfiguration, characterized by a decline in their productive functions and a restructuring around the logic of services and consumption. They are shifting from compact metropolitan spaces with defined boundaries and limits to ones with diffuse boundaries and polycentric structures, accompanied by a process of suburbanization of the dominant classes along with an increase in precarious habitats.

Mattos (2010) argues that there are certain global trends shaping the most important mutations in the world's major cities, which are also identifiable in Latin America. He employs the concept of urban macroregions to name a pattern of diffuse and interconnected urbanization, where the central feature is the articulation of networks from centers and urban systems that combine a large number of towns, medium-sized and small cities. Thus, according to these authors, the traditional model of a city that gradually grows from the center to the periphery with somewhat clear delineations from rural areas is vanishing, giving way to a web of focal points, nodes, and networks. This transformation represents an "[...] uncontrolled expansion of this compact city, with relatively clear boundaries, to give way to an expanded, diffuse, discontinuous, polycentric agglomeration with a regional dimension" (Mattos, 2010, p. 96).

In the same vein, Janoschka (2002) speaks of a "[...] new model of the Latin American city" where the state is gradually replaced by private initiative in terms of organizing urban space. This new model, heavily focused on reflection on the region's major metropolises—São Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires—is marked by the emergence of gated communities, luxury towers, hypermarkets, and shopping centers. These features highlight a trend towards private urbanization and significant isolation of middle and high-income sectors in private forms of living in the city. Concurrently, there is a progressive isolation of low-income neighborhoods and a tendency toward a segregated and divided city. Janoschka (2002) conceptualizes Latin American metropolises develop in the form of "islands" (islands of wealth, consumption, production, precariousness), as opposed to the open city and public spaces of the previous stage. This viewpoint is shared by other authors who argue that this new city model not only exhibits an unequal distribution of social groups in space but also accentuates physical and concrete barriers to further fragment urban space (Bayón; Saraví, 2013; Borsdorf, 2003; Caldeira, 2000; Schapira, 2001).

In response to these perspectives that suggest a rupture and focuses on a new phase in urban expansion processes in Latin America, authors such as Duhau and Giglia (2008) advocate for a deeper understanding rooted in enduring urban processes. Based on their work in Mexico City, they stress that globalization processes and their impacts on urban order can only be understood within the historical framework of the modern city, that is, they propose that these transformations should be viewed as an accentuation of the characteristics of a pre-existing urban geography.

On the other hand, from a Marxist perspective, recent shifts in the production of Latin American urban space are interpreted as a tension between its social function as a place of living and its private appropriation (Carlos, 2015). Urban land ownership emerges as a key element in the analysis of socio-spatial transformations, where private property and dynamics within the real estate market deepen socio-spatial inequalities (Rodrigues, 2014). Investigations in São Paulo illustrate a metropolis characterized by fragmented and

disconnected mosaics: remnants of old neighborhoods, areas of self-segregation, favelas, and informal settlements contribute to a scattered metropolitan landscape (De Lima Seabra, 2004). Concentration and dispersion, wealth and poverty intertwine within contemporary urban environments, shaped by the process of capital accumulation as the axis of the logic of urban space production (Rodrigues, 1988a).

In this sense, one aspect that stands out in Latin American studies—which is practically absent in central countries' problematizations—is the situation of the most vulnerable and marginalized social groups. Latin American cities expand in a diffuse and fragmented manner, yet these expanding spaces are also battlegrounds for marginalized sectors excluded from formal employment and housing access. Thus, land occupations—both in the form of settlements, villages or favelas—represent strategies for accessing land and housing for large sectors of the population[5]. Peripheral urbanization residents are active agents in the in the process of shaping the city, contributing in creative and diverse ways, and marked by inequality (Caldeira, 2017). Spaces on the city's outskirts become more complex, in the presence of large contingents of the dispossessed who also struggle to access the city, with specific temporalities, logics, and practices.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the spread of the notion of peri-urban space in Latin American studies in recent years. Both in urban and rural studies, the concept of peri-urban space has gained relevance in different research (Barrows, 2010; Barsky 2005; Durán; Córdova; Bonilla, 2018; Fernández; de la Vega, 2017; López; Méndez-Lemus; Vieyra Medrano, 2021; Pintos, 1993; Ribeiro da Gusmão Furtado, 2011; Suazo Pereda; Cárdenas Piñero, 2021; Venturini; Rodríguez; González Roura, 2019). It aims to encapsulate the interplay of intensive primary production systems, residential and recreational sectors—both permanent and temporary—, land access through collective occupations, real estate dynamics, and decentralization of productive activities. This concept emphasizes the intricate and juxtaposed nature of these spaces (Pintos, 1993), highlighting them as transition zones (Barsky, 2005), where diverse and unequal social groups coexist in spatial contiguity (Feito, 2018).

In line with what was mentioned earlier, it becomes evident that while the characterization of peri-urban spaces in Latin America recovers certain elements present in European conceptualizations (especially the integration of diverse land uses and varied productive activities), the emergence of popular sectors competing for these spaces is a brand-new trend.

In central countries, the diversity of social groups in peri-urban spaces often arises from the establishment of government-funded social housing, which typically accommodates wage laborers integrated into the formal market. Furthermore, the coexistence of social classes found at the extremes of the social pyramid is not a focus of these studies, and constitutes a novel phenomenon that is particularly pronounced in Latin America.

FINAL REMARKS

This article has allowed us to account for the ways in which urban expansion has been conceptualized in different parts of the globe. Closely linked to industrialization and

[5] According to Arlete Moyses Rodrigues (1988b), by the end of the 20th century, self-construction accounted for 70% of housing production in large Latin American cities.

the consolidation of the capitalist mode of production in central countries, certain terms emerged to characterize industrial suburbs, where the working classes, attracted by urban labor demand, settled. With the consolidation of the Fordist accumulation model in the mid-20th century, forms of urban diffusion began to spread, characterized by the settlement of middle-class populations in the periphery, seeking a tranquil "way of living" away from the chaotic city, facilitated by car circulation, with the United States pioneering this trend. The model of dispersed or diffuse city would be consolidated in Western Europe a few decades later, coinciding with the emergence of a new accumulation model. Different concepts and categories were developed to understand and analyze emerging social phenomena, each with nuances reflecting the specific emphases and processes studied.

The research conducted highlights the importance of examining urbanization processes and city growth dynamics in line with periods of accumulation and global capitalism's expansion movements. However, regional and national particularities highlight the importance of economic dynamics and national politics, as growth and recession cycles and current accumulation models significantly influence what happens in cities.

We paid special attention to debates surrounding peri-urban spaces, as it is a category widely used in Latin American literature across various fields of discussion. Given that it is a concept coined from northern realities, it is worth noting the absence of lower-class and popular sectors competing for these spaces, making its use here problematic or at least in need of redefinition. One of the most interesting elements of this category is that it places the conflictive dimension of expansion phenomena at its core, allowing for the integration of geographical analyses with sociological reflections.

The processes of urban diffusion that emerged in central countries from the mid-20th century onwards, and which have their counterpart in Latin America, must be understood in close connection with the capitalist accumulation regime during one of its restructuring phases, as one of the strategies that ensures the necessary space-time adjustment for its accumulation (Guevara, 2015). At a higher level of abstraction, this appears as a fundamental theoretical element. However, delving into the concrete processes linked to urbanization in Latin America becomes central to conducting an analysis grounded in situated historical processes.

This article has explored approaches and debates that primarily focus on large Latin American cities, which then would concentrate on the new urban structures of globally connected metropolises. These cities, although subordinated, –are part of a "network of cities" that articulates global production and consumption (Sassen, 2004). A significant portion of urban studies worldwide focuses on these types of cities, providing insights into general patterns of transformation and structuring within the main nodes of global dynamics. However, this focus often overlooks the social and urban processes typical of cities operating on different scales. It remains essential to analyze which elements from these metropolitan studies can inform our understanding of what happens in other types of cities and to identify emerging elements specific to these contexts.

Finally, we underscore the importance of maintaining a balance between explanations that emphasize social dimensions and those that highlight spatial dimensions. Neither space solely determines social relations, nor do social relations unfold independently of space, as

they are both product and producer. In the interplay between physical distance and social distance, many conflicts arise in the expansion areas of contemporary Latin American cities.

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