

Modern and urban crisis: the importance of a different agenda of research

Victor Augusto Campos Alves

Economist, for Federal University of Minas Gerais and technician at Caixa Econômica Federal

victoraca.2010.1@gmail.com

The present work aims to provide a different and broad spectrum of analysis to the urban crisis. It is based on the premise that the world is going through a crisis on its philosophical model and on its planning/urban model. Based on that premise it understands that a complete alteration on the citizens and governments behavior is needed. Built under a Lefebvrian/Marxist matrix it points out to the urgency of modifying not only the relations between people and State but mainly between those two and the capitalist system. Its main goal is to problematize the need and validity of a specific research agenda that has already started in some centers, but that must spread throughout the globe.

1. Introduction

Society, in the early 21st century, started to watch a series of problems that had been operating along the end of the 20th century and which probably originate from the Keynesian/Fordist crisis, the 1968 manifestations and from the systemic crisis of capitalism, starting in 2008. In present time, stands the starting point of awareness by the population (mainly in the developed world) of a crisis of a different kind. Here it is understood that this crisis takes place in the realm of ideas and not in the material one, once, reached the society of abundance, people started noting, gradually, that human aspirations have not been met. Contrary to what classical and neoclassical economics proclaimed, more is not always better. Therefore the predominance in the speech of our time of the need of economic growth at any price and the importance of achieving ever-higher levels of income, savings and investment is relativized and "o espetáculo, a serviço da acumulação, desestrutura a organização social moderna assentada na relação entre valor de uso e valor de troca. O 'parecer ter' supera o 'ter' como forma de superação exponencial do 'ser'" (SANTOS, 2015:42).

With that, this work is based on the premise that there is a crisis of modernity, as something that walks in the direction of progress as a synonym of good and of supreme truth (SANTOS, 2015:43). This crisis is mixed with various others that seems to be individual crises, but that are in fact subordinated to this bigger crisis, a moral and ideological one. The present work search, then, to understand one of these so-called "minor" crisis, in light of this notion of a crisis of modernity, which is the urban crisis. More than that, it aims to show that there should be specific interest in this agenda of research.

In this sense, the starting point for the construction of such a framework of crisis, beyond empirical observation, is the Lefebvrian theory. To Henri Lefebvre, society goes through a period of transition, a change that will lead to the complete urbanization of society. The author is working with a virtual object, with the future, once this society is only hypothetical. At the time, traces of the ancient society mingle with new traits, thus the own agenda in this society is still in formation, but as Lefebvre points out, it differs enough from the industrial agenda and this conflict is what has caused the crisis. In a way it's like saying we don't know what we want, but we know what we don't want.

2. The Modern and Urban Crisis Panorama

Thus, the rationale for undertaking this study takes place around these two crisis: the modernity and urban ones. Under this perspective, on the side of the urban crisis, it is noticeable that the capitalist system, as it is organized, can't answer two important social demands of our time: the environmental demand and the improvement of the conditions of the everyday life, both covered by the great concept of the "right to the city". Under the Lefebvrian optic described earlier, assuming the hypothesis of complete transformation of society in an urban society, the question of right to the city starts to occupy a prime role in order to change this situation of crisis. At one end, the idea of capitalist accumulation brought by Marx points that the profit is the great capitalist's goal and to achieve this goal and complete the cycle M-C-M ' in a recurrent form and to overcome the challenges of the falling rate of profit trend, he understands that the flow of goods put into circulation must always be increased, their production speed expanded and the rate of exploitation of labor intensified (extraction of surplus value). At the other end, the concept of environmental sustainability highlights that for

the human life to reproduce in an environment of relative stability, you should be able to reduce consumption; reuse materials and allocate them to new and different uses; and recycle what can be modified and reinserted in the production chain. All these factors go against the concept of planned obsolescence, against the idea of producing more and more consumer goods and against the idea of high speed of realization of goods in trade. By entering into the idea of further exploitation of paid labor by the capitalist and consequently increasing separation of the worker from the work process and its results, we bring the problem of dehumanizing what people spend most of their time doing, which is their daily work. The other sides of everyday life: the party; the urban mobility, all suffer with the subsumption of the use value of the city's equipment to the exchange value. This is noted: on the need to provide the capital with general conditions of production that transform public spaces in ways so that the capital can perpetuate with greater ease; on the transformation of private spaces in mere habitats of the worker, in the transformation of the housing issue in a matter of providing the workforce with their minimum conditions for reproduction of its workforce (in contrast to the concept of "to inhabit"). In view of this process, the capitalist city suffers today an unprecedented crisis. To study this phenomenon is crucial as most people are living in cities and most of them live in the big cities, which incorporates other problems. The June/July 2013 journeys in Brazil can be interpreted as a manifestation of the crisis and of interests that seem diffuse and unclear at first glance. The interpretation that the scholars of critical geography and urban planning have given the phenomenon is precisely that this dissatisfaction is due to the bankruptcy of a kind of town model.

To the purpose of the crisis of the so-called "modern Constitution", already pointed by Latour (2013), it is important to say that this work is based on the hypothesis that the advent of modernity is what formed, in large part, what conforms today Western societies in which we operate. Thus, modernity was forged in the context of two important revolutions that have taken place in Western societies, the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment (which inspired the bourgeois Revolutions) in the 17th and 18th centuries, respectively. This concept, formed in retrospect, is the conjunction of the intellectual and technical factors that caused the theoretical division between nature and culture. "Nos escritos de Adorno e Horkheimer, essa separação

entre homem e natureza é a condição estrutural do esclarecimento que se traduz na superioridade da razão." Is the result of the separation between reason and emotion, between spirit and body, or between theory and practice. (SANTOS, 2015:39). For Latour (2013), the word "modern" means two practices: a blend of genres of new beings, hybrid of nature and culture and a separation of humans and non-humans. The first allows that the same newspaper talks of ecology, politics and technology at the same time, and the second allows the moderns to analyze separately, science, society and nature, without mixing them. However, the important fact in this analysis is that the modern ignores the proliferation of these hybrids while analyzes separately the natural world and the human being. In other words, while our daily life is permeated by a mix of culture and nature, the modern insists on reviewing both separately, without taking them into account in the dimension of their mixes and symbiosis. So, for this author, the awareness of the existence of hybrids broke with what constitutes modernity, that is, the ignorance of this mixture, what is what had allowed it to happen in the first place. From this point of view, the urban crisis would keep important relationship with a supposed breakout of this Constitution, and, therefore, rests in his own crisis of modernity in progress. More than that, the assumption here is that this crisis creates conditions for the proposition of alternatives that do not deny the advances brought with modernity, but who considers it unable to support themselves philosophically *vis-à-vis* the new goals of "urban society" in formation. As Santos (2012), the construction of a more humane world find its material conditions to settle down, "basta que se completem as duas grandes mutações ora em gestação: a mutação tecnológica e a mutação filosófica da espécie humana." (SANTOS, 2012:174). Such technological mutation would be allowed and caused by modernity, but the philosophical mutation needs to break up with it.

3. Findings and Suggestions for a Research Agenda

For starters, modernity as a discourse preached economic growth, individualism and a specific logic-based philosophy of science. As it is based on the separation described in the previous section, nature and humans could evolve separately, the latter dominating the first without picturing any kind of conflict, in matter of fact, picturing the wild and raw nature in a negative connotation. So the acknowledgment of the

dialectic relation between the pairs: welfare and income, development and nature preservation, liberty and community feeling, to name a few, disrupts not only the discourse but the fundamentals of that society and what it believes. So, in that view, when one analyses all those characteristics of a modern crisis, one might pose that it intertwines with what people are claiming nowadays on the streets. The very roots of the urban crisis confuses with the modern, philosophical one. So when capitalism is set in motion with the primitive accumulation process and enclosures politics in (current) Great-Britain it will spread and acquire its known form only because there was an immaterial process happening alongside that allowed a modification on the plan of ideas. That is why one should separate between capitalism and modernism. If, in the plan of ideas, society modifies itself, than capitalism may survive under different conditions (or different names¹) but the modern path won't allow people to free themselves from the exploratory conditions now in vogue. So as Latour and Moore point out, a new and non-modern path is needed if society wishes to understand the modern achievements but to evolve in social cohesion and social happiness. From that, change could happen in a bottom-up model and the capitalist contradictions will be naturally attacked from its premises as it lies on top of a modernist framework. Without its pillars it will, conservatory speaking, at least have to modify and transform itself to become a less exclusivist system.

4. Conclusions

In that view, the paper tried to analyze what are the current conditions of the world's urban and modern crisis. It showed, from a Lefebvrian standpoint, that the combination between Capitalism and Modernism forged a strong theoretical apparatus that sustained western societies along the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Although the signs of a major crisis, that surpasses the economic field, were already there since the 1960's it is nowadays that the whole system described above is collapsing. The transition needed for a different one does not find conditions to appear in a context in which people simply don't know where to go. From that discussion, it is

¹ Each author will classify and establish the minimum conditions to call a social system "capitalism". So a new system may maintain profit, or labor exploitation, or private property and still be called capitalism for one set of theorists, but, for another group the disruption of one those elements may mean capitalism's death.

thought that the current crisis is a product of a crisis in the realm of ideas. The ideas that made possible the world's political and economic current conformation do not correspond anymore to the aspirations of the new and in formation "urban society". Therefore, the paper tried to show the need for a debate that can articulate those elements, modern and urban crisis, demonstrating that they overlap each other and that some of the causes of society's malaise with their everyday life find its roots in a moral and philosophical crunch.

Regarding the criticism that Lefebvre makes to the philosophy of knowledge built under the influence of modernity, the compartmentalization of knowledge is extremely detrimental to any analysis, along the lines of discussion of a reality. For that we need a new model of knowledge (especially with regard to university education) and a different understanding about what is scientific knowledge. What Lefebvre points out is that the fragmentary and biased knowledge that aims to inform the action of planners and urbanists is insufficient. Therefore it follows from this analysis that part of solving the problem is to form people with knowledge of the whole, for a more diffuse approach without allowing the contents present in isolated disciplines to harm the synthesis which is necessary for the effective understanding. So, initial and long term change passes through a transformation of educational systems all over the world. Technicians and politics must have contact with a new kind of knowledge forged in a different epistemology, a different view on science. At last, the role of current planners, teachers, etc. shouldn't be passive and waiting for that change to occur. A second hint is to try to unravel the current modern-capitalist discourse to show society that a different one is possible, that the ideas in vogue and the so-called "unique speech" do not need to be over-represented *ad eternum*. The very practice of planners could be contaminated by those thoughts and they should encourage what some would call "subversive planning" (LIMONAD; CASTRO, 2013). The paper intends only to bring light to that theme and is not ready to end with concrete results, but those items serve an initial reflection and it is believed that with further discussion and debate it will be possible to arrive at a process that can have political representation and/or at projects that could be translated into politics. That is the major challenge.

5. Bibliographical References

- CARLOS, Ana Fani Alessandri (Org.). Crise Urbana. São Paulo: Contexto, 2015.
- FURTADO, Celso. Criatividade e dependência na civilização industrial. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978.
- HARVEY, David. Os Limites do Capital. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2013.
- LATOURE, Bruno. Jamais fomos modernos: ensaio de antropologia simétrica. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2013.
- LEFEVRE, Henri. A revolução Urbana. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 1999.
- LEFEVRE, Henri. O direito à cidade. São Paulo: Centauro, 2001.
- LIMONAD, Ester; CASTRO, Edna. Um novo planejamento para um novo Brasil? Rio de Janeiro: Letra Capital, 2014.
- MILL, John Stuart. Da definição de economia política e do método de investigação próprio a ela. In: Bentham, Stuart Mill. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 291-315 (Col. Os Pensadores), (1836[1974]).
- MOORE, Steven A. Tecnologia, lugar e regionalismo não moderno. In: SYKES, A. Krista (Org.). O campo ampliado da arquitetura: Antologia teórica 1993-2009. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013.
- SANTOS, César Simoni. A metageografia e a ordem do tempo. In: CARLOS, Ana Fani Alessandri (Org.) Crise Urbana. São Paulo: Contexto, 2015.
- SANTOS, Milton. Por uma outra globalização: do pensamento único à consciência universal. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2012.
- SYKES, A. Krista (Org.). O campo ampliado da arquitetura: Antologia teórica 1993-2009. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013.