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# Urban common space, heterotopia and the right to the city: Reflections on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey

*Espaço urbano comum, heterotopia e o direito à cidade: Reflexões a partir do pensamento de Henri Lefebvre e David Harvey*

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## Abstract

A city's common spaces are appropriated by capital that aims to guarantee the conditions necessary for the production-reproduction of capitalist relations. In this context, the challenge is to imagine and construct a very different type of city capable of breaking away from the dynamic of capital, founded on new forms of appropriation of the city, which implies articulating both theory and praxis. For this to occur, however, it is necessary to create new knowledge about the city and a strong anti-capitalist social movement focused on the transformation of daily urban life and involving new forms of appropriation of urban common spaces. It is in this context, and from a dialectic perspective, that this article articulates the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, seeking to contribute to an understanding of the production processes of space in contemporary capitalism, the discussion of the future of cities and perspectives on transition. To do so, the article addresses four central ideas: (i) the dialectic conception of space to problematize the production and appropriation of urban common spaces; (ii) the recognition of urban common spaces as spaces traversed by contradictions, disputes and material and symbolic conflicts among different agents; (iii) the right to the city as a need and as a utopian project; and (iv) the challenge of articulating heterotopic practices from the perspective of creative rebellion for the right to the city and the transition to a new urban future.

**Keywords:** Right to the city. Urban common spaces. Urban reform. Urban conflicts.

## Resumo

*Os espaços urbanos comuns da cidade são apropriados pelo capital visando garantir as condições necessárias para a produção-reprodução das relações capitalistas. Nesse contexto, o desafio seria imaginar e construir um tipo totalmente diferente de cidade capaz de romper com a dinâmica do capital, fundado em novas formas de apropriação da cidade, o que implica em articular teoria e práxis. Mas para isso ocorrer torna-se necessário criar um novo conhecimento sobre o urbano e um forte movimento social anticapitalista focado na transformação do cotidiano da vida urbana como seu objetivo, o que envolve novas formas de apropriação dos espaços urbanos comuns. É nesse contexto e desde uma perspectiva dialética que o presente ensaio busca articular as formulações de Henri Lefebvre e de David Harvey, buscando contribuir para a compreensão dos processos de produção do*



*espaço no capitalismo contemporâneo, a discussão sobre o futuro das cidades e as perspectivas de transição. Para tanto, o ensaio aborda quatro ideias centrais: (i) uma concepção dialética de espaço para problematizar a produção e a apropriação dos espaços urbanos comuns da cidade; (ii) o reconhecimento dos espaços urbanos comuns das cidades como espaços atravessados por contradições, disputas e conflitos materiais e simbólicos entre diferentes agentes; (iii) o direito à cidade como uma necessidade e como um projeto utópico; e (iv) o desafio da articulação das práticas heterotópicas na perspectiva da rebeldia criativa pelo direito à cidade e da transição para novos futuros urbanos.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Direito à cidade. Espaços urbanos comuns. Reforma urbana. Conflitos urbanos.*

## Introduction

The subordination of the city to capitalist development and its incessant need for production of surplus capital implies a process of constant urban growth based on destruction and reconstruction of cities and the grave social, environmental and political effects associated with this dynamic. For this reason, capital appropriates urban common spaces with the intention of ensuring the conditions necessary for the production-reproduction of capitalist relations. The challenge is to imagine and construct a very different type of city that constitutes a departure from the dynamic of capital, founded on new forms of urban appropriation, which implies articulating theory and praxis. However, for this to occur, it is necessary to create both new knowledge of the urban and a strong anti-capitalist social movement with the objective of transforming day-to-day urban life that would involve new ways of appropriating urban common spaces. It is in this context — and from a dialectic perspective — that this article intends to articulate the formulations of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey around four central ideas and to contribute to understanding the production processes of space in contemporary capitalism in the discussion about the future of cities and the perspectives of transition. It is noteworthy that many of Harvey's formulations essentially use Lefebvre's insights as their starting points. Since the publication of *Social Justice and The City* (1973), Harvey has incorporated Lefebvre's ideas and conceptions in his reflection on urban space and the capitalist production of space and in his ideas about the theory of uneven geographical development. More recently, perceiving that the idea of the right to the city has experienced a

resurgence over the last decade, Harvey resumed his reflections on Lefebvre in the book *Rebel Cities* (2012), thereby updating the debate on the right to the city and the urban revolution.

### **First idea: a dialectic conception of space to problematize the production and appropriation of urban common spaces**

It is opportune to begin this reflection by asking the question: What is urban common space? Is it public space, space produced by the state, space appropriated by groups or collectives, or spaces for political action?

From the physical viewpoint of urbanism, urban common space may be considered as space within a city that is for public use and collective possession and belongs to the public authority or to society as a whole — for example, spaces for circulation (such as a street or a square), spaces for leisure and recreation (such as an urban park or a garden), spaces for contemplation (such as a waterfall), or spaces designated for preservation or conservation (such as an ecological reserve). In all of these cases, the right to free access and movement is guaranteed to everybody.

However, there are urban common or public spaces that feature certain access and circulation restrictions, such as public buildings, educational and health institutions, and cultural centers. For example, hospitals and schools set access, use and circulation rules for their spaces. In fact, no matter how free the public spaces may be, it is necessary to ask, in each context, who appropriates them.

Common space, however, does not only refer to physical space. Beyond materiality, from the political

viewpoint, the concept of public space or the public sphere is distinguished from the private sphere and refers to spaces of public interest (BOBBIO, 2006), spaces constituted of identities and collective action (SADER, 1988), spaces that allow societal representation and collective expression (DAHL, 1997), spaces for political freedom (O'DONNELL, 1999), spaces advancing the condition of equality (ARENDT, 1981), and spaces reflecting democratic formation of opinion and public will (HABERMAS, 1997).

According, there are various ways to think about urban common spaces with respect to both its material and its symbolic appropriation. Thus, before specifically addressing urban common spaces, following is a brief reflection about space itself, which is based on the contributions of David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre.

Within the dialectic tradition, Lefebvre (1991) proposes a conception about space founded on a triplicity: spatial practice (space of perception arising out of daily reality); representations of space (i.e., conceived space and represented space); and representational spaces (i.e., spaces experienced through images and symbols, the spaces of passion and action). To Lefebvre, "spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period" (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 46).

Therefore, Lefebvre (2008, p. 55) "denies space as a piece of *a priori* data, whether of thought (Kant), or of the world (positivism)". The author argues "that every society — and hence every mode of production with its subvariants (i.e. all those societies which exemplify the general concept - produces a space, its own space." (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 31)

Harvey (1973, 2006) also proposes a tripartite conceptualization of space, but his is based on the absolute, relative and relational conception of space:

If we regard space as absolute, it becomes a "thing in itself" with an existence independent of matter. It then possesses a structure that we can use to pigeonhole or individuate phenomena. This view of relative space proposes that space be understood as a relationship between objects

that exists only because objects exist and relate to each other. There is another sense in which space can be viewed as relative, and I choose to call this relational space—space regarded in the manner of Leibniz, as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects (HARVEY, 1973, p. 13).

Harvey argues that, in a dialectic conception, "space is neither absolute, [nor] relative [n]or relational in itself, but it can become one or all simultaneously depending on the circumstances" and on human practice (HARVEY, 1973, p. 13). Thus, he continues on to note that

the problem of the proper conceptualization of space is resolved through human practice with respect to it. In other words, there are no philosophical answers to philosophical questions that arise over the nature of space — the answers lie in human practice (HARVEY, 1973, p. 13).

The conceptualization proposed by Harvey can easily be harmonized with that of Lefebvre. Harvey (2006, p. 133) proposes to do exactly that:

I propose, therefore, a speculative leap in which we place the threefold division of absolute, relative and relational space-time up against the tripartite division of experienced, conceptualized and lived space identified by Lefebvre. The result is a three-by-three matrix within which points of intersection suggest different modalities of understanding the meanings of space (and time).

In addition, Harvey proposes to articulate this conceptual matrix using the Marxist concepts of use value, exchange value and value, generating a new analytical matrix. From this perspective, the author stresses that "everything that pertains to use value lies in the province of absolute space and time", whereas "everything that pertains to exchange value lies in relative space-time because exchange entails movement of commodities, money, capital, labor and people over time and space." Finally, because value is a relational concept, "its referent is [...], relational space-time", underlining

that “value, as Marx states, ‘is immaterial, but objective.” (HARVEY, 2006, p. 141).

Here it is relevant to readdress the question of the definition of public space. Taking the approach of Harvey and Lefebvre as a reference, we could say that public space is neither absolute nor relative, nor is it relational in itself, but instead is characterized by dimensions related to those three dimensions in permanent dialectic tension.

Inspired by an example given by Harvey (2004) himself, in which he attempts to understand a house situated in a certain space, one can look at a square and recognize the three dimensions. A square has a physical and legal materiality and is related to the absolute space. In addition, it is possible to situate the same square in relation to other places — e.g., residence, work or leisure, or commerce — and in relation to the flows of persons, services and money, thus recognizing its position in relative space. Finally, it is also possible to attempt to understand the relationship of the square and the process of local property construction in the global property markets, including financing the economy, participating in history and heritage of the city, and its meaning as a place traversed by personal and collective sentiments and memories, among other aspects. All of these aspects sustain the square as a place of leisure and circulation. Harvey sustains that profound understanding about the transformation process of spaces over time. The square in the example considered here could only be achieved by identifying the effects simultaneously produced by these three forms of space-temporality. Despite all of the difficulties in applying this conceptual space, as the author himself recognizes, the ideas that come from this dialectic approach can open up innovative paths of thinking about different forms of appropriation of public space by distinct social agents and the social conflicts arising from them, in addition to illuminating new possibilities of action and collective rebellion.

This approach shows how different public spaces are experienced and appropriated as spaces of experience and perception associated with the quotidian (spaces experienced by persons, who uses different spaces, and how those different spaces are used); how they are represented as spaces (spaces conceptualized in different ways, as open

or closed, distant or near, spaces of business or leisure, etc.); and how they are representational spaces (space experienced — i.e., the sensations, imagination, memories, emotions and meanings associated with public space). Therefore, public spaces are experienced as much materially as they are intellectually and emotionally.

What is interesting to retain from this discussion is that human practice is producing, appropriating and assigning new meanings to urban common spaces. Moreover, as Lefebvre (1991, p. 55) affirms,

[...] as for the class struggle, its role in the production of space is a cardinal one in that this production is performed solely by classes, fractions of classes and groups representing classes. Today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 55).

### **Second idea: Urban common spaces as spaces traversed by contradictions, disputes and material and symbolic conflicts among different agents**

Here, the starting point is to recognize the diversity of the agents and interests that intervene in the production of the city and its different forms of relating to urban land, housing and urban equipment as use values and exchange values, understood as relational concepts (HARVEY, 1973). What is use value for a particular agent may be exchange value for another, and vice versa, due to the different forms of material and symbolic reproduction of agents in the city (BOURDIEU, 1989, 1997).

This approach allows one to view the city as an arena where different agents with different interests confront each other. Each agent seeks to achieve its objectives, even if they relate to one's very existence and social reproduction in the city (e.g., living well or realizing symbolic gains relative to the status of residing in a special place) — that is, use value — if they instead relate to the possibilities of material gains and accumulation of wealth — that is, exchange value. From this perspective, Bourdieu (1997, p. 161) makes an important contribution in affirming that city space, physically created, is the expression of social space:



The reified social space (that is, space that is physically created and objectivized) is thus presented as the distribution in the physical space of different sorts of goods or services and also individual agents and physically located groups (as bodies linked to a permanent place) and endowed with opportunities for appropriation of these more or less important goods and services (in accordance with their capital and the physical distance from these goods, which also depend on their capital). It is in the relation between the distribution of the agents and the distribution of the goods in the space that the value of the different regions of reified social space is defined.

City space is, therefore, the expression of the “great social oppositions objectivized in the physical space”, in the form, for example, of division between a city’s center and its periphery, and it tends to be reproduced in the forms of representation

and in the language in the form of oppositions constitutive of a principle of vision and division, that is, as categories of perception and appreciation or mental structures (BOURDIEU, 1997, p. 162).

Thus, city space is translated in the expressions that oppose the residents of these different areas (for example, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, the opposition between a resident of the regular urban area and a shantytown dweller, or between the Carioca (citizens of Rio) and the Fluminense (citizens of Rio State).

On this level, Bourdieu (1997, p. 162) emphasizes that,

as the social space is found to be inscribed at the same time in the spatial structures and in the mental structures [...], the space is one of the places where power is affirmed and exercised, and, without doubt, in the most subtle form, that of symbolic violence as unnoticed violence [...].

One can conclude that, in the same manner, various agents also relate to urban common spaces in different ways — as material spaces or political spaces, seeking to guarantee their social reproduction (i.e., use value) or material gains and accumulation of wealth (i.e., exchange value).

From the perspective of the approach proposed here, it is possible to reflect on the city’s urban conflicts in terms of two interlinked dimensions: material and symbolic appropriation of urban common spaces. Thus, the capacity to dominate urban common spaces, above all, materially or symbolically appropriating the goods and services distributed in them, depends on agents’ capital in their different forms (economic, cultural, political, symbolic, etc.) (BOURDIEU, 1997).

As Lefebvre argues, in capitalist society, the common space is appropriated from the perspective of constituting a system, a coherence, which harkens back to the concept of structured coherence, of Harvey’s (2005) theory of unequal development. How can this coherence be achieved? For Lefebvre (2008, p. 56), “masking its contradictions”, the spaces’ “character, at the same time, global and dispersed, joint and disjointed” are homogeneous and disarticulated. In this way, the dominant strategy attempts to ensure production of social relations and reproduction of these class relations throughout the entire space, “including urban space, leisure spaces, spaces considered educational, quotidian spaces, etc.” (LEFEBVRE 2008, p. 49).

However, as Lefebvre notes, despite being masked, the contradictions of the space explode for two reasons. First, contradictions arise from the production itself and social appropriation, in particular by capital. At the same time, in the logic of capitalism, while the space intended to be global, joint and rational, its dynamic of functioning disrupts, commercializes, sells, and divides the space into portions, making it “at the same time global and dispersed”. Second, on the institutional plane, these contradictions appear between “private ownership of the land, which is generalized for all spaces, with the exception of the rights of collectives and the state” (2008, p. 57) and the globality, knowledge and strategy of the state itself. In other words, a contradiction exists between the abstract space (conceived, global and strategic) and the space appropriated, immediate, experienced and fragmented. This contradiction is expressed on the planes of land regulation and in the partial projects of production and appropriation of the space on the part of incorporators and economic agents.

In a similar manner, the concept of structured coherence of space, devised by Harvey (2005, 2006), also expresses capital's attempt to create a space in its own image and its similarity, in the context of the spatial restrictions that exist under particular technological conditions. However, in the same way, this coherence is subject to constant tensions and contradictions arising from the dynamic of capitalism itself and tends to be shaken by the forces of accumulation and superaccumulation by technological change and class struggles. However, this power to destroy structured coherence depends "on the geographical mobility as much of capital as the labor force, and this mobility depends on the creation of fixed and immobilized infrastructure" (HARVEY, 2005, p. 150).

Thus, the capitalist dynamic is marked by tension between preservation and continuity of the constitutive elements of the structured coherence existing in a certain space at a particular time (power relations, social reproduction, values, culture, etc), and the destruction of this same coherence to make room for a new space to accumulate capital (HARVEY, 2005).

In short, under this approach to this article's theme of analysis, there is a conception of urban common spaces as marked by conflicts and contradictions. This allows reflection on the forms of material and symbolic appropriation of these spaces by different social agents, as well as on the dynamics of production, preservation, reproduction, destruction and creation of new urban common spaces, identifying factors that focus on their homogeneities and heterogeneities, their continuities and ruptures.

### **Third idea: the right to the city as a need and as a utopian project**

Under capitalism, certain common spaces, such as state-constructed physical spaces, are fundamental for the reproduction of capital: streets, highways, squares, ports, airports, housing, and public buildings, which together result in a specific type of urbanization. Likewise, certain public spaces, such as political spaces, are also crucial: parliament, the executive power, state agencies, etc. Therefore, urbanization involves the creation of common spaces

that guarantee the conditions for production and reproduction of capital.

However, urban space is more than the creation of conditions for capital reproduction. At the same time, it is also the production and reproduction of the relations of capitalist production. From this perspective, Lefebvre highlights that "capitalism was only maintained by being extended to the entire space" (2008, p. 117), which implies a need for capital to produce and reproduce its own space. Throughout history, capitalism has modified cities according to its requirements:

More or less fragmented in suburbs, peripheries, satellite agglomerations, the city becomes, at the same time, a decision-making center and a source of profit (LEFEBVRE, 2008, p. 175).

In this process of producing the city, "an immense workforce is employed, as productive as the labor employed in the maintenance and 'feeding' of machines" (LEFEBVRE, 2008, p. 175). From the same analytical perspective, Harvey argues,

Urbanization is itself produced. Thousands of workers are engaged in its production, and their work is productive of value and of surplus value. Why not focus, therefore, on the city rather than the factory as the prime site of surplus value production? (HARVEY, 2012, p. 129-130).

In short, it becomes necessary to consider the production of the city as a process of surplus value.

Based on this approach, it can be said that producing the capitalist city is inevitably associated with class struggle. As Harvey (2012, p. 115) explains,

If urbanization is so crucial in the history of capital accumulation, and if the forces of capital and its innumerable allies must relentlessly mobilize to periodically revolutionize urban life, then class struggles of some sort, no matter whether they are explicitly recognized as such, are inevitably involved. This is so if only because the forces of capital have to struggle mightily to impose their will on an urban process and whole populations that can never, even under the most favorable of circumstances, be under their total control.

Considering the production of space, there is yet another important aspect, raised by Lefebvre (2008), related to what we could call the space fetish. Lefebvre, referring to Marx, affirms that merchandise, produced and exchanged by means of money as things, contains and disguises social relations, and argues that in the same manner, one can speak of space. Thus, one can say that the private appropriation of land and the subordination of space to capital, along with the institutionality mediated by the state, are responsible for creating the space fetish, disguising the social relations contained in common spaces.

On the basis of this approach, the idea of the right to the city gains meaning, as formulated by Henri Lefebvre (1967, p. 158) as follows: “The right to the city is like a cry and a demand”. As Marcuse (2012) observes, for Lefebvre, the idea of the right to the city acts in two dimensions: on the one hand, a requirement, a demand for the provision of social reproduction in the city; on the other hand, a project, a collective demand for the new city that expresses the right to claim something that does not yet exist, the right to another city.

As a requirement, the right to the city expresses a demand for the provision of social reproduction in the city, and is linked to struggles against dispossession — referring to claims related to housing, sanitation, mobility, education, health, culture, democratic participation, etc. Thus,

the cry is for the material necessities of life, the aspiration is for a broader right to what is necessary beyond the material to lead a satisfying life (MARCUSE, 2012, p. 31).

From this perspective, the right to the city as a requirement (the right to the city as a cry) could be translated into the diversity of agendas of the urban social movements that have emerged in several countries, especially in Latin America: movements against evictions, movements for the homeless, urban reform, sanitation, a just city, environmental justice, free public transport passes, the rights of immigrants, and cultural movements, among others. This heterogeneity is also perceptible in the institutional struggles for change in urban legislation, which would create special social-interest zones, social housing programs, programs

to regularize land tenure in shantytowns and low-income districts, in addition to expanding spaces for political participation, e.g., through participatory budgets and municipal councils. All of these struggles could be considered part of the right to the city, given that they focus on decommodifying and broadening access to urban land, housing and public services. In short, this set of mobilizations has repercussions for fundamental aspects of social reproduction in the city. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider that these struggles concern only this dimension of the right to the city. In fact, in all its plenitude, the right to the city cannot be exercised in the ambit of capitalist urbanization.

As a collective demand for a new city project, the right to the city is linked to the creation of a less alienated alternative urban life that promotes human emancipation. It is the right to reconstruct the city from the perspective of social justice and happiness. Thus, the right to the city expresses the right to claim another city. As Marcuse (2012, p. 34) states:

For the demand for the right to the city is a demand for a broad and sweeping right, a right not only in the legal sense of a right to specific benefits, but a right in a political sense, a claim not only to a right or a set of rights to justice within the existing legal system, but a right on a higher moral plane that demands a better system in which the potential benefits of an urban life can be fully and entirely realized.

As Lefebvre (2008, p. 34) affirms, “taking it in all its extent”, the right to the city seems to be a utopian project, or, in the terms of the author himself, “something that is not possible today, but may be tomorrow” (LEFEBVRE, 2008, p. 162). Therefore, “to claim the right to the city is, in effect, to claim a right to something that no longer exists” (HARVEY, 2012, p. xv). In this way, “the definition of the right to the city is itself an object of struggle, and that struggle has to proceed concomitantly with the struggle to materialize it” (HARVEY, 2012, p. xv).

In this sense, before setting one perspective in opposition to another (the need versus the utopian project), it seems more virtuous to articulate these two dimensions dialectically. Thus, the challenge is



to articulate the struggles linked to demands for the fundamental need for social reproduction in the city and an agenda for a utopian project for a new city, one that is just, democratic and emancipatory.

Historically, the industrial city was subordinated to capitalist development and its incessant movement of production of surplus value and overaccumulation, which implied uninterrupted urban growth, with all its perverse social, environmental and political effects. For Harvey (2012, p. 80), “capitalist urbanization perpetually tends to destroy the city as a social, political and livable commons.” In fact, the process of capital accumulation, as Harvey (2012, p. 80) observes, “threatens to destroy the two basic common property resources that undergird all forms of production: the laborer and the land”, underlining that the inhabited land “is a product of collective human labor”. Thus, in capitalism, “urbanization is about the perpetual production of an urban commons (or its shadow-form of public spaces and public goods) and its perpetual appropriation and destruction by private interests” (HARVEY, 2012, p. 80).

In sum, from the perspective of the right to the city, it is fundamental to articulate the struggles for the needs for social reproduction and a utopian project for a new city with urban common spaces. Such spaces focus directly on the conditions of social reproduction in the city, as much in the sense of expanding access to housing, sanitation, urban mobility, culture and leisure, health and education, environmental sustainability, etc., as in the sense of decommodifying these goods and services. However, urban common spaces also concern the forms of sociability and appropriation of space and time, and they express the values and public vision of the city in which they desire to live.

Thus, as Harvey (2012, p. xvi) notes, “our political task, Lefebvre suggests, is to imagine and reconstitute a totally different kind of city out of the disgusting mess of a globalizing, urbanizing capital run amok”, which involves new forms of the appropriation of public spaces as urban common spaces. Nevertheless, “that cannot occur without the creation of a vigorous anti-capitalist movement that focuses on the transformation of daily urban life as its goal” (HARVEY, 2012, p. xvi).

This poses the challenge of reflecting on the subjects of social transformation. Without deeply

exploring that theme in this article, two aspects seem crucial: the need to redefine the concept of class (as suggested by David Harvey (2012)) according to the agents that construct the city; and the need to break from the homogenizing vision of the working class. From the perspective of the approach proposed here, it is these subjects of social transformation that have the potential to form an anti-capitalist movement, as suggested by Lefebvre, fundamental to ensure the plenitude of the right to the city.

Addressing the historical and contemporary social conditions of neoliberal capitalism requires retreating from the traditional Marxist interpretation centered on the relationship between capital and labor in the ambit of production, as a place of appropriation of surplus value, which leads to treating urban conflicts as related to the ambit of reproduction and devoid of revolutionary potential due the working class’s lack of involvement. The traditional interpretation often seemed to assume that expansion of salaried employment would generate homogenous workers, and that class-consciousness could be developed from the objective conditions of the productive structure.

It is evident that this reductionist vision neglects the mechanisms by which neoliberal capitalism promotes differentiation of the workers at the same time that it has the capacity to homogenize, in the sense of subordinating everything to commodity form, thus activating symbolic distinctions involving culture, gender relations, ethnic characteristics, consumption patterns, and religious beliefs, among other factors. Thus, in the context of homogenizing market relations, neoliberal capitalism is characterized by a strong capacity to fragment and divide, which is expressed equally in the production of spatial differentiations and inequalities.

With the aim of furthering this approach, Harvey raises two central questions. First, he (2012, p. 128-129) sees “no reason why it should not be construed as both a class struggle and a struggle for citizenship rights in the place where working people live”, given that “the dynamics of class exploitation are not confined to the workplace”, as shown by the practices of dispossession promoted by contemporary neoliberal capitalism, such as the removal of communities in favor of major urban projects and the privatization of common urban

spaces. The author goes on to say, “these forms of exploitation are and always have been vital to the overall dynamics of capital accumulation and the perpetuation of class power.”

Second, Harvey (2012, p. 129-130) argues, “Urbanization is itself produced. Thousands of workers are engaged in its production, and their work is productive of value and of surplus value.” Next, he proceeds to argue, “Why not focus, therefore, on the city rather than the factory as the prime site of surplus value production?” The question that emerges from this reflection concerns knowing the identity of the workers that produce the city. In addition to construction workers, there are other labor forces involved in producing the city that deserve to be considered.

In this context, the struggle for the right to the city could be constituted in a worldview capable of promoting the working-class alliance in the context of neoliberal fragmentation and differentiation.

#### **Fourth idea: the challenge of articulation of the heterotopic practices from this perspective of creative rebellion for the right to the city and the transition to a new urban future**

Lefebvre (1999, 2008) formulates three important concepts for thinking about contradictions in the production and appropriation of space: isotopic spaces, heterotopic spaces and utopian spaces.

In simplified form, isotopic spaces are defined by isotopia itself due to being constituted in the same place. They could be conceived as spaces homologous to the logic of capital, having analogous functions and structures from the perspective of capital reproduction that are therefore spaces of capital, commodified — that is, having exchange value. In this sense, the spaces produced by the public authority, in the logic of creating conditions for capital reproduction or in the logic of political domination, could also be conceived as isotopic spaces. Thus, it can be said that spaces of participation created and used as domination mechanisms are equally isotopic spaces.

Heterotopic spaces are characterized by heterotopia itself, by the space of difference. They are contrasting spaces. At times, they represent conflicts, appropriated by agents to be spaces for the

reproduction of life; also, they are decommodified and therefore represent use value. Such spaces refer to the multiplicity of uses of space in the quotidian life of the city.

Finally, utopian spaces are defined by utopia, by the non-place, by places elsewhere. Utopian spaces are those spaces that do not yet fully exist. For Lefebvre (1999, p. 45-46), the utopian “is real. It is at the heart of this real, the urban reality, which is not itself devoid of this seed. In urban space, the elsewhere is everywhere and nowhere.”

What is interesting about this analysis is that these heterotopic spaces do not only arise after a rupture with the capitalist system, after which one could plan to construct such spaces and create new utopian spaces. Such spaces already exist and criss-cross the city.

Thus, one can identify heterotopia in the innumerable practices of social movements, in cultural manifestations and in collective action to decommodify the city, which promote new forms of appropriation of urban common spaces. Spaces in the city gain new meanings through these practices: squares, streets, collectively occupied buildings, museums, theatres, parks, rivers, beaches, abandoned sheds, trains, buses, steps, bridges, and schools, among others. No public space escapes from the new possibilities created such that all of these can be reappropriated in a creative fashion through collective action.

In the case of Brazil, the formation and struggle of the *Comitês Populares da Copa* [Popular Committees for the World Cup] in the context of the organization of these mega-sporting events in the 2014 World Cup host cities, may be viewed as an example of heterotopic practices. Through actions of resistance to community evictions affected by urban intervention, through mobilization and street protests against the commodification and elitization of the cities, through the denunciation of human rights violations associated with this mega-sporting event, and through defense of publicly administrated football stadiums, the *Comitês Populares da Copa* are impinging directly on the defense of common urban spaces and are promoting new forms of appropriation of the cities. In this context, one can highlight the collective mobilizations developed by the *Comitê Popular da Copa e das Olimpíadas do Rio de Janeiro* [Rio de Janeiro Popular Committee

for the *World Cup* and Olympics] against the removal of residents from Vila Autódromo, which neighbors the site where the Olympic Park will be constructed (FREIRE, 2013) and which will become a “symbol of resistance” not only to the eviction of lower-income settlements but also to neoliberal development projects constructed by the Municipal Public Authority.

Thus, it seems useful to think of urban transformations and contemporary conflicts in light of these concepts. In a schematic manner, it is possible to affirm that current thought is marked by the dispute between two worldviews or ideas of urban policy: the ideas of the neoliberal city and the ideas of the right to the city, with their different impacts on city dynamics.

Situated in the ideas of the neoliberal city are the strategies of urban entrepreneurship, city marketing, and neoliberal urban restructuring (HARVEY, 2005; HACKWORTH, 2007; THEODORE; PECK; BRENNER, 2009). Urban policy is transformed into a market relationship in which the winner is the one who holds the most power to ensure profits and transfer costs to the public authorities. In this conception, social participation is founded on recognizing agents as clients/consumers, bearing private interests, and preventing the construction of the public sphere that is an expression of collective interest. On the planning level, this idea seeks legitimacy through discursive strategies founded on the models of strategic planning in the promotion of mega-events (especially sporting ones like the World Cup and the Olympics) and in the diffusion of city models considered to have been successful in constructing favorable business environments. Such strategies are undertaken and diffused by the action of hegemonic actors that involve multilateral agencies, financial institutions, and national and local governments. It is important to assess the power of this conception to continue influencing the neoliberalization of urban policies in central and peripheral countries and to discuss their effects — in political, social and environmental terms — on different cities. With the permanence of this view's power, it can be foreseen that for the coming years there will be an increase in social inequality, a loss of political institutions' legitimacy, and aggravation of environmental injustices.

From capital's point of view, the diffusion of entrepreneurial governance and the neoliberal city can be viewed as processes of creating isotopias, of commodifying urban common spaces and subordinating them to the logic of capital.

The other worldview around the idea of the right to the city is under construction, due to both its theoretical aspect and socio-political praxis. Developed in the context of a large set of experiences of collective action, social mobilization and public administration, this concept affirms the public character of urban planning and the need to confront mechanisms that produce social inequality arising out of the current subordination of city production and administration to market logic and capitalist profit. These principles have played a decisive role in the resistance to commodification of the city and in the construction of alternatives to the new liberal city project. Nonetheless, it is necessary to recognize that this vision is still far from constituting a hegemonic force, at least in current thought.

From the point of view of transition to an urban revolution, the challenge is to promote heterotopias, to decommodify urban common spaces and to build articulation and unity among the different heterotopic groups with respect to a new utopian project and collective action aimed at the right to the city in its plenitude, through construction of a completely different city. However, this urban revolution must not be viewed as a specific moment in time disconnected from the present heterotopic practices. As Harvey emphasizes,

Lefebvre's theory of a revolutionary movement is the other way around: the spontaneous coming together in a moment of 'irruption;' when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different."

For Lefebvre, “in a few words, the urban revolution and concrete (developed) democracy coincide” (LEFEBVRE, 1999, p. 126).

## Final considerations

The intention of this article is to explore the dialogue between the approaches of Henri Lefebvre

and David Harvey in discussing some of the concepts and conceptions related to common urban spaces and the right to the city. Identification of the points of convergence and complementarity between the two authors was favored to the detriment of their differences. In fact, many of the ideas in Lefebvre's works are presented in the form of insights and are not developed in a manner as systematic as that found in the works of Harvey. Nevertheless, as Harvey himself recognizes, Lefebvre is a constant inspiration for his own ideas. This does not occur without reason. Both thinkers use Marx as their fundamental reference: the dialectic thinking, the historical and geographical materialism — to use the formulation of Harvey (1996) — and as an intellectual project, to contribute to filling the gap in Marxist thinking, problematize space as a key analytical category for understanding the capitalist dynamic and the construction of alternatives to overcome it.

The future construction of new urban alternatives requires an understanding of the contemporary urban phenomenon, with all of the changes emanating from neoliberal globalization, along with the urban roots of the crises of present-day capitalism (HARVEY, 2012). Furthermore, recalling Lefebvre (1999), it is possible to say that reflection on the urban phenomenon must define a double strategy, both articulated and inseparable, i.e., the strategy of knowledge and the socio-political strategy.

Within the ambit of the strategy of knowledge, it is necessary to devise a radical critique of traditional urbanistic models and their contradictions and to develop a science of the urban phenomenon. From this perspective, inspired by Bourdieu (2004), it is possible to state that it is necessary to expect radical revelations from scientific analysis of the urban dynamic. Analyses committed to the vision of the right to the city face the challenge of putting into perspective agents' discourses and perspectives, revealing the meaning of their practices and interests (and the social and political conflicts arising from them) and seeking legitimation and universalisation of their particular positions. This implies breaking the barriers and blockages that prevent the urban phenomenon from being recognized (to use the terms proposed by Lefebvre), which keep the urban phenomenon prisoner to fragmentary

analysis, subordinate to the urbanistic concepts of industrial society. Thus, it is necessary for analysis of the urban phenomenon to reveal processes of differentiation, segmentation and urban segregation as structured elements of the social-spatial dynamic, the processes of commodification of the city and the forms of appropriation of the urban common spaces by capital.

On the plane of socio-political strategy, it is appropriate once again to refer to Lefebvre (1967, p. 155), who proposes an urban strategy based on two points: (i) "a political program of urban reform", formulated on the basis of knowledge of reality, produced by the science of the city, and sustained by social and political forces, which assume the role of the subjects of the proposal; and (ii) "mature planning projects that consist of model and spatial forms and urban times without concern for their current feasibility or their utopian aspect", resulting from popular imaginary and praxis, "which invests itself in appropriation (of time, space, physiolocal life and desire)" and that also "include the way of living in the city and the development of the urban on this basis", that is, that can also focus on the forms of appropriation of urban common spaces.

On this plane, it is of fundamental importance to update the conception and the agenda of struggles for the right to the city "as a political class-based demand" (HARVEY, 2012, p. 136) that would respond to the challenges arising from contemporary social and economic transformations. Similarly, one can also speak of the challenge of developing a new emancipatory pedagogy in city planning to incorporate these elements.

The central question, noted by Harvey (2012, p. 128), is that

any anti-capitalist alternative must abolish the power of the capitalist law of value to regulate the world market. This requires the abolition of the dominant class relation that underpins and mandates the perpetual expansion of surplus value production and realization.

When examining the experiences of heterotopic practices in progress in the cities, one can conclude that it is in the face of great challenges, from the perspective of constructing new urban common



spaces and a new city project, that this anti-capitalist alternative is expressed. However, it is possible to say, once again inspired by Lefebvre, that it is necessary to view in these experiences — and in the diversity of heterotopic practices undertaken by different social agents — lessons that conform to practice that may generate a new utopia of the right to the city, capable of developing collective actions of creative rebellion and new processes of reappropriation by human beings, their space and their temporality, from the perspective of urban transition to a more just and democratic city.

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