

CITIZENSHIP TRANSFORMATION UNDER GLOBALIZATION: SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY¹

CIDADANIA EM MUTAÇÃO NA ERA DA GLOBALIZAÇÃO: EXCLUSÃO SOCIAL E O PAPEL DA DEMOCRACIA LOCAL

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RESUMO: A mutação do conceito de cidadania e a nova dinâmica da exclusão social são analisadas no contexto da globalização econômica e capitalismo informacional, conforme aporte teórico de Manuel Castells e Saskia Sassen. Os efeitos da globalização desafiam os direitos do cidadão, especialmente ao influir nas dinâmicas locais, uma vez que a expansão mercadológica compete por financiamento e espaço nas cidades. O presente artigo debate o conceito de cidadania, apresentando as distintas vertentes teóricas que abordam sua definição, ao mesmo tempo em que questiona recentes mutações relacionadas à necessidade de diferenciar pessoas conforme sua função dentro do processo econômico global. O processo de exclusão e inclusão dentro do capitalismo global está diretamente relacionado ao conceito de cidadania e a “utilidade” de pessoas e lugares para a reprodução do sistema. Por fim, o presente artigo analisa a possibilidade e/ou potencialidade do fortalecimento da democracia local em apresentar uma resistência aos processos de exclusão social reforçados pela globalização do capitalismo informacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: cidadania, globalização, exclusão social, participação cidadã

ABSTRACT: Mutations in citizenship as well as the new dynamics of social exclusion are analyzed in the context of economic globalization and informational capitalism, along with the theories developed by Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen’s. The effects of economic globalization challenge citizenship’s rights as it influences local dynamics: the market competes with citizens for space and financing in the city. This essay debates the concept of citizenship according to the different theoretical affiliations and put into question the mutations on citizenship due to the necessity to differ people according to their functions within the global economic process. Social exclusion and inclusion within global capitalism is directly related to the concept of citizenship

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and the “use” people and places have to the reproduction of the system. Thus, this work analyzes the potential of strengthening local democracy as a counter factor to processes of social exclusion, reinforced by the globalization of informational capitalism.

KEYWORDS: citizenship, globalization, social exclusion, citizens’ participation

SUMMARY: Introduction. 1. SOCIAL EXCLUSION: PERIPHERIES AND FRAGMENTATION. 2. CITIZENSHIP: MUTATING UNDER GLOBAL ECONOMY? 2.1 Contextualization of the concept. 2.2 Citizenship mutation in globalization era. 3. PARTICIPATION: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CITIZENRY EMPOWERMENT? CONCLUSION. BIBLIOGRAPHY.

INTRODUCTION

This essay discusses the relation between economic globalization and the new trends of social exclusion in both developed and developing world. Is there a real social change with globalization? How does it affect citizenship and the bundle of rights it entitles? Is there a way to oppose to this trend of giving value to people and places according to economical criteria?

An action towards social inclusion necessarily confronts the dominant culture or the dominant practices which make groups or people uneven. ‘To include’ means, in other terms, to confront relations of power. Those relations change in time and place and then, ‘social inclusion’ is also a process that requires a comprehension of those temporal and spatial dimensions.

On the one hand, analyzing the processes of exclusion/ inclusion in relation to the formal representation of power, as to say, in relation to the state, requires as well an understanding of the concept of citizenship, as being excluded is somewhat lacking the rights inherit to citizens of a given country. In our times when economy plays a main role in determining power relations, understanding process of inclusion/exclusion bypasses the comprehension of socio-economic dynamics.

How the rights of citizenship are pledged to people, how people can be denied or restricted from exercising them and how the dynamic of exclusion happens on current days are the topics discussed on this paper, with an emphasis on the process of globalization, the new forms of exclusion it discloses and how it shapes the concept of citizenship. Finally, the paper attempts to define the elements of ‘social inclusion’ and its relation with the claim for a more participative civil society.

1. SOCIAL EXCLUSION: PERIPHERIES AND FRAGMENTATION

Being socially excluded means to be denied the access to what the collectivity can provide so as to guarantee freedom and decent conditions of life. Or rather, according to Castells (1999, p.8), social exclusion is defined as “the process by which certain individuals or groups are barred from access to social positions that would entitle them to provide for themselves adequately, in an autonomous way, within the context of prevailing institutions and values.”

Latin American researchers and practitioners have appropriated the concept of social exclusion to address the dramatic economic inequality present in the region. Hernández-Medina (2010, p. 514) quotes Silver and Miller which argues that the “idea of social exclusion involves moving along a historically defined continuum of exclusion and inclusion. In between these two polar situations there is an interregnum of vulnerability in which social groups face the risk of becoming more or less excluded/included’.

In the case of South America, for instance, the colonial heritage plays an important role in defining excluded groups, which stem mainly from the former relations of subjugation colony-metropolis (Africans slaves and natives Americans). Besides, the continuum of the power relations even after the independence aggravates the situation of those vulnerable groups; who cannot compete equally in the market economy.³

As mentioned by Koonings and Kruijt (2007, p. 8), ethnicity is a stratifying factor within the urban informal economy and society in South America, as “informal economy has more to do with black people than the black market and in the Andean countries (...) features of Quechua and Mayan culture mix elements of informal society”.

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the pattern of segregation, restriction, poverty and *de facto* second-class citizenship acquired an urban face. Exclusion is translated in the geographical distribution of social groups, representing an extremely segregated urban environment.

The social exclusion in an urban context has shaped the form of cities and there is a clear spatial divide associated to who has and who has not access to what the city can offer. The relation of exclusion and cities is going to be the main focus in this essay, for this reason, is relevant to understand the current trends of development which have contributed to reshape cities and also create new forms of marginalization.

The analysis of social exclusion is present on the studies of globalization, especially with the work of Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen. Both authors link the process of global flows and the informational era with new forms of inclusion/ exclusion, which has not necessarily created a new group of “excluded” but new forms of exclusion that actually aggravated the situation of existing marginalized groups.

Castells affirms that the current global system has deepened inequalities and he predicts a social crisis. According to him, for the first time in history the

³ South America is highly urbanized, but this phenomenon was rather related to an ‘urbanization of poverty’ than to development, which is the case of the most urbanized countries. The urban poor in South America are still mainly color/ race associated.

entire world is capitalist. A capitalism which is at the same time old and new; old in its competition on pursuit of profit and individual satisfaction, but new from the forms of production permitted by the informational tools and communication technologies. And it is exactly those new forms of production and the capacity to adapt to it what can hinder or foster development. As the author explains (Castells 1999, p. 3):

for those economies that are unable to adapt to the new technological system, their retardation becomes cumulative. Furthermore, the ability to move into the Information Age depends on the capacity of the whole society to be educated, and to be able to assimilate and process complex information. This starts with the education system, from the bottom up, from the primary school to the university. And it relates, as well, to the overall process of cultural development, including the level of functional literacy, the content of the media, and the diffusion of information within the population as a whole.

The information era also allows countries to develop faster than before, once they can adapt to new economy. But even then, some regions concentrate the most advanced production and management systems, attracting talents from all over the world, living aside its own population whose education level does not fit the requirements of the new production system. All of what is produced in terms of high technology is held within the hands of few global firms, as the author explains.

Castells (1999, p. 5) sees flexibility as a distinctive feature of the new global economy and argues:

The flexibility of this global economy allows the overall system to link up everything that is valuable according to dominant values and interests, while disconnecting everything that is not valuable, or becomes devalued. It is this simultaneous capacity to include and exclude people, territories and activities that characterize the new global economy as constituted in the information age.

For Castells the concept of network is also central to understand the information era, once it represents its organizational form. As he explains, network is a set of interconnected nodes, with no defined centre. The relation between nodes may be asymmetrical, but all nodes are necessary for the functioning of the network (flows of money, information, goods, people, services, etc). The critical distinction in this organizational form is not so much the hierarchy which might exists between the different nodes, but rather to be or not to be in the network.

Social exclusion then, is a consequence of the devaluation of people and territories by the dominant interest of the information capitalism. Castells asserts that there is a systemic relationship between the rise of global capitalism under informational conditions and the growth of social exclusion and human despair, in an era where the technology of production would allow a fair human fulfillment.

The new regime tends to increase social inequality and polarization with the simultaneous growth of both extremes of the social scale, the lowest and the highest. The author argues that this scenario is due to three factors which he identifies as being: a) a fundamental differentiation of the labor force between those who are highly productive and self-programmed and those who are dispensable, the generic work force; b) the individualization of labor, which weakens the collective organizations and abandons the most fragile segments to their own fate; and c) the gradual end of the welfare state, with the withdraw of social security benefits. He concludes that inequality and polarization are pre-determined in the informational capitalism dynamics and can only be prevented by direct and conscious intervention to counteract (Castells 2003).

Saskia Sassen also identifies the relation between global economy and the raise of inequalities and she tries to demonstrate why globalization has not provided the internationalization of wealth as predicted.

According to Sassen, the era of communication and information flows allowed the internationalization of the production with the dispersion of the manufacturing process in the developing world and the dynamization of global economy. She argues though that instead of broadening the possibility of capital share, globalization has actually caused the concentration of wealth and power. The production was dispersed worldwide, but the command has been more and more centralized. As the researcher explains (Sassen 2001, p. 19), “the spatial dispersal of economic activities and the reorganization of the financial industry are two processes that have contributed to new forms of centralization insofar as they have occurred under conditions of continued concentration in ownership or control.”

Important former manufacturing centers have lost functions and also did the jobs related to those activities, while other services have been over valorized, such as the ones in the financial system. There has been an increasingly unequal concentration of strategic resources on the so-called global cities, which reversely represents an increase of peripheral cities in a global and regional level.

Sassen (2000) points out that the specialized services-led economy might be regarded as a new economic regime, where its imposition on other sectors of economy can shape cities and their function in the global market. Finance industries have a possibility of generating what she calls “super-profits”, which devaluates manufacturing and low added value services. The problem for the urban economy is that those activities serve the daily needs of residents but they are threatened by the financial and super-specialized services industries, once they compete for space and investments in the city.

The author observes that this trend has contributed to growing informality, where low-profit making firms work informally or even if formally, subcontracts with informal operators.

These tendencies towards polarization assume distinct forms in (a) the spatial organization of the urban economy, (b) the structures for social reproduction, and (c) the organization of the labor process. In these trends towards multiple forms of polarization lie conditions for the creation of employment-centered urban poverty and marginality, and for new class formations. (Sassen 2000, p. 83).

She concludes that this development constitutes new geographies of centrality and marginality that actually affects both developed and developing world. In the urban scenario is visible this new geography of center and margins and its new dynamic of inequality. The new forms of exclusion can be represented in the developed world as the under-skilled immigrants, but in the developing world there is a continuum of exclusion post-colonialist, which has been reinforced.

According to Castells and Sassen then, globalization has a relevant role on understanding new trends of social exclusion. Globalization processes also influence changes on cities shapes whereas the greater the inequalities the more segregated the urban space.

For the scope of this work we will focus on social exclusion as broad sense to relate to a process where certain groups are denied to access the services and goods that the city can provide, as consequence of a social and spatial polarization and structural fragmentation of the urban society due to the current economic regime, which is exclusionary in nature. In saying that, we acknowledge that social exclusion is also associated to social constructions of prejudice, which might lead to aggravate the vulnerable situation of groups, such as related to gender, sexual affiliation, age, race, religion, nationality, political affiliation, among others. However, for the scope of this essay those vulnerable groups are not going to be analyzed separately, even acknowledging that the circumstances of each form of exclusion might be unique and then, requiring a specific treatment.

2. CITIZENSHIP: MUTATING UNDER GLOBAL ECONOMY?

The debates on social exclusion/ inclusion are often related to the idea of citizenship or the entitlement of rights guaranteed by national states. Social groups on exclusionary conditions lack access to rights, which are nuclear to the concept of citizenship itself.

With the purpose of clarifying the linkage between citizenship and social exclusion is relevant to examine briefly the different conceptions of the former,

which will allow bringing the debate to a contemporary analysis and the mutations on citizenship under global economy.

2.1 Contextualization of the concept

The concept of citizenship since its origins relates to the collective participation to public life, as a political ideal of “rule and be ruled”⁴. It is also seen as a membership, which defines the relation between individual and States. Different theoretical affiliations though have diverged from which extend this membership should be realized, as well as how both individuals and State should behave.

For liberals, citizenship is a political membership of belonging to a nation-state which entitles oneself of rights and duties. The centre of liberal thought is additionally the notion that citizens act rationally to advance their own interests and the State’s role is to protect them to exercise their rights. Then, the actual exercise of the rights is an individual choice, assuming that each citizen has the resources and opportunities to do so. (Gaventa 2002).

Contrasting the liberal concept of citizen, communitarian thinkers argue that in order to be a self one must be a member of a community. This means that individuals are interconnected and dependent on each other for their own self-identity and autonomy. “As such, maintaining social cohesiveness may outweigh individual rights and liberties because the community provides the very conditions that give rise to autonomous individuals in the first place”. (Bleazby 2006) The communitarian thinking is associated with socialist states, but not only as it is often related with Asian culture, which are seen as less individualistic than the western one.

A third affiliation is the civic republican, whose concept of citizenship put emphasis on people’s political identity as active citizens, but with an individual obligation to participate in communal affairs. For the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) the republican idea, opposing to the liberal idea, puts the community participation in the center of the critical debate where the citizens are part of the republic through an active concern with the values promoted or underrated by the State. It can be seen as an attempt to oppose to the liberal idea of self-govern and independent citizen, by proposing a concept that contains communitarian elements of citizenship but also liberal ones.

Differing from the ideologies described so far, Hannah Arendt argues that the first right an individual must have, in order to acquire all the other rights, is the ‘right to have rights’, which represents the citizenship itself (Soares 2001). Besides, still according to Arendt, the citizenship right can only be fulfilled through the total access to the juridical system. Some authors, such as Margaret Somers (2010), defends this conceptual approach arguing that this allows thinking comparatively about citizenship regimes as variable, along a continuum from lesser to greater degrees of democratic and rights-based social

⁴ As far as it relates to the Greek origins, as Somers argues. (Somers 2010)

inclusiveness. It is possible to acknowledge then, that different political communities will generate different forms of citizenship.

In a State where the economic power is predominant in the political relation, the social relations are impersonal and symbolic rather than related to any specific social class or group. Then, it prevails diffused interests and the mechanism of political representation is distorted (Soares 2001). This situation makes it less favorable to marginal groups to organize political demands, as the groups themselves are also diffused and weakened.

When relating citizenship and social inclusion, Somers states that firstly for political membership should be the right to be included *de facto* in civil society. By social inclusion she means “the right to recognition by others as a moral equal treated by the same standards and values and due the same level of respect and dignity as all other members” (Somers 2010, p. 6).

Despite of the different understandings on concept of citizenship, there is the recognition that it describes the relation between citizen and State. However, in the globalized era the concept of State itself is put into question, bringing up other issues to the understanding of citizenship. Other powers are at stake, challenging sovereignty.

In sum, the meaning of citizenship has gained importance as it situates in the center of all the other rights guaranteed by national states, but also its boundaries come back to discussion as nation-states themselves change in the globalized era.

2.2 Citizenship mutation in globalization era

Taking into consideration that in the economic globalization the biggest power at stake confronting national sovereignty is the economic power, the concept of citizenship will alter accordingly to the predominant interest. Globalization has provoked deep changes in the understanding of citizenship and its extension, as argued by Aihwa Ong (2006), who questions the traditional concept of citizenship in the era of globalization and the homogenization of neoliberal thinking.

In mutation in citizenship, she discusses that citizenship provided by membership to one nation-state has been disarticulated while new entitlements realize through mobilization in the globalized contingency. Some sites and zones receive more political investment according to neoliberal criteria, as for entrepreneurial expatriates that come to share benefits which were prior exclusive for citizens. On the other hand, at the same time many citizens come to have limited protections and rights in their own country. For the author (Ong 2006, p. 500), “instead of all citizens enjoying a unified bundle of citizenship rights, we have a shifting political landscape in which heterogeneous populations claim diverse rights and benefits associated with citizenship, as well as universalizing criteria of neoliberal norms or human rights”.

Ong brings the concept of 'flexible citizenship' to describe the nature of the relation state-individual of some mobile subjects according to what she calls an opportunistic borderless dynamic of the market conditions. As a consequence, this "new synergy between global capitalism and commercialized citizenship creates milieus where market-based norms articulate the norms of citizenship" (Ong 2006, 501), changing countries immigration laws in order to benefit elite migrant subjects of wealth-bearing and talented foreigners.

Recent changes in the immigration laws in United Kingdom (2010), for instance, have made it more difficult to an ordinary individual to acquire a job visa. The legislation clearly directs the entrances in the country to highly skilled immigrants, who can prove high salaries. To be eligible, one must prove a salary up to £32.000,00 per year. However, as the application functions in a point system, the chances to qualify for this type of visa depends on a proof of salaries up to £150.000,00 per year, which is the minimum value to gain the maximum of points (75 points)⁵.

The relation between State and citizen also changes under neoliberal values. The State is less protective and provider to be more a supporter of freedom and self-governing individuals, whose quality of life depends on their own capabilities to confront globalized insecurities.

The current situation of low skilled immigrants in Europe, for instance, allows a parallel to the conditions of refugees after the World Word II, who was object of analysis of Arendt. Her conclusions at that time perfectly fit today's reality in relation to the discrepancies between the fulfillment of citizenship rights according to individual's class, social position or nationality. Arendt (1994, p. 159) identified the situation of statelessness, referring to those completely unprotected under certain states as she criticizes the paradox of modern society:

No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as 'inalienable' those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves.

Low skilled immigrants in Europe can be seen as 'economic refugees' from countries which could not properly cope with market economic and never reached the welfare state. However, on the other hand, highly skilled immigrants are not only desirable but easily considered citizens to benefit from what the State can provide so as to assure they will allow the economy to grow.

Citizenship then mutates under global economy, changing the entitlements of rights. Those bundles of rights that were associated to

⁵ The changes in the UK immigration laws took place on 7th, April, 2010. It changed significantly the requirements to apply for visa "tier 1" and "tier 2". For instance, in order to apply for visa "Tier 1", which is related to highly skills immigrants, one might have at least £200.000,00 of disposable capital held in regular financial institution to apply as "entrepreneur"; or £1.000.000,00 of disposable funds to apply as "investor".

individuals in relation to the nation-state shift to encompass elements necessary for the market economy, such as individual skills and economic resources.

3. PARTICIPATION: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CITIZENRY EMPOWERMENT?

At global level we watch the concentration of wealth and power, which reflects at local level as well, favored by the current economic system. It is at local level, though, where citizens face daily the consequences of the widening of the social gap, which does not come without raise in conflict, violence and segregation.

Patterns of urban exclusion, however, are different in the developed and the developing world. As this essay focuses on Europe and South America, it will attempt to better contextualize those realities, wherein the critical diverging point is the presence of the welfare state in the former, and an incomplete and failure social state in the later.

Europe faces a new process of impoverishment of middle-class and a constant tension to secure benefits proper from the welfare state to its citizens. Wealth concentration and the increase in social inequalities have also made a great impact in the old continent, where the new trends of globalization had a negative outcome as well. The immense flows of immigrations together with the declining of the welfare state contributed to raise hostility between groups (raise in xenophobic movements from the Europeans who consider themselves as the solely legitimate beneficiaries of the continent's wealth). This social divide is visible and it is slowly shaping cities.

Conversely, in countries where the welfare state could never been fully realized, such as the South American countries, the concentration of wealth due to global capitalism reinforces a long term situation of marginalization of certain social groups. This has provoked also a huge transformation on the morphology of cities, much more dramatic than in the European case. The segregation in South American cities is extreme and the gap of social inequalities reflects on the fragmentation of the urban space: in one side the rich build fortresses to assure the enjoyment of their wealth; while at the margins a big proportion of the population struggles to survive with what is available for them in terms of infrastructure and services.

Subsequently, the most outstanding form of exclusion in South America is the one occasioned by extreme poverty and privation of basic needs. The urgency for fulfillment of basic needs of those individuals sometimes hinders other social struggles which may undergo along, such as gender or race discrimination. The claims in this scenario represent much more the urge for redistribution than the one for recognition, even though both might be as relevant for the realization of social justice.

In order to clarify the debate upon social justice, this essay bases on the arguments of Nancy Fraser (2003), for whom the achievement of social inclusion bypasses the fulfillment of two different dimensions: recognition and redistribution. Redistribution focuses on socio-economic injustices rooted in the economic structure of society: a. exploitation (labor); b. economic marginalization (deny access to income-generating labor); c. deprivation (living conditions). Whereas recognition targets cultural injustices, presumably rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication: a. cultural domination (hostile to own culture), b. nonrecognition (invisibility), c. disrespect (stereotype).

The remedies for both dimension of social (in) justice are often considered separately. With the purpose of realizing redistribution, the necessary actions undergo economic restructuring; changing in property ownership, democratizing the procedures by which investments decisions are made, etc. On the other hand, so as to achieve recognition, remedies target cultural or symbolical change; positively valorizing cultural diversity; transforming societal patterns of representation, etc.

As mentioned before, social exclusion caused by impoverishment of population, aggravated by the current economic system, is often related to the need of redistribution. However, exclusionary processes are more complex and demand a joint action of recognition and redistribution in order to achieve social justice.

Acknowledging formal citizenship has not helped those on misery conditions to overcome it, contrarily this group has just increased in the past decade. Besides, social and cultural fragmentations are reinforced by recent aspects of globalization such as flexible accumulation, polarization of income and technical progress and dispersion of levels of productivity.

Facing this social reality, restoring the public sphere through active participation has been seen as a hope to break the urban divide and foster social solidarity. It can invert the balance of power bringing excluded groups to decision-making processes, at least at local level. Participation, then, can stimulate a more substantive citizenship for those who could never fully exercise it.

Besides, formal rights are meaningless without the inclusionary resources necessary to create a kind of person capable of accessing and acting those rights. Once again it is another way of invoking full social inclusion as the prerequisite to substantive, not merely formal, access to system of justice. Social inequality denies in that case the possibility of those marginalized to act as citizens, as Somers (2010, p. 137) argues:

When market-driven inequalities and social exclusions deny adequate ontological foundations for access to the universal services of civil society and the public sphere – quality public education, adequate health care; in short, all the aspects of life necessary to live the life of a 'civilized'

being – the consequences are people without that primary foundational right of recognition and personhood.

This is a vicious cycle, people cannot exercise rights because they have no means to do it, on the other hand, they will not be able to acquire the necessary means, if they do not exercise their citizenship. This lack of awareness, education, ‘foundation’, as the author says, is what gives argument to some politicians and technicians who believe people cannot be part of decision-making processes. However, the contrary is also true, if they are constantly denied from the possibility to act as citizens, they will never be able to do so, which aggravates the condition of those on ‘excluding’ situation.

Currently, there is a recognition that more has to be done to include marginalized groups than declaring formal equality. As Somers (2010, p. 136) points out “the great achievement of the concept of social exclusion is to turn a narrow economic term regarding income and behavior into a political category signifying relations of power and powerlessness that are codified in social policies”.

Policies aiming to tackle social exclusion have attempted to invert relations of power. Participation as a mechanism of inclusion intends to shift the balance of power by giving deliberative powers for groups which were never listened. The hope is that while being part of participatory initiatives, excluded groups can acquired the necessary means to act as citizens and claim rights in other spheres of public life as well.

The paradox of citizenship and social exclusion is clearly defined by Chalmers and Vilas (2004, p. 7-8), who have studied the situation of social inequalities in South America:

the tension between citizenship and people can be interpreted as a tension between two dimensions of democracy. On the one hand, citizenship refers to a group of free and independent individuals who enjoy rights of participation that compensate for, and at the same time conceal, actual socioeconomic inequalities. On the other hand, relationships of oppression, poverty, and exploitation restrict the effective exercise of these rights of citizenship.

Understanding participation as a motor to empower citizens has been the biggest motive to implement policies to foster local democracy. In Europe, citizens’ participation for urban projects is already mandatory in Germany and France⁶, for instance. Those policies help making a break on the kind of

⁶ In France the law knew as SRU or “Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbains”, 13th December 2000, made it mandatory *la concertation* or the participation of the local population in the elaboration of urban planning documents.

development which attends only economic interests, as this community involvement allows bringing the social concern to the debate.

In South America there has been a proliferation of projects, such as participatory budgeting, in order to involve the community in local affairs. In Brazil, where this experience has developed strongly, bringing citizens to discuss upon city priorities has a strong focus on giving voice to social groups who were always denied political representation. The aim of social justice, inversion of priorities, empower the excluded were the lemma of participatory budgeting, which would allow the urban population to rethink the city from the perspective of the excluded in order to finally change the reality of territorial inequality in terms of infrastructure and services' distribution.

It is clear though the news challenges faced by governments when implementing such participatory mechanisms. It is not evident that people are interested in participating on many administrative procedures and those arenas are often emptied.

However, the complete lack of community involvement on urban projects can have negative impacts and disaster consequences for government's interests, such as the popular movement in Stuttgart against changes in the train network, known as Stuttgart 21. This event can also demonstrate how a strong community can act together and face undesirable top-down projects, even when it involves billions and are of high national interest.⁷

Even though the formalization of civil society's participation on the municipal level can face challenges, at least those democratic channels are open and can be utilized to favor the debate of complex local issues with the different sectors of the society. Besides, experience has showed that participatory channels are been utilized by groups and people when there is the necessity to pressurize governments or to bring relevant issues into public discussion.

The promotion of 'popular participation' through the insertion of mechanisms of direct participation in government is also susceptible to advisement. Many challenges surround participatory initiatives, such as how to bring citizens to the debate; how to build trust and, in the case of the global south, how to assure that the most excluded social groups are going to be listened.

These are just few examples of questions raised when debating participation; many others are there to be reflected on, as the practices are implemented and the challenges popping up. Those threats can only be prevented, as Santos (2003) asserts, by a continuum process of learning and reflection where new democratic innovations can be extracted. Democracy is not an ended process, it has to be continually reinvented to address the mutations in society and to cope with different needs and claims that poses over time.

⁷ More information of the event available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11465890>, accessed on 20th, October, 2011.

CONCLUSION

Exercising citizenship can help facing challenges of globalization? If community participation in local political life cannot avoid all the negative effects of economic globalization once there are elements which are beyond the local sphere, at least it can reduce the vulnerability of local contexts to global economic pressures. Thus, local democracy is an important element of building up citizens' awareness, which is essential to counteract negative effects of economic globalization.

One negative impact of globalization, as said before, is the over-valorization of the market and its needs in confront with local demands and/or needs. As the priority is given to economic development, local issues are easily undermined. Participation of local community in local politics is a strong counter-force over the under-valorization of the human need in benefit of the global profit. This is due to two main reasons: firstly, a strong community can assure that political interests are less manipulated by economic ones; secondly, it cannot be ignored the "awareness" element brought by citizens' participation into political life, which contributes to make the community also less susceptible to economic factors.

Then, recognition of citizenship itself is insufficient without the awareness of what to be entitle of citizenship means. As to say, people in social-exclusion situations do not only need to be guaranteed rights of citizenship, but more than that they need to be conscious of what this entitlement represents for them.

Political participation in this context cannot be summarized on voting during elections. Conversely, in order to represent a counter-movement against the negative impacts of economic globalization it needs to work as an open channel of constant dialog between community and government. Citizen's participation does not need to be rigid in procedure, but should allow control over the mandate in benefit of people's interest.

This participation can be flexible enough to adapt to changes in society. This flexibility can be guaranteed nowadays, for instance, by technological tools, such as governmental virtual spaces, social media and such informational innovations. Social media may represent alternative ways of opening channels

for dialog that cannot be underestimated, as society moves fast towards a more fluid and dynamic exchange of information.⁸

In sum, acquiring a substantive citizenship bypasses having the possibility to be part of the political life, as actor of the political decision. Local participation of a politically conscious citizen can represent a strong counter factor to the destructive and negative effects of economic globalization and, then, hold back the growth of local inequalities.

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⁸ The power of social media has recently surprised the world with the blast of democratic revolutions in the Arabic world.

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