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Discussing the ideological nature of the Habermasian theoretical guidelines and their assimilation by social management in the field of administration

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to discuss the ideological nature of Jürgen Habermas' theoretical framework regarding his concept of public sphere within his deliberative democratic theory and its assimilation by social management in the field of administration. The study intends to contribute offering a critical approach towards the influence of Habermas on the notion of social management, mainly with regard to the category of public sphere, by relying on the theme of ideology in a capitalist State and a class society. We analyze the evolution and continuity of Habermas' thought about the public sphere and discuss the consonance of the perspective of social management with the assumptions of Habermas' deliberative theory. We then argue that Habermas' theoretical framework points to an ideology of consensus on social developments. In addition, we claim that, inasmuch as Habermas presumes the possibility of a wholly spontaneous and unfettered dialogue, he ends up designing, idealistically, the intersubjective communication and the public sphere as an "ideal" discursive instance – as aprioristic guarantees of success. We conclude that the "real" public sphere should not be conceived as an arena of idealistic communicative conditions but as a genuinely contentious and asymmetrical deliberative space. In addition, an effective public sphere is supposed to encompass both informal public opinion formation and formal decision making, that is, it should promote real sharing of decision-making power, as sustained by the perspective of social management.

Keywords: Social management. Ideology. Public sphere. Communicative action.

Discutindo a natureza ideológica dos delineamentos teóricos habermasianos e sua apropriação pela gestão social no campo da administração

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é discutir o caráter ideológico dos delineamentos teóricos de Jürgen Habermas acerca de sua noção de esfera pública no bojo de sua teoria democrática deliberativa, bem como sua apropriação teórico-conceitual pela gestão social no campo da administração. Nosso propósito é contribuir com uma abordagem crítica à influência do pensamento habermasiano na conformação da concepção de gestão social, sobretudo no que tange à categoria da esfera pública, recorrendo ao tema ideologia à luz do Estado capitalista e da sociedade de classes. Para tanto, analisamos a evolução e as continuidades do pensamento de Habermas acerca da categoria da esfera pública e discutimos o alinhamento da gestão social com os pressupostos teórico-conceituais da teoria deliberativa habermasiana. Em seguida, defendemos o argumento de que o esforço teórico habermasiano aponta uma ideologia do consenso quanto aos desenvolvimentos sociais, bem como o de que, ao supor a possibilidade de um diálogo completamente espontâneo e não condicionado, Habermas acaba por projetar idealisticamente a comunicação intersubjetiva e a esfera pública enquanto instância "ideal" de discurso como garantias apriorísticas de sucesso. Concluímos que a esfera pública "real" deve ser tomada menos como arena de condições comunicativas idealísticas e mais como espaço deliberativo originariamente conflitual e assimétrico e que uma esfera pública eficaz deve abranger tanto a formação informal da opinião pública quanto a tomada formal de decisão coletiva, isto é, deve promover a efetiva partilha de poder decisório, tal como preconizada pela gestão social.

Palavras-chave: Gestão social. Ideologia. Esfera pública. Agir comunicativo.

Discutiendo el carácter ideológico de los lineamientos teóricos habermasianos y su apropiación por parte de la gestión social en el campo de la administración

Resumen

El objetivo de este ensayo es discutir el carácter ideológico de los lineamientos teóricos de Jürgen Habermas acerca de su noción de esfera pública, en el ámbito de su teoría democrática deliberativa, y su apropiación teórica y conceptual por la gestión social en el campo de la administración. Nuestra intención es contribuir con un enfoque crítico a la influencia del pensamiento habermasiano en la conformación del concepto de gestión social, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la categoría de la esfera pública, recurriendo al tema ideología a la luz del Estado capitalista y de la sociedad de clases. Para ello, analizamos la evolución y la continuidad del pensamiento de Habermas acerca de la categoría de la esfera pública y discutimos el alineamiento de la gestión social con los presupuestos teórico-conceptuales de la teoría deliberativa habermasiana. A continuación, argumentamos que el marco teórico habermasiano apunta a una ideología de consenso sobre los desarrollos sociales. Asimismo, argumentamos que, en la medida en que Habermas presume la posibilidad de un diálogo completamente espontáneo y no condicionado, proyecta idealísticamente la comunicación intersubjetiva y la esfera pública – como instancia "ideal" de discurso – como garantías apriorísticas del éxito. Concluimos que la esfera pública "real" debe ser entendida menos como una arena de condiciones comunicativas idealistas y más como un espacio deliberativo genuinamente conflictivo y asimétrico, y que una esfera pública efectiva debe comprender tanto la formación informal de la opinión pública como la toma formal de decisiones colectivas, es decir, debe promover la verdadera compartición del poder de decisión, como preconiza la gestión social.

Palabras clave: Gestión social. Ideología. Esfera pública. Acción comunicativa.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the various approaches around the notion of social management, there is a common understanding that within management studies the social management perspective has arisen from a depletion of dominant administrative theories still aligned with the capitalist ideology, the Taylorism and Fordism principles, the bureaucratic structure, the prescriptive managerial emphasis, and the instrumental rationality as the main grounds for organizational social actions. In this context, particularly from the 1990s onwards, the theme of social management became popular in organizational practices and studies as an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy and the utilitarian rationality of the traditional mainstream. In other words, social management has come out as a form of management not driven to purely economic and strategic goals (CANÇADO, TENÓRIO and PEREIRA, 2011; FRANÇA FILHO, 2008).

Based on Alberto Guerreiro Ramos' thoughts and Frankfurt scholars, such as Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and especially "old" Jürgen Habermas, Fernando Tenório (2008a, p. 40) seeks to develop a conceptualization according to which social management is regarded as "a dialogical management process in which the decision-making authority is shared among all the participants involved", either in public policy making or in productive relations.

Under such a concept of social management, deliberative citizenship becomes the intermediate element in the relationships between society-State and labor-capital. This suggests a perspective underpinned by the Habermasian theoretical framework, assuming that decisions' legitimacy rests on processes of discussions guided by the principles of inclusion, plurality, egalitarian participation, autonomy and the common good (TENÓRIO, 2012). As Tenório (2008b) claims, deliberative citizenship aims at gathering citizens around an ethical self-understanding so as to encompass multiple forms of communication. This means a deliberative and participatory process anchored in intersubjective understanding among individuals, not for the sake of negotiation or persuasion, but for the accomplishment of a normative consensus (CANÇADO, TENÓRIO and PEREIRA, 2011).

This particular notion of social management, which we take as most representative in the management field (JUSTEN and MORETTO NETO, 2013) and about which we expatiate in this article, is built upon the Habermas' theory of communicative action. That is why it rests on a mutual understanding closely linked with language towards a consensus through critical and reasoned discussions and intersubjective appraisals (CANÇADO, TENÓRIO and PEREIRA, 2011). The Habermasian public sphere is then considered as one of the pivotal theoretical elements in social management (OLIVEIRA, CANÇADO and PEREIRA, 2010)

The public sphere is conceived as a genuine space for deliberative citizenship, a non-State public space in which political actors come together towards a common end. The public sphere, in such case, is different from the bureaucratic sphere, where decisions are made behind closed doors, centralized, debated on the basis of technical knowledge and ruled by asymmetrical power relations and bureaucratic secret. For Tenório (2008b), the public sphere represents a dialogical and decentralized domain for identification, comprehension, problematization and proposition of solutions to social problems, to the point of being assumed as public policies and implemented by administrative State apparatuses. According to Morrow and Torres (1998), the public sphere consists in a space in which citizens decide on common interest affairs; in other words, it consists in an arena of institutionalized discursive interactions.

In the following sections, we will have the opportunity to discuss in more detail the issues initially mentioned. For now, it suffices to point out the conspicuous theoretical and conceptual implications of important aspects of the Habermasian framework for the social management approach, notably with regard to the concepts of communicative action, deliberative citizenship and public sphere. Thus, we consider that the Habermasian public sphere is one of the building blocks of the social management approach (OLIVEIRA, CANÇADO and PEREIRA, 2010). Consequently, we claim that one of the major challenges of this counter-hegemonic management approach is precisely to develop a new conception of public sphere, taking into account its proposal of organizational and societal management (CANÇADO, PEREIRA and TENÓRIO, 2013).

In order to contribute to such a construal, this article seeks to provide a critical analysis of the social management theoretical and conceptual guidelines and its Habermasian background. In this way, we intend to highlight not only the most promising aspects of the social management perspective but also some of its most significant flaws and omissions. We believe that such a critical analysis may contribute to turning the social management ideology and its underlying assumptions into a more "realistic" proposal, as one might say, in compliance with its concrete practices and actions. For that purpose, we address and problematize the question of social management in the light of its ideological contours in a capitalist State and class

society. Therefore, the objective of this article is to discuss the ideological nature of Jürgen Habermas' theoretical framework regarding his concept of public sphere within his deliberative democratic theory, and its assimilation by social management in the field of administration. We argue that the Habermasian theoretical framework points to an ideology of consensus on social developments. Moreover, we claim that, inasmuch as Habermas presumes the possibility of a wholly spontaneous and unfettered dialogue, he ends up idealistically proclaiming intersubjective communication and the public sphere – conceived as an “ideal” discursive instance – as aprioristic guarantees of success.

This article implies a critical positioning, in that our primary purpose is to endorse the public sphere as a fundamental category to a critical social theory as well as to a truly democratic political practice, just as the social management current seeks to do. In this sense, we claim that an effective public sphere should not be conceived as an arena of “idealistic” communicative conditions but as a genuinely contentious and asymmetrical deliberative space. Furthermore, we affirm that, in order to confront strategic ways of managing, the bureaucratic power of the capitalist State and their underlying dominant ideologies, an effective public sphere should encompass both informal public opinion formation and formal decision making, that is, it should promote real sharing of the decision-making power, as sustained by the social management perspective.

SOCIAL MANAGEMENT AND THE HABERMASIAN INFLUENCE

Broadly speaking, the social management approach emerges as opposed to technobureaucratic and monologic managing, as “a more participatory and dialogical way of managing through which decision-making processes are carried out by different social subjects of a given society” (TENÓRIO, 1999, p. 151). In this context, Tenório (2008b) recognizes Habermas' theory of communicative action as a promising perspective to contribute to apprehending and building up an emancipatory possibility for humanity and social autonomy. Therefore, social management rests on communicative rationality and the compatibility of this management perspective with the Habermasian framework is clearly stated in the following assertion:

Under the conception of **dialogic management action**, the word-principle **democratization** would be implemented through the rational intersubjectivity of different social subjects – subordinates and superiors – within organizations. This rational intersubjectivity requires that actors bring forward their proposals under rational basis, that is, none of the parties involved – subordinates and superiors – can impose their pretensions of validity without an agreement reached **communicatively**, whereby all participants expound their arguments and seek mutual understanding through language (TENÓRIO, 2005, p. 120, emphasis in the original).

Cançado, Tenório and Pereira (2011), with the aim of contributing to clarifying and demarcating the concept, suggest that social management means collective decision making, free of coercion, based on intelligibility of language, dialogicity and clear understanding, on transparency as a prerequisite, and on emancipation as an immanent end. Within this definition of social management, we can then point out the following basic premises: 1) its opposite position to bureaucratic, monologic and strategic administration; 2) the Habermasian public sphere as one of its cornerstones; 3) the deliberative citizenship performed within public spheres as the intermediate element for the accomplishment of a debated consensus in dialogic management action; and 4) social management is materialized in discursive practices as facets of social practices that take place in the social metabolism of the public sphere (TENÓRIO, 1998, 1999, 2005; OLIVEIRA, CANÇADO and PEREIRA, 2010).

That is because deliberative citizenship takes place in public spheres and is guided by dialogic action as a means towards an intersubjective consensus, in line with discursive and procedural assumptions of Habermas' theory of communicative action (TENÓRIO, 1999). Hence, deliberative citizenship constitutes the principles of social management, a counter-hegemonic oriented ideology that represents a new way of mobilizing discourses to contest the unilateral precept of the non-dialogical political action mediated or planned by the State's administrative power or by capital (TENÓRIO, VILLELA, DIAS et al., 2008).

In Habermas' democratic model, the notion of deliberative citizenship is rooted in a theory of dialogue, which implies a multiplicity of communicative forms that bring about a network of debates and negotiations to unite citizens under an ethical self-understanding. Underpinned by intersubjective communication conditions aimed at mutual understanding, that is, consensus attained by argumentation, deliberative citizenship can be seen as a political action that would result in political and decision-making equality (TENÓRIO, VILLELA, DIAS et al., 2008).

In this sense, deliberative citizenship would refer to a “widened citizenship” conception (TENÓRIO, 2012), which comes about when individuals reflexively, intersubjectively and discursively participate in decision-making processes related to a public sphere; in such a public sphere what is at stake is the so-called “public interest well understood”, i.e., the pursuit of collective well-being as a precondition for individual well-being.

In sum, within the social management approach, deliberative citizenship takes the Habermasian proposal as a reference framework and means that the “legitimacy of political decisions stems from **discursive processes** guided by the principles of **inclusion, plurality, egalitarian participation, autonomy and the common good**” (TENÓRIO, 2012, p. 38, emphasis in the original).

Social management is then conceived as a discursive and dialogical process that takes place in public spheres, in which the decision-making authority is shared among all the participants involved; it refers, in a nutshell, to a collective decision-making process (TENÓRIO, 2008b). Such a management trend inherently implies egalitarian participation of subjects in decision making, for participation is the essence of social management (CANÇADO, SAUSEN and VILLELA, 2013); and here exactly lies its potential for political emancipation of subjects (SUBIRATS, 2007), after all, could an effective participation of individuals in discursive practices for political decisions lead them to overcome ideological and objective structures of domination and oppression? Before going into these matters, however, it is necessary to critically understand Habermas’ conception of public sphere in the light of his communicative theory.

THE HABERMASIAN PUBLIC SPHERE AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

The book *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, originally published in 1962, is considered the starting point of the public sphere’s theoretical reference frame, in which Habermas (1984) retraces the emergence and decline of this category (THOMPSON, 2011). For him, the political public sphere is a category that arises in Western Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries from a particular social class, the bourgeoisie, when it starts to use the literary public sphere to question the state monopoly over the problematization and thematization of public affairs (SILVA, 2002). According to Habermas (1984, p. 42):

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant.

As Habermas (1984) states, the intellectual stratum of the bourgeoisie is the genuine backbone of the public domain, inasmuch as it constitutes, from the outset, a reading public. Inheritors of the humanist aristocracy, in contact with bourgeois intellectuals, turned their social debates into open criticism, coming together in arenas of dialogical discursivity in which issues hitherto unquestioned could then be problematized, since “the public that read and debated this sort of thing read and debated about itself” (HABERMAS, 1984, p. 59).

These discursive spaces represented sites of criticism of themes that, while considered matters of general interest, remained confined to the Church and the State apparatuses. Hence, the general interest became accessible and capable of deliberation, in principle, to everyone affected, that is, the public was deemed inclusive and open to whoever wanted to participate, apparently without any coercion (HABERMAS, 1984; SILVA, 2002; THOMPSON, 2011).

In this context, the bureaucratic secrecy policy of the bourgeois State competes with what Habermas calls “principle of critical publicity”, a distinctive element of the bourgeois public sphere whose function is to transform personal opinions of private individuals into a public opinion through a critical-rational debate that is open to all and free from domination (THOMPSON, 2011).

Habermas (1984, p. 93) claims that such critical publicity refers to the public sphere as the “organizational principle of the bourgeois constitutional States that feature parliamentary forms of government”. For him, within public institutions the publicity of parliamentary deliberations would assure the public sphere of its effective influence, securing the connection between delegates and voters as parts of the same process. In this instance, the public sphere aims to undertake effective functions in order to emancipate politically the bourgeois civil society from the ruling absolutist regime at the time, by invoking the principle of public knowledge against existing authorities “to compel public authority to legitimate itself before

public opinion" (HABERMAS, 1984, p. 40). In sum, it intends to exert influence on absolutist state's decisions through public opinion (LUBENOW, 2012).

The criticism of Habermas' arguments around his notion of the bourgeois public sphere led him later to seek other theoretical underpinnings to support his theory of democracy and, consequently, his conception of public sphere. As a result, while certain conceptual continuities over the Habermas' theoretical pathway must not be neglected, there is a meaningful shift in the classical notion of public sphere as from the publication of *The theory of communicative action* (HABERMAS, 1981). This shift means a linguistic turn in the Habermasian paradigm through the insertion of formal pragmatics and discourse ethics concepts into Habermas' thinking (SILVA, 2001).

Initially, such a linguistic turn stems from the reconceptualization of rationality, which is understood by Habermas (1981, p. 22) as a "disposition of speaking and acting subjects that is expressed in modes of behavior for which there are good reasons or grounds". Habermas' (1981) account of rationality relates to argumentative discourse, since he states that rationality and argumentation are both interdependent and inseparable. In other words, communicative rationality points to argumentative practice as a court of reason, insofar as a critical and rational discussion is taken as privileged instruments for conflict resolution (SILVA, 2002).

In this vein, Habermas grounds democratic opinion formation upon pretensions to validity he claims to be universally underlying communicative actions. Broadly speaking, in Habermas' thinking, democracy evolves from historicity and contingency of the notably bourgeois public sphere, according to his 1960s accounts, towards a universal and ahistorical capacity of human linguistic communication, as of his 1980s analysis (SILVA, 2001, 2002).

Habermas' argument relies now on an **ideal speech situation**, which occurs when discursive communication of a person with one another implies the following pretensions to validity: 1) what someone says is comprehensible and intelligible, that is, there is a meaning that is grasped by the other; 2) the propositional content of an assertion is truthful; 3) what is said by the speaker may be justified, that is, there is a normative basis that sustains the propositional content according to existing beliefs; and 4) the speaker is honest when speaking and does not intend to deceive the interlocutor (HABERMAS, 1976; SILVA, 2002). This means that in an ideal speech situation, i.e. supposedly free from communicational noises, coercion and ideological operations, an individual participating in linguistic-communicative processes cannot achieve mutual understanding with one another and meanwhile exert influence over him or her in order to accomplish any strategic and rational goal. Discourse, in this case, does not serve to exert power or domination. This notion of ideal speech situation is pivotal within social management, since its proposal means to be carried out in a "privileged space of social relations in which everyone has the right to speak, without any sort of coercion" (TENÓRIO, 2006, p. 1146).

Based on such underpinnings, Habermas seeks to insert the concept of public sphere into his theory of deliberative democracy. The public sphere is then described as a network for communicating information and viewpoints (HABERMAS, 1996), a multiform but linguistically connected sphere in which communication streams are filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. The public sphere distinguishes itself through a communication structure related to communicative action that refers "neither to the function nor to the contents of everyday communication but to the social space generated in communicative action" (HABERMAS, 1996, p. 360).

From this perspective, the materiality of public sphere rests on a highly complex network that branches out into a variety of overlapped international, national, regional, local, and subcultural arenas. Habermas (1996) argues that functional specifications, thematic foci, public domains, and so forth, provide the baseline for a substantive differentiation of public spheres that are, however, still accessible to lay publics (for instance, literary, scientific, religious, artistic, feminist, or even alternative publics that are concerned with matters of health care, social welfare or environmental policy). Moreover, public spheres materialize into different levels depending on communicational density, organizational complexity and range: at the level of episodic publics (pubs, cafes, street corner encounters); at the level of occasionally organized audiences (public presentations and events, theater, music concerts, party assemblies, church conferences); and at the level of more abstract public spheres that are produced and virtually interconnected by the mass media (isolated readers, listeners, viewers geographically scattered across the globe) (HABERMAS, 1996).

Therefore, in contrast to the classical notion of bourgeois and unitary public sphere, Habermas (1996, p. 499) now defines "a highly differentiated network of public spheres – local and transregional, literary, scientific and political, within parties or associations, media-dependent or subcultural" (HABERMAS, 1990, p. 360). Within these public spheres, discursive processes

for public opinion and will formation are institutionalized aiming at diffusion and mutual interpretation of information. That is why their “boundaries are porous; each public sphere is open to other public spheres” (HABERMAS, 1990, p. 360). By propounding the public sphere as an unconditional normative space of deliberation and public communication, Habermas (1992b, p. 400) ended up conceiving the public sphere as a “resonance box” composed of a far-flung network of “sensors that react to the pressure of society-wide problems and stimulate influential opinions” (HABERMAS, 1996, p. 300). Public influence, however, turns into communicative power only if it is caught and filtered through institutionalized proceedings for democratic public opinion and will formation. As Habermas (1992b, p. 368) states, the core of a genuinely proceduralist understanding of democracy is that

[...] the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable.

Then, it is up to the public sphere to include existing conflicts in the political system in order to influence and steer the processes of regulation and circulation of power within the political system (LUBENOW, 2010). This means, however, that, owing to its essentially communicative structure, public opinion only holds influential power over the capitalist State’s bureaucratic apparatus, since the political system is now understood as open to be indirectly influenced by a lifeworld and a public sphere (SILVA, 2002). The public sphere develops a more “offensive” nature, one might say, performing a broader and more active role in formal processes constituting the administrative systems that are controlled by bureaucracy (LUBENOW, 2010). As Habermas (1992b, p. 435, emphasis in the original) says,

From the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must, in addition, amplify the pressure of problems, that is, not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and **influentially** thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes.

In sum, the public sphere represents an intermediary structure between the capitalist State and the political system, on the one hand, and the private domains and the lifeworld, on the other (HABERMAS, 1992b). It consists of a network of communication and information flows that is linguistically built up and anarchically arranged. Moreover, it refers to a social space in which discursive opinion and will formation emerge from statements and pronouncements of participants, according to formal rules of deliberation and validity criteria of communicative action (SILVA, 2002; LUBENOW, 2012).

In other words, the quality of deliberations that take place within public spheres relies on formal proceedings whereby citizens fight over discourses, interpretations and proposals until everyone is convinced of the best argument applied throughout the process. What Habermas wants with his proceduralist paradigm of democracy is to set out the ways in which discursive opinion and will formation can be institutionalized, that is, how to translate communicative power into administrative power, considering that such an influence has to be procedurally mediated through certain “means” (LUBENOW, 2012). In such means, “the discursive level of public debates constitutes the most important variable” (HABERMAS, 1992b, p. 369).

Thus, the formal procedures of an institutionalized decision-making process puts forward the following assumptions: 1) deliberative processes take place in an argumentative form that is characterized by regulated information and argumentation interchanges among parties; 2) no one may be legitimately deprived from deliberative processes, due to their public and transparent nature; 3) hence, such deliberations are free of any external coercion, taking into account that participants respond only to communication presuppositions and established argumentation rules; 4) likewise, any internal constraint that jeopardizes isonomy among participants in public deliberations is not allowed, which points to the opportunity for each one to be heard, to introduce themes, to set forth contributions and to criticize other’s proposals. The only internal coercion must be the force of the better argument (HABERMAS, 1992b; SILVA, 2002).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the Habermasian procedural democracy rests on formal proceedings that define “who” participates (or who has legitimacy to participate) and “how” to do that, although they say nothing about “what” should be decided. As Lubenow (2010, p. 232) points out, “the rules of the democratic game (regular elections, principle of majority, universal suffrage, power alternation) neither provide guidance nor commitment on the ‘content’ of the deliberations and decisions”, whereas “discussions do not govern” (HABERMAS, 1992a, p. 452); they only influence, through a communicative

power, the decision-making process which nevertheless remains in the domains of the State's bureaucratic apparatuses. In our vision, this account has important implications of an essentially ideological sort to social management.

THE IDEOLOGICAL NATURE OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND THE HABERMASIAN NOTION OF IDEAL PUBLIC SPHERE

According to Mészáros (2014), Habermas' theory is associated with the remarkable postwar period of consensus politics. This is noticeable in his book *The theory of communicative action*, in which he shifts his theoretical framework to an essentially abstract plane, so as to found his ideology of consensus upon the concepts of universal pragmatics and communication rationality.

For Eagleton (1997), Habermas has often enough been accused of being a rationalist, and in his view, there is certainly some justice in the charge. In order to ground his public sphere conception upon the logic of the better argument, Habermas suggests that any other social, economic and ideological resources should not, as a rule, interfere in the process of rational deliberation. Nonetheless, how far is it possible to initiate a rational discussion regardless of the participants' social and economic statuses, as if these were something distinct and disentangled from personal identity? How could it be possible, through a mere act of will, to shut off a substantial part of our identity, such as the symbolic and ideological resources related to our social status, class, gender, race, and so on? (SILVA, 2001). On this matter, Habermas (1984, p. 85) firmly states that "public opinion was formed in the conflict of arguments concerning a substantive issue, not uncritically based on common sense in the either naive or plebiscitarily manipulated assent to or vote about persons".

Neglecting in such a way the power of ideology and its close relationship with discursive practices, Habermas does not take into consideration that every discourse carries out an ideological work (FAIRCLOUGH, MULDERRIG and WODAK, 2011), since "ideology cannot operate without showing itself, that is to say without being exposed as a discourse" (LEFORT, 1974, p. 27). Ideology, therefore, is also a discursive or semiotic phenomenon, for discursive practice, as the favorite vehicle to materialize ideology (PÊCHEUX, 1990), is responsible for its linguistic construction; in other words, ideology is pervasively present in language and communication (FAIRCLOUGH, 1989).

Thus, Habermas gives us a "quasi-transcendentally" grounded critical and emancipatory theory, insofar as he sees the requirements of a consensus as intrinsically rooted in the universal human competence of communication, which would enable a discursive public opinion formation free from any ideological jamming. Paradoxically, Habermas ended up projecting the "ideal communication" and the ideal situation/space of discourse of the public sphere as aprioristic guarantees of success to intersubjective understanding (MÉSZÁROS, 2014).

In Mészáros' (2014, p. 81, emphasis in the original) accounts, Habermas has "to **pre-suppose** – in the form of a 'universal species competence' – what he has to **prove** to be a practically feasible strategy of emancipation from the crippling constraints of the established systems of domination". In the same vein, J. B. Thompson, who is, by the way, sympathetic to Habermas' accounts in many aspects, stresses that the German theorist uncritically assumes what must be shown, precisely that the symmetric orientation towards mutual understanding is the basic goal of communication. As this author points out:

What Habermas's assumption of **symmetry** seems to neglect, and what his occasional allusions to the model of 'pure communicative action' do nothing to mitigate, is that the constraints which affect social life may operate in modes other than the restriction of access to speech-acts, for example by restricting access to **weapons, wealth or esteem**. [...] Habermas emphasizes that the application of the thesis of symmetry to representative and regulative speech-acts presupposes a reference to the organization of action contexts, and hence 'the emancipation of discourse from the constraints of action is possible only in the context of **pure communicative action**. This does not mitigate the problem because communicative action is defined so as to exclude considerations of **interest** and **strategy**, of **power** and **persuasion**; thus the latter are not thematized and suspended by the model of pure communicative action, but are simply ignored (THOMPSON, 1982, p. 298, emphasis in the original).

The question, therefore, is the disconcerting fact that the solid socioeconomic, political and ideological power relations and strategies of class societies, which Habermas seems to disregard, attribute an idealistic character to his dialogical and consensual conception, for such relations diminish all pretensions to taking this modality of ideal communication – which is, in truth,

heavily constrained – as a genuine site of intersubjective dialogue and consensus. Moreover, inasmuch as Habermas considers that Marxian categories like class, class consciousness, ideology, exploitation, forces and relations of production (and so forth) are no longer applicable nowadays, he cannot realize that the margins of action – including the margins of communicative action – of the members of different classes and social groups participating in spaces of discursivity are structurally prejudged in favor of the social ruling order. Thus, “the likely outcome of the communicative interchanges of all individuals cannot be brought under the same model and reduced to an aprioristic common denominator”, as Mészáros (2014, p. 83) puts it.

In fact, the potentially consensual nature of the ongoing communication in class societies varies according to the situation in which the dialogue takes place, that is, whether it occurs among individuals of the same social stratum defending the common interests of their class, or, conversely, among individuals who identify themselves with antagonistically opposed classes and social groups. That is precisely why presuming the possibility of an utterly unconstrained dialogue in a public sphere, i.e. neither materially nor ideologically curtailed one, turns out to denote a purely idealistic behavior. As Mészáros (2014, p. 90, emphasis in the original) states, Habermas’ communicative action is

[...] a notion hedged around with a whole range of circular escape-clauses, like “**possible** speech”, instead of actually experienced or produced speech; “we **contrafactually** proceed as if so and so” in such a “possible speech”; “**competent** speakers” (i.e. speakers who obligingly conform to Habermas’s definitional assumptions), as against real speakers; and “the **idealizing proviso**: if only the argumentation could be conducted openly enough and continued long enough” etc., etc. And it does not become any less of a fiction by calling it, as Habermas does, an “**unavoidable fiction**”. All the less since the powerful in the existing (and far from “**symmetrically**” structured and “**reciprocal recognition**”-oriented) historical world, who have ample wealth as well as the weapons of “overkill” one-sidedly at *their* disposal, have no difficulty whatsoever in avoiding and ignoring **all** of the “possible” emancipatory implications of Habermas’s “contrafactually possible ideal communications community”.

In sum, the Habermasian approach of communicative action is in its essence thoroughly ideological, since it tries to explain the interrelations engendered within public spheres of contemporary democracies through a theoretical dynamic of the ideas themselves. In this sense, according to the Marxian conception of ideology, notably the theoretical delineations of Marx and Engels (2007) in *The German Ideology*, originally released in 1846, ideology refers to a speculative and fetishized expression of reality that is detached from its empirical ground by reality itself and that aims at providing us with an explanation and interpretation of such a reality by imposing the predominance of ideas upon reality. For Marx and Engels (2007), every ideology is reduced either to a distorted conception or to an utter abstraction of history. Ideological behavior, therefore, derives reality from ideas, although, and contrarily, the latter must stem from the former.

Thus, the influence of communicative action over bureaucratic systems and the capitalist market, as pursued by Habermas, cannot be achieved solely in the domain of discursive confrontation of ideas but through effective processes of development of the individuals’ material life. The effectual and practical impact of a public sphere will take place via modifications of real and material circumstances, and not via purely theoretical and discursive deductions. Reality will not change with ideas, theorizations and interpretations of the world, but instead with the concrete practice of producing and reproducing life conditions. It is worth pointing out that Marx and Engels (2007) once criticized Ludwig Feuerbach for his attempt to impute abstractedly the human essence to religion, instead of making it intelligible on the basis of the constellation of social and material relations. In Mészáros’ view (2014, p. 103, emphasis in the original), Habermas offers us the same kind of idealistic solution, “by implanting into the individuals the Feuerbachian ‘mute generality’ of a miraculous ‘linguistic **mechanism**’, by means of which the *species* is supposed to emancipate the individuals, achieving reconciliation and conquering freedom”.

In fact, Habermas’ accounts suggest an opposition between the “abstract possible” and the “concrete real”. In other words, his theory of communicative action immerses itself in the abstract possible and, as a result, it secedes from the concrete real insofar as Habermas neglects the influences of the real world and its contradiction over his theory, as its pretensions to validity are self-referential and self-enclosed. The nature of the link that Habermas establishes between the highly abstract core of his model and reflections and actual historical situations is that of a mere Kantian-oriented *ought* (MÉSZÁROS, 2014). Indeed, particularly with regard to the public sphere, his assumptions imply a far more normative approach associated to moral and deliberative principles that the public sphere “must” set out (MELO, 2015) than a concern to understand the practical reality of such a social arena and the ways in which it objectively affects the existing socioeconomic and political processes.

Public spheres represent obviously factual spaces of discursive practices, not mere fictions. However, the ways in which Habermasian assumptions depict the reality of these public spaces, and their effects and outcomes over political and social movements, just find a match in an ideal domain; that is why they constitute a speculation, an arbitrary abstraction. In Habermas' theory, the social metabolism of the public sphere is defined on the grounds of what it not necessarily is, or, at most, of what it "must be".

Furthermore, another ideological bias in the solutions offered by Habermas concerns the fact that both his ideal communications community and ideal speaking situation, which constitute the discursive locus of the political public sphere, suggest a view of social conflict and of its potential resolution – a view that could be ultimately described as naive. Mészáros (2014, p. 99) observes that Habermas says nothing about who has the power to transform, that is, "radically restructure – the existing, highly centralized and bureaucratized, system of decision making into the ideal 'ought' of a fully democratic and genuinely participatory alternative". According to the author,

Having severed in this way all links with a historically identifiable social agency of emancipation, all that remained to Habermas were the arbitrary assumptions of a transcendental pseudo-anthropology, from a fictitious "primordial urge to self-reflection" to explaining social development as such in terms of "an automatic inability not to learn". To this, he added a circular and convoluted deduction about "agreement" and "consensus" (even "contra-factual consensus") guaranteed by "communicative competency", concluding his discourse on the significance of the "ideal speaking situation" in the "ideal communications community" with the axiomatically self-reassuring but singularly unilluminating assertion that: "Always, when we begin a discourse and carry it on long enough, a **consensus** would have to result which would be *per se* a **true consensus**" (MÉSZÁROS, 2014, p. 193, emphasis in the original).

In this sense, the "ideal" public sphere that engenders such a "true consensus" could only be effective if established from the start in an essentially social conflict-free world, thus rendering the dialogical-argumentative labor of the "ideal speakers" totally redundant. That is to say, if we erect the artificial walls of the ideal communications community against the persisting antagonisms in the real world, if all objectively and ideologically sustained contradictions of society are wiped away, then the role of the ideal interlocutors of an ideal public sphere would be confined to rejoicing over the already instituted fundamental consensus (MÉSZÁROS, 2014). In other words, if Habermas' normative public sphere is free from external conflicts and constraints, immune to ideologies and asymmetries of argumentation and power – due to that universal communicative and cognitive competence –, what would be the reason for a discursive pursuit of a "true consensus" but to endorse and self-indulge with a priori agreed "consensus", that is, the consensus of the masses with regard to the hegemonic power of the established bourgeois social order?

Therefore, the thrust of the Habermasian communicative theory and its universal pragmatics implies a distinctly ideological nature, since it remains silent on the mystifications of structural contradictions in the capitalist society and fictitiously seeks to supersede the deficiencies of "distorted communications" by the purely idealist formal procedures of deliberation and pretensions to validity (MÉSZÁROS, 2014).

As a matter of fact, the Habermasian guidelines of deliberative democracy and its discursive ethics point to an ideology that expresses a non-conflictual perspective on contemporary and future social developments to which social management, in the version under discussion here, seems to be adherent. In our view, social management bears the marks of such an ideology to the extent that it refers to a participatory process of deliberation based on mutual understanding among individuals, not in the sense of negotiation or persuasion but of normative consensus achievement through ethical-political and moral self-understanding (TENÓRIO, 2008b; CANÇADO, TENÓRIO and PEREIRA, 2011). In this vein, some aspects that reveal the ideological trait of social management must be here mentioned.

THE IDEOLOGY OF SOCIAL MANAGEMENT

The paradigm of social management seeks to operate some sort of inversion of the relationship between State and society so as to promote the latter as the true principal agent in such a relationship. Underpinned by the Habermasian thesis, Cançado, Pereira and Tenório (2011, p. 102) claim that the discourses of public interest which are capable of solving problems are institutionalized in civil society, “as they exert influence on the institutionalized opinion and will formation” on the communicative terrain of public spheres. Accordingly, that is the way in which the contemporary society can emancipate itself from both the State and the market.

Nonetheless, the State remains indeed the entity which institutionally regulates and controls the social metabolism as a whole, so long as the State exists. This is because the capitalist State plays an overriding role of representing and organizing the ruling classes, from which it cannot be detached. For Poulantzas (2015), the State constitutes the political unity of the ruling classes, thereby establishing them as dominant classes by representing and organizing, both now and in the past, the long-term political interest of the bourgeoisie and its several class fractions within the power bloc. Hence, political domination – the power of the bourgeoisie in the case of the capitalist State – “is inscribed in the institutional materiality of the capitalist State” (POULANTZAS, 2015, p. 12), regardless of which side of that inversion it rests on. The State thus operates towards class hegemony as the interpreter of dominant political and economic interests (POULANTZAS, 1986, 2015); it represents, ultimately, the alienation of masses with regard to the most comprehensive power of decision making, for it complements and enforces “globally intertwined exploitative practices of the capitalist productive system” (MÉSZÁROS, 2014, p. 469).

Unlike the Habermasian claims, the framework of the capitalist State and of its organizational principle is not critical publicity, but relations of production. According to Poulantzas (2015, p. 24), “capitalist relations of production trace the field of the capitalist State, for the relations of production constitutes its primary relation with social classes and the class struggle”. Hence, the State plays a central role in the relations of production and in the delineation and reproduction of social classes. As opposed to Habermas’ argument (1971, p. 113), that “in advanced capitalist society deprived and privileged groups no longer confront each other as socio-economic classes”, Poulantzas (2015) claims that the State has a constitutive role in the existence and reproduction of class power and specially in the class struggle. For him,

Wherever there is class division and thus class struggle and power, the State already exists as institutionalized political power. Right from the beginning, the State marks out the field of struggles, including that of the relations of production; it organizes the market and property relations; it institutes political domination and establishes the politically dominant class; and it stamps and codifies all forms of the social division of labor, all social reality within the framework of a class-divided society (POULANTZAS, 2015, p. 37).

The presence of political and ideological relations within relations of production stems from the primacy of these relations of production which trace the field of the State, since these political and ideological relations concretize and legitimize them. Poulantzas (2015) argues that the process of production and exploitation constitutes simultaneously a process of reproduction of relations of domination, and political and ideological subordination. This means that the State sanctions and produces political domination not only by using repression, force or violence, but also by directly using the power of ideology in order to legitimize violence (in its various forms) and contribute to organizing a consensus of certain subordinated classes and groups around the public power. In this regard, Poulantzas (2015) adds that the dominant ideology is embedded in the State apparatuses whose function is to formulate, proclaim and reproduce such ideology, which represents an important aspect to establish and reproduce social division of labor, social classes, and class domination. That is the main role of the so-called ideological State apparatuses, whether they compose the formal structure of the State, whether they are shrouded in a private and juridical cloak, as the Church, schools, the media, cultural apparatuses, etc.

In this sense, if the public sphere is idealistically taken as a normative space of consensus, and to the extent that it does not constitute an arena for real translation of communicative power into formal will (decisions, actions, policies, etc.), it then may become an ideological tool to legitimate class hegemony and conceal political domination. This requires social management to recognize that the sorts of dialogues taking place within the boards of public spheres in a capitalist State are indeed always structurally vitiated against the possibility of an outcome that could effectively challenge the most important structures of

the established social order. As a constituent product of the capitalist State, the public sphere is scarred by the contradictions of the capitalist system from the outset.

Whereas the State “intervenes in all the relations of power in order to assign them as class pertinency and enmesh them in the web of class powers” (POULANTZAS, 2015, p. 41), the social management public sphere is more likely to be trapped by a materially and ideologically preconditioned vicious circle rather than to comprise a priori a site of genuine and unconditional political deliberations and decisions. Furthermore, it would be absurd to underestimate the practical efficacy of the power of ideology employed by the State to create a consensus with regard to the main conflictual aspects in pursuance of its essential political function, which is to assure cohesion in capitalist social formation (MÉSZÁROS, 2014).

It is important to stress, in addition, that the State’s interventions in reproducing consensus and domination over masses are not just achieved through the promotion of the dominant ideology that works to conceal and dissemble its targets and goals as well as to produce a permanently mystificatory discourse. It should be remembered that ideology does not necessarily mean inversion, delusion, deceit, falseness, mystification; it refers, above all, to a form of social consciousness, a materially anchored and inescapable practical consciousness of class societies (MÉSZÁROS, 2014). Therefore, the State employs the power of ideology in a positive fashion, creating, transforming and making reality (POULANTZAS, 2015). In other words, the State plays a role in organizing the dominant classes themselves, which consists of uttering, formulating and openly expressing the discourses and strategies to reproduce their power. This means the promotion of the dominant forms of consciousness to the dominant classes.

Consequently, the State enjoys a *relative autonomy* in relation to dominant groups within the power bloc, as far as this enables it to perform its primary political function of safeguarding the cohesion of the social formation and organizing and unifying dominant classes. Hence, the State cannot be seen peremptorily as a mere instrument of class domination, whereas it is crossed by class contradictions, resistance, and subordinated classes and social groups’ claims. Such relative autonomy enables the State to respond to pressures, from time to time and within limits, with more openness, integration, transparency, and participation of dominated classes and groups, albeit this does not mean a disruption in the ruling political power. In this way, as Poulantzas (2015, p. 131) stresses, the State and its policy, forms and structures express the interests of the dominant class not in a mechanical manner, but through a relationship of forces that makes of the State a “material and specific condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions”.

Capitalist juridical ideology illustrates this question quite clearly. As previously mentioned, the Habermasian notion of deliberative democratic politics suggests that the law is the regulatory and procedural element of communication flows that evolves from the public opinion dimension based on rational debates, which lends them democratic validity and legitimation, to the level of political decisions (SILVA, 2002). According to Poulantzas (2015), however, the capitalist law turns out to be necessary for a State that does not forgo relative autonomy owing to one or other fraction of the power bloc precisely to organize their unity under the hegemony of a given class or fraction. Thus, the law regulates the exercise of political power through State apparatuses, as well as the access to these apparatuses themselves through a system of universal, abstract and formal norms that allows a changed balance of power within the State, although without provoking upheavals.

With this in mind, social management seems to disregard the power of ideology and its association with the capitalist State, just like Habermas did. By presenting itself as a sort of “dialogical managerial action focused on the public non-state interest and achievement of common good” (CANÇADO, TENÓRIO and PEREIRA, 2011, p. 103), social management must inevitably recognize its ideological nature – even if it represents an alternative or counter-hegemonic one. Moreover, it cannot neglect the work of the dominant ideologies to which it opposes – ideologies that in fact hide political domination and fundamental conflicts of antagonist class interests and social groups under the cloak of “well understood” general interest.

In this vein, it should be stressed that ruling ideologies have a typical interest in the preservation of the *status quo* in which even the most evident inequalities are already structurally entrenched and established. Consequently, as Mészáros (2014) points out, such ideologies can afford to proclaim enthusiastically the “virtues” of “consensual” arrangements, of “political unity” and “participation”, thereby mystifying the fact that the social order which they champion is inherently plagued by contradictions, no matter how successful the reproduction of the hierarchical structural framework of domination and subordination and the semblance of “organic community” and “mutually shared and well understood interest” over time.

Hence, in order to avoid favoring, paradoxically, ideological strategies of what social management intends to fight against, it needs to take into account that the dialogical action taking place within its borders is always structurally vitiated against the possibility of an outcome that could objectively challenge the most important cornerstones of the established social order, for individuals tend to be confined in a materially and prejudged vicious circle of power rather than immersed in a genuinely open and unconstrained space, in view of their class positions and social strata. Despite the patent inattention to this fact, on the part of some social management scholars, it is paramount to consider carefully the discursive and non-discursive devices of dominant ideologies as well as the ideological operations of the State's bureaucratic apparatuses. That is essential to keep us from falling into the trap of a "consensus" which is in fact a more or less one-sidedly enforced outcome of dominant power relations, and which takes many times an "often deceptively unproblematical form of an 'agreement-production' communicative interchange", as sustained by Mészáros (2014, p. 84).

By the way, the problematic of illusory consensus and utterly misleading participation is nothing new neither to the Habermasian proposal supporters nor to the social management scholars. Nancy Fraser's Marxist reviews of the Habermasian notion of public sphere since the 1990s, notably on the distinction between strong publics, which correspond to effective decision makers, and weak publics, which correspond to participants of public opinion formation only, bring about relevant implications on the ideological nature (in a pejorative sense in this case) of the participation of subaltern groups in decision-making processes carried out within public spheres.

In Fraser's (1990) view, one cannot isolate public arenas for deliberation from the effects of a stratified society, which is based on an institutional framework that generates inequalities between social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination. Such inequalities interfere with deliberative processes of public spheres, which then tend to operate to the interests of dominant classes and groups. Fraser (1990) criticizes the bourgeois character of the Habermasian ideal public sphere by pointing out that these deliberative sites work under the supervision of dominant groups, in this way narrowing the critical and challenging the argumentative potential of members of subordinated groups, which she calls *subaltern counterpublics*.

As can be observed, these arguments refer to the mystificatory and delusive nature of both participation in decision-making processes and strength of subaltern groups to articulate and defend their political interests. These ideological reflections also come forward insofar as subordinated groups are particularly vulnerable to a dominant language. According to Fraser (1990), in political discourse there are powerful terms frequently deployed to delegitimize some interests, perspectives and topics, and to valorize others. Moreover, by assuming the ideology of consensus, of shared general interest etc., subordinated groups ended up endorsing "consensually" the dominant power and the established order, instead of representing some sort of effective political constriction. In addition, the State's bureaucratic secrecy allows the introduction of circuits and networks that make enunciations easier from some specific centers (POULANTZAS, 2015), and this suggests a structural prevalence of State apparatuses over public spheres.

According to Fraser (1990), once the distinction between State apparatuses and civil society is set out, the public sphere is inscribed in the latter, and strong and weak publics are distinguished one from the other; it is then inevitable not to distinguish the decision-making power from public opinion formation. In this case, while resting on civil society, Habermas' public sphere will not be able to cross over to the State side, that is to say, to the side of decision making (SILVA, 2002).

Habermas' (1992a, p. 452) reply to this argument is clear: "discussions do not govern". For him, the thematization of social problems is a function that only can be carried out within public spheres; the problematization and the resolution of conflictual issues, on the other hand, are exclusive assignments of the State apparatuses.

For Habermas, as opposed to Fraser's (1990) claims, the communicative power of public spheres cannot replace the bureaucratic systemic logic, since the political-ethical solidarity cannot replace the administrative power. The former can and must only influence the latter in an indirect way (SILVA, 2002). In other words, when Habermas states that "discussions do not govern" he is suggesting that deliberations prompted in public spheres "generate a communicative power that cannot take the place of administration but can only influence it" (HABERMAS, 1992a, p. 452), an influence that is, in Silva's (2002) opinion, limited to justification or mere contestation of the instituted power.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Certainly, the category of public sphere is indispensable to critical social theory and to democratic political practice (FRASER, 1990, 2007; MELO, 2015). As described here, however, the way in which Habermas drew up his concept of public sphere is not entirely satisfactory, and that is why the notion of public sphere has been undergoing some criticism and reviews over the years. As Fraser (2007) states, the Habermasian category of public sphere should be rebuilt according to other postulates rather than being simply rejected, in a way that it could truly illuminate the possibilities of political emancipation and that, precisely in the case of social management, it could be coherent with what such a proposal of dialogical management of collective and participatory decision making strives for.

In the light of the arguments debated in the previous sections, we argue, in conclusion, that the “real” public sphere cannot be conceived as an arena of “ideal” communication conditions which aprioristically assure an essentially consensual nature to its deliberative process. Discussions are conflictive processes that not necessarily aim at a common outcome, that is, a cognitive consensus; they refer to negotiation progress and communicative interactions whose interests are antagonistic and contradictory, full of ideological strategies and power influences. The public sphere, therefore, must not be taken as a genuine consensus-based dimension, unless from an idealistic perspective.

In this sense, we consider that the Habermasian guidelines on deliberative democracy and discursive ethics, which have been assimilated into the social management notion, consist of an *ideology of consensus* that ends up mitigating existing structural conflicts of the established social world, and projecting the fiction of ideal communication and the public sphere as an ideal situation/space of discourse, that is, a site of utterly spontaneous and unconstrained dialogues and elocutions oriented towards the best argument. Meanwhile, to what extent is it really possible to extricate the force of the best argument from the ideological and rhetorical mechanisms by which it is conveyed, the material and subjective conditionalities, the forms of consciousness with which different social classes are linked, the game of power and desire which molds such utterances from within? (EAGLETON, 1997). And, if Habermas’ normative public sphere is supposed to be an arena which is free from conflicts, discrimination, ideologies, power asymmetries and external constraints, due to that universal communicative and cognitive competence, which would then be the meaning of the discursive search for the best argument, or “true consensus”, but to endorse an aprioristically agreed consensus, the consensus of the established social order?

As Mészáros (2014) observes, the idea of sticking with the dominant social order through some sort of consensus, rather than firmly confronting the established power relations which subdue class opposition, is nothing new, even as regards administrative theories. Taylorism is quite instructive to show us how deep the consensual aspirations in capitalist productive organizations were (the elimination of causes for dispute and disagreement by scientific management). Actually, administrative theories have always aimed at consensual solutions to social antagonisms by means of different methods and approaches employed by each school of managerial thought.

Therefore, as long as capital remains the main regulator of the fundamental social metabolism, the margins of communicative action of the members of different antagonistic classes and social groups participating in discursive public spaces will remain structurally prejudged in favor of the ruling social order. This makes Habermas’ purely dialogical and consensual conception – underpinned by a universal pretension to communication validity, by the public sphere as an ideal community of discourse, and by discursive ethics of Kantian inspiration – an essentially idealistic perspective, for the public sphere is, in fact, strongly constrained by well-entrenched socioeconomic, political and ideological power relations and strategies. Moreover, as sustained by Mészáros (2014), it would be absurd to underestimate the practical efficacy of manipulatory and persuasive vehicles of the capitalist State. As the interpreter of dominant political and economic interests (POULANTZAS, 1986), the State employs these vehicles – such as bureaucracy and even the public sphere in many cases – to create a consensus with regard to ideological beliefs and major “political interests”. Mészáros (2014, p. 145) states that:

The effective intervention of the State in managing potentially devastating “dysfunctions” and conflicts is an undeniable practical dimension of the contemporary social reality, and it is sufficiently eloquent in itself. Within this framework, ideologies of consensus, politically and institutionally underpinned, have

a much greater weight and power of persuasion than any other direct appeal – in the name of science or anything else – for particular individuals or social groups to “revolutionize their mental attitudes” in order to promote a “brotherly cooperation”, an appeal that, if left on its own account, is doomed to remain at the level of mere wishful thinking.

Certainly, domains of historically relevant conflicts that folded out into broad processes of struggle, conquests and defeats (citizenship, rights, representation, participation) arose within public spheres. That is why they historically evince the political consciousness of ruling classes, the exploitation of working class and subordinated groups, women’s exclusion, discrimination against black people etc.; although they are also spaces in which ideas of freedom, equality, justice and inclusion are politically developed (MELO, 2015).

As Melo (2015, p. 26) points out,

It [the public sphere] is a conflicted social space in which power relations pervading practical experience and everyday life bring about consequences to the public sphere itself, where wide-ranging and organized public thematizations, manifestations of diffuse revolts or, in certain cases, imposition of important institutional changes are generated.

In sum, the public sphere does not represent an inherently consensus-oriented domain but a network of conflicting discursive clashes and negotiations, of resistance and oppression, of injustice, discrimination and asymmetries of power. The social metabolism of the public sphere is, one might say, a degenerate space of less civility and more contradictory interests (MELO, 2015; PERLATTO, 2015). The public sphere is then an arena under stress, resistance and movements against hegemony, albeit it can also serve to hegemony self-promotion and political domination of certain classes and social groups.

Accordingly, the social management perspective must not conceive – without due critical reflection at least – the public sphere as the sphere of discursivity normatively and idealistically designed by Habermas, that is, it must be considered less as an ideal space for communication, locus of an abstract democratic *ethos*, and more as a dimension of actual and practical experiences. It must be asserted as a contradictory space in which several forms of consciousness confront each other and whose discourses must necessarily have practical implications.

Consequently, this requires a formulation of another notion of inclusive public sphere, one that comprises both the informal democratic public opinion formation and the collective decision making, that is to say, the effective sharing of decision-making power as advocated by social management. For this purpose, it is not enough that dialogic interactions mobilize an informal collective will that, while legitimate, only have influence over formal decision making ultimately carried out by the State apparatuses. Conversely, this means that the public opinion generated in the stages of dialogic discursivity must imply a political force that ensures its own efficacy, which is the capacity of being translated into decisions, laws and effective political actions in order to be implemented by the set of State apparatuses. Such efficacy implies both a process of translation – which according to Fraser (2007) concerns the conversion of communicative power generated in public spheres into binding laws and administrative power – and the capacity of administrative power to realize the public’s designs and social interests of the collectivity by effectively implementing the discursively formed will.

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