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THE CRISIS OF THE CITY AND CITY MANAGEMENT: WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO CHANGE?

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The crisis of the city and city management: interdisciplinary contributions

Today's crisis encompasses all spheres of Western societies and can be diagnosed from various perspectives (Morin, 2011; Touraine, 2000, Giddens, 2000). It also affects management, participatory planning, and sustainability models (Brown, 2009; Diamond, 2005). Brazil's urban and city management models are not exempt from criticism, including that of being "archaic and inefficient" (*Observatório Metrópolis*, year III, no. 472, 2013/06/02), with respect to both models and their management and administration. Scholars from several fields of knowledge, e.g., sociology, political science, anthropology, and psychology, have approached the urban phenomenon and analyzed its current crisis as manifested through

behaviors, patterns, conflicts, practices, and interactions in the urban context.

Is it possible to solve this urban crisis by implementing direct public policies and introducing more specialized and transparent management models? We think so, in spite of their not addressing the problem in detail, which we will do. If we take the reciprocity law into account, public policy is a key element to solving this urban crisis; however, the analysis of the other part is missing. Beyond the traditional macro-analysis perspective commonly found in the human and social sciences, this article will handle the crisis of the city through a micro and subjective analysis of its significance to human consciousness as the origin of a planetary crisis, by bringing up a number of issues that require in-depth investigation. To adopt this perspective as a starting point is to apprehend this crisis much more broadly, i.e., as affecting our ways of life, modes of consumption, and relationships, and to view it as an opportunity for change. Let us first explain briefly how different fields of knowledge have approached urban phenomena.

To sociology, the space of the city appears as unfathomable and infinite qua the object of an analysis that struggles to grasp and realize the breadth and complexity of this phenomenon. This science has specialized in sub-fields of knowledge such as urban sociology, which considers the city and human relations existing in it as an object of study primarily from a macro perspective. Proposed by Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth, "individual" theories describe the individual immersed in the urban environment. The first attempts at analyzing consciousness in the social context are attributed to symbolic interactionism and Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934). Peter Berger, in his book *The Sacred Canopy* (1985), writes: "Every human society is a construction endeavor of the world," thereby suggesting that institutions and social phenomena are, ultimately, cause and effect of human actions. The subjectivist analyses and reflections of sociology have identified and exposed the subjective crisis from the standpoint of the subject's interaction with the environment and the influence of external, material or symbolic structures on the individual, responsible for the crisis, without delving into the meaning and relationship between the subjective and the spiritual.

The city has never been of interest to anthropology and seldom has this field of knowledge been included in interdisciplinary studies on this theme. Only recently have anthropological researchers begun to propose the analysis of practices concerning urban forms constituted by individuals (Echanove & Srivastava, 2012). By proposing new analytical categories and challenging traditional presuppositions of "slum" and "city," these contributions distance themselves from apocalyptic visions of overpopulated cities and never-ending slums. Their focus lies in observing systems organized around neighborhoods and cities that constitute interconnected economic and cultural systems based on the spatial establishment of the "house-equipment" and collective processes of self-organization and self-construction of dwellings.

Psychology has been concerned with the urban phenomenon since the publication of Kevin Lynch's book in 1960. It has subsequently tried to establish a nexus, from a man-environment viewpoint grounded in a spiritual assessment of reality (Stokols, 1990). Psychologists have attributed the study of behavior based on psychoanalytic tradition and focusing on the analysis of subjectivity to psychoanalysis. Along this line of thought, subjectivity is mainly set in the private family sphere. Individuals' behavior in the urban environment or city, as advocated by the dominant ethics or existing social standards, appeals to family relationships as its cause and blames them for it. This approach, which Michel Foucault (1988) calls "the inner paradigm," emphasizes concepts such as *private*, *home*, and *family* and contrasts them against the public-street-society matrix. New trends in the social representations school and social psychology (Moscovici, 1978; Pecora & Sá, 2008) have opened up to the analysis of the individual in the city and public space (Conselho Regional de Psicologia, Minas Gerais, III Seminário Psicologia Social em Ação Hierarquias e a Cidade: Práticas e Resistências, 2012) by regarding these categories as fundamental to apprehending individual and collective behaviors and their determinants. Their proposals have been largely restricted to observing the phenomenon at the macro level, anchored in people management and social psychology. These fields of knowledge have provided limited answers to understanding the relationship between the individual and the urban crisis in its entirety, of

which management is a consequence. The aforementioned epistemological fields have confined themselves to identifying the urban social crisis without attending to a subjective analysis of the causes of this crisis or, when analyzed from this perspective, establishing a social bond, thereby exempting it from the responsibility of consciousness.

I. CRISIS QUA OPPORTUNITY

The current crisis in city management, evident in most municipalities of the Amazon region and Brazil, can be approached and understood from other angles. This crisis arises in a context of global uncertainties and “turbulences.” All hegemonic models that appeared assured and resolved in terms of urban planning, public administration, and the State in the last decades are now being disputed, to the same extent that the diagnosis made in the early 1980s is crumbling day after day (Keane, 1988). Questions about how to manage municipalities, how to reduce deficits and create jobs, and how to deal with constant and increasing social demands for quality services and participation are being continually posed. This crisis has unsettled old structures through which municipalities are governed based on uninformed decisions, outdated procedures, and, consequently, negative conceptions.

This crisis is in all spheres of our lives: economic, cultural, political, and participatory, and as a result of administration and management models. Jürgen Habermas indicates that a crisis should be dealt with in light of the subjectivity of those experiencing it: “The crisis cannot be separated from the perspective of someone who is going through it, the patient experiences his powerlessness against the objectivity of his disease only because he is a man condemned to passivity” (Habermas, 1973, p. 12). In this statement, Habermas attributes resilience to the patient, i.e., the ability to respond to adversity, thus ceasing to be a passive subject to become an active subject. Notwithstanding, his thesis is limited to capacity of reaction, without addressing questions such as: How is the crisis understood? What is it telling us?

For Greek psychotherapist John Pierrakos, a crisis should be seen as an opportunity for change, as necessary changes may not be implemented or can be obstructed by reason of self-serving, short-sighted or partisan interests. If they are so, the result will be a larger and deeper crisis affecting all social structures. It will not be possible to reach a balance without structural changes in the core of hegemonic models thus far ubiquitous in city administration and management. To Pierrakos (1970), the more difficult and painful the crisis, the more citizens and their political representatives of the municipal government should promote its awareness, despite external forces attempting to prevent changes.

II. CONSCIOUSNESS QUA AN ATTRIBUTE OF THOUGHT

The current model of society promotes passivity; we become mere spectators. As philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2008) wrote about represented values and attitudes: "We live in a time of frivolity." The way our thinking is structured and the way we approach knowledge are not exempt from this passivity, conformism, and disharmony. We are all somehow immersed in this context, in situations that obstruct reflection and self-reflection, since the latter demand individual effort and special attention. In short, this context thwarts the Socratic principle "Know thyself."

There are more and more citizens able to pose essential questions regarding collective actions, with your everyday life, responsibility, and projects in their cities or municipalities. We seem to be at the threshold of a new historical period characterized by utopias and realities, revolutions, hope and obscurantism, redeeming theories and their failure, and the demise of old management and conflict-resolution paradigms and emergence of new ones. All these opportunities and challenges do not arise out of the blue; they take form after a process of crisis, overcoming, and ensuing opportunities. To become conscious of that is an important step.

Consciousness is commonly associated to "being conscious of something," which may allude to some individual or collective phenomenon of personal responsibility before an obstacle. It may refer to becoming aware of issues such as environmental protection, social exclusion, discrimination or the

hegemony of the market to which we are all subject. One may also show "poor awareness" with "feelings of guilt." In this situation, consciousness coincides largely with the Freudian concept of "superego:" an individual's internal social control.

Despite these psychological aspects, "being conscious of something" and "poor awareness" are not referred to as a failure of some fundamental moral precept or value. From Ancient Greece to the "biology of knowledge" (Maturana, 2010), consciousness has been said to be a quality of the mind, whereas several Freudian scholars have suggested that it is a quality of human psyche.

Along the former line of thought, many philosophers have delved into and established relationships between human mental attributes and spiritual thinking. Manfred Frank (1991), upon theorizing about self-awareness and self-knowledge, indicated the relationship among consciousness, self-awareness, and self-knowledge, whereas Ernst Bloch ([1949] 2005) referred to "phenomenal consciousness," which is experience itself and "access consciousness." By doing that, he took a step toward explaining how we sort out things that we experience through practice and through self-knowledge. Along these lines, if change is not resisted, citizens can be free and believe themselves to be free. However, they may react differently and irrationally when outer and inner obstacles emerge due to incipient self-knowledge. In this case, the crisis will not surface or will be inevitable in them or, conversely, when it does emerge, the effort needed to overcome it will be much greater.

It seems necessary to establish a connection between the outer world and our consciousness. Max Scheler has tried to establish a nexus and a unity by considering the human being as determined, since only an individual's own obligation opens the possibility of 'knowing' the self through it" ([1928] 2003). In his writings, Scheler establishes a link between inner and outer consciousness: "World consciousness, self-consciousness and God-consciousness constitute an indestructible structural unit." Notwithstanding, consciousness appears isolated, establishing the concept of consciousness in relation to other elements that define human beings.

What are these elements? The answer will depend on the school or line of thought adopted. For sociologist Peter Berger ([1967] 1985), the basic dialectic process of society consists of "three moments or steps:" externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Yet, Berger ignores the essence through which a human being initiates the dialectical process, something that would be later developed by John Pierrakas.

III. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Psychotherapist John Pierrakas, along with Eva Pierrakas, created the self-knowledge movement Pathwork (the conference summary can be found in *The Pathwork Guide Lectures*, Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, São Paulo, *Pathwork Foundation*, 2000). The movement is defined as a "spiritual and personal development path [...] towards self-transformation and self-transcendence," and is mainly inspired by concepts and ideas from three lines of thought. The first, psychoanalysis, and the concepts of "vital energy," of "creating an armor," of a particular human being, and of power struggles inherent to social relations. It derives from Wilhelm Reich's psychoanalysis, psychotherapist Alexander Lowen's ideas, and their bioenergy analysis, which provides therapy based on the body-mind. It was also influenced by post-structuralism, Jacques Lacan's philosophy, and Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalysis: the investigation of the conscious and unconscious that drive human actions and one's ability to heal oneself. The second, and lesser, perspective refers to Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger's transcendental phenomenology, which introduces the concept of consciousness intentionality, in which experiences are apprehended as necessary experience links, assuming the existence of a higher being called God. The third and last line of thought is that which comprises a thinking model based on cause and effect within a matrix of systemic interconnection among different spheres or systems that make up human existence.

These psychoanalytical ideas and trends provide a decisive step towards defining this process as a harmonious relationship among movement, consciousness, and experience. These elements affect life and, consequently, our actions qua citizens, civil servants, technicians, and

political representatives of the city. At the professional level, these three elements are: the ability to make decisions and promote life projects, the reflection needed to accomplish this, and the ability to establish a connection between the first two.

This process is *motion*. Motion happens at all levels: individual, social or global, since a society deprived of motion, i.e., without contradictions, conflicts, and search for alternatives, is destined to vanish. Based on Eva Pierrakos's writings (Lectures no. 55th, 1959; no. 126, 1964; no. 208, 1973; no. 183, 197?), motion is its driving force. An individual's life is in constant motion. I do not mean physical or sociopolitical motion, but motion in the mind. The ability of the mind to rationalize diminishes when it is starved of intellectual motion. This motion includes our decision not to remain passive in the presence of individual and collective challenges. Every action, whether individual or collective, implies motion: to affirm ourselves as citizens, to defend ourselves from injustice, and to transform reality and our own lives. According to the aforementioned lectures, when motion, be it of a material, intellectual or emotional nature, is impeded at the collective level due to lack of innovative ideas in the municipality or city, human beings or institutions are prone to be manipulated and exposed to a number of weaknesses that surround us. To Pierrakos, this can lead to individual diseases, addictions, and dependencies, which are manifested at the social collective level as improvised decisions, patrimonial or despotic practices, and nepotism and corruption.

At the intellectual level, when *motion* is atrophied, the intellect withers. In other words, when the mind is not educated to act, it loses the ability to rationalize and create new management models and structures. To shun new worldviews and new ways of thinking and managing the city rationally will ultimately affect one's ability to understand the phenomena, transformations, and complexities of an ever-changing reality.

However, *motion* per se cannot advance our search for knowledge. Without consciousness, it can undermine the harmonious movement of our personality and management skills. It does not suffice to perfectly master social and management theories and techniques; that would only turn us into technocrats, professionals that do not really know what they have in

their hands. Jürgen Habermas calls this type of public officials and local politicians that are uncritically allowed into the system as “technocrats” who “colonize the lifeworld” (1981).

Experience is the third element that defines human beings in their entirety. It is the result of a harmonious synthesis of movement and consciousness, i.e., it is the direction of rational action or government management, the relationship among politicians, civil servants, and citizens, as well as the quality of service and the *public value* deriving from management actions or services. It is the aspiration of all conscious political managers or administrators that can rationally decide on appropriate strategies in order to obtain maximum benefit, efficiency, and effectiveness through their public deeds.

Experience is the nexus between diagnosis, planning and decision-making, development of concepts that make up city planning, and our own knowledge of subjective values, as are experience and beliefs; it is the wrapping up of public management. During this phase, there is a direct relationship between politicians and population managers. Management and public policies of the city play a decisive role in development. Based on this logic, improvised or intuitive planning and management models should give way to those based on robust planning, management of results, efficiency, and training of human resources, with people at the center of policies.

Finally, energy or “life force” — i.e., method combined with consciousness — is essential to raising issues and questions that can help us to increase our knowledge of reality. This exercise will allow us to begin to understand reality, qua individuals, citizens, and political representatives of the city, to understand material reality and subjective — spiritual — constructions and their possible connection to material and management actions.

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