

# **THE RIGHT TO CONNECTION:**

## **IMAGINARIES, STRUGGLES, RIGHTS AND INSTITUTIONS**

**If in order to claim a right it is necessary first to imagine its possibility, then the construction of new imaginaries could have political effects. For this to be feasible, however, such an imaginary must develop from existing conditions. Based on this premise, this paper discusses the possibility of understanding connectivity as a right, based on specific cases arisen in Latin America in recent years.**

KEYWORDS · city, public transport, mobility, equality, Latin America

### **IMAGINING CITIZENSHIP AND FUTURE**

For some years now, a particular form of urban citizenship emerging among the poor who inhabit the new megacities in third world countries has been discussed (Holston and Appadurai, 1996). This implies that the urban poor have become relevant political actors. The form of interaction between this new citizenship status and the legitimacy of the social order articulated – largely – by state institutions empowers the concept of the right to the city.

This view follows the subject raised paradigmatically by Marshall (1950) and Polanyi (1957) in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. For Polanyi, state institutions evolve through a continuous ‘double movement’ between market forces unleashed by capitalism and other forms of non-commercial relationships that constitute our societies. Marshall writes in the post-war Britain and tries to justify both the construction of the welfare state and the adoption of notions of economic, social and cultural rights within the doctrine of human rights. He states that the Western state has evolved around the

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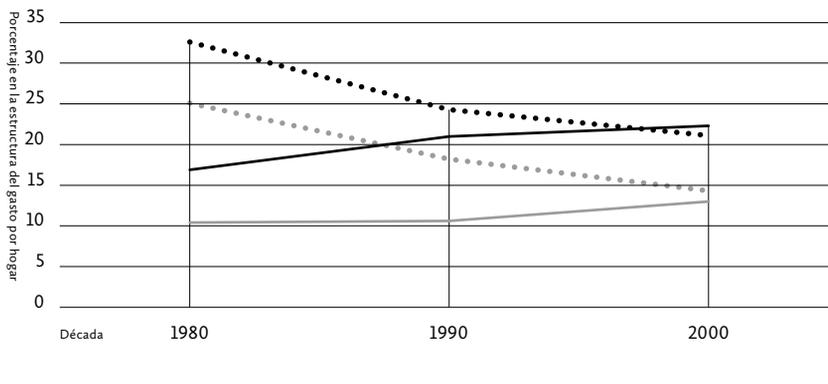
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protection of a set of different rights involving particular forms of citizenship.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to civic citizenship, based on the right to private property and the rule of law liberal conquest against autocratic arbitrariness. The 19<sup>th</sup> century conceived political citizenship with the corresponding development of bourgeois democracy, established on the basic political right to elect authorities and the always dubious promise that anyone can compete for votes. According to Marshall, the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to social citizenship. This notion, based on social rights, implies that to be a citizen conveys a minimum standard of material well-being, which should be guaranteed by society as a whole. In Marshall's perspective, citizenship is an incremental phenomenon configured in the conquest of rights. The state's character evolves by being governed by these citizenships and, at the same time, it ought to promote them and protect them.

It is the right to the city, which, according to Holston and Appadurai (1996), begins to mediate between the state's legitimacy and the emerging forms of urban citizenship. For these authors as well as for Marshall, it is essential to understand rights and citizenship from the perspective of the construction of imaginaries. Our image of what citizenship is allows us to understand a particular role and status for each society member, both in terms of social reality and of the possibilities and ways of changing it. The image we have of our rights helps us conquer them and protect them. The state, whose democratic legitimacy is based on these imaginaries, must necessarily perform and deliver certain results to citizens – the sovereign, in the democratic imaginary – for that citizenship and those rights to become measurable, tangible, credible. In this tripartite scheme that integrates citizenship, rights and institutions, imaginaries become a key for both the present and the future.

We will focus on analyzing the emergence of the right to connection in relation to the forms of urban citizenship in Latin America in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and the imaginaries involved. We can argue that the region experienced two fundamental changes in the same period. First, the urbanization of its population: towards the 1960s only half of Latin Americans lived in cities, while today they account for more than 80% (World Bank, 2016). Second, the reform or restructuring of its states: more than fifteen new constitutions were established between 1980 and 2010 (Couffignal, 2014). Cities became spaces where most of the existence takes place and where new struggles, institutions and imaginaries have arisen.



**FIG 1** Evolución del gasto por hogar en alimentos y bebidas no alcohólicas versus transporte y telecomunicaciones, en Chile y Colombia. / *Evolution of household's expending on food and non-alcoholic beverages versus transport and telecommunications in Chile and Colombia.*

Fuente / Source: Elaboración propia en base a CEPAL (1995), DANE (2009) e INE (2013). / *Developed based on CEPAL (1995), DANE (2009) and INE (2013).*

- Colombia - Alimento / Food
- Colombia - TC
- Chile - Alimento / Food
- Chile - TC

### DEVICES FOR ARTICULATING IMAGINARIES: STRUGGLES, RIGHTS AND INSTITUTIONS

Within the historical processes of rights' conquest and forms of citizenship – with the subsequent change in the state's character – there are some particular devices that articulate struggles, rights and institutions through imaginaries. They have emerged through political processes that have given rise to numerous new realities. We will look at two examples: (1) basic needs and (2) the workday. Both appear as devices that construct the imaginaries of various actors, sometimes in conflict with each other. For example, basic needs are the basis for the definition of social policies implemented by the state, yet these are also used by groups who consider themselves as disadvantaged and demand that same state to fulfill its obligations. Working hours, meanwhile, mediate between the interests of workers, capital and the political class (Sweezy, 1942).

We will try to show evidence supporting that – organized around these devices – the materiality of these imaginaries, struggles, rights and institutions has changed. The evolution of new rights, citizenships and state forms requires imagining a new city. The imaginaries concerning the future of the city and the struggles to conquer new rights appear as a need for building the future. Thus, the built environment as well as mobility and connectivity become important, all of which establish new demands on the political and social role of design disciplines and city administration.

#### BASIC NEEDS

The importance of the concept of basic needs develops throughout three different moments. The first occurs when the 'social question' is problematized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Polanyi, 1957). The second occurs in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when the concept becomes a mediator between the situation of the poor and the welfare state's functioning in Europe and some former colonies (Esping-Andersen, 2013). This second phase continues with the state's dismantling following the adoption of the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1990), virtually all around the world. In addition, the neoliberal state is conceived, reducing the size of the public apparatus and attacking the former widespread social programs. However,



**FIG 2** Protestas en Brasil durante junio de 2013 / *Protests in Brazil during June 2013*.  
Fuente / *Source*: Maria Objetiva, © Creative Commons. En / *In* : <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mariaobjetiva/>

the concept of basic needs is maintained through policies of targeted public budget and poverty reduction, leaving aside the inequality decline. Finally, in a third stage, the adoption of targets for diminishing global poverty through the Millennium Development Goals for the 2000-2015 period were largely based on the notion of basic needs, and the same goes for the new Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2016).

Basic needs imply a particular imaginary. As evidenced by the popularity of programs such as cash transfer to the poor – exemplified by the *Bolsa Familia* in Brazil or the *Ingreso Ético Familiar* in Chile (Skoufias et al., 2010) – the way of addressing these needs has focused on the problem of how much income households require to cover them (Ravallion, 2010). To this day, the imaginary of basic needs in this discussion entails a strong physiological basis. Aspects such as food or access to drinking water and sewerage have become the material with which basic needs are imagined. Development is seen as food and water delivered to the world's poor, now urbanized, living in slums, shantytowns, favelas or camps (Davis, 2007).

This physiological imaginary, especially developed during the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with notions as 'war against poverty' (Parenti, 1999), was consistent with the cost of living, surviving and being part of society, at least until three decades ago. The statistical tool of the Household Budget Survey (HBS), applied in different parts of the world, allows us to understand the evolution of these costs and basic needs. In some cases, these data are available and comparable for several decades, as in the case of Chile and Colombia (FIG. 1).

First, a brief look at the HBS of both countries tells us that, in the 80s, the physiological imaginary of basic needs had a correlate in household spending. The nutritional aspect was essential, being the principal household spending, which consumed between one quarter and one third of the budget for the cases of Colombia and Chile. In recent decades, however, data shows further evolution. If thirty years ago items such as transport and telecommunications (TC) corresponded to half the expenditure on food, this ratio changed, with a



**FIG 3** Afiche de convocatoria a la marcha de los bastones. / Poster advertising the marcha de los bastones [cane's demonstration] Fuente / Source: Oficina Parlamentaria Diputado Giorgio Jackson / Parliamentary Office Deputy Giorgio Jackson

gradual increase on the budget destined to different forms of connectivity, reducing the relative importance of food and non-alcoholic beverages.

In Chile, since the mid-2000s, TC became the main household spending. This country, where more than 90% of the population lives in cities (INE, 2013), is emblematic for understanding change in the material support of basic needs. These numbers suggest the importance that different forms of connection, physical and digital, have for Chileans. Infrastructures that support these different forms of connection, the socio-technical systems involved (Graham and Marvin, 2002) and the infrastructure and interactions implied are at the center of the current configuration of cities. Connection is a basic need that empowers people to be part of society; therefore, access cost reflects a monetary aspect through which individuals and households interact with it under an institutional market-oriented arrangement.

#### WORKING HOURS

Another device articulating imaginaries, struggles, rights and institutions is the working day. The conquest of the eight-hour workday became, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a device that could lead struggles, protect workers' freedom and be translated into concrete political and legislative acts. Marx describes this achievement in the following words:

For "protection" against the "serpent of their agonies," the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital. In place of the pompous catalogue of the "inalienable rights of man" comes the modest Magna Carta of a legally limited working day, which shall make clear when the time which the worker sells is ended and when his own begins. (Marx, 1933:263-4 cited in Sweezy, 1942:247)

Urban population barely rose from 16.2% to 23.6% among industrialized countries during the period of 1850-1880 (Bairoch



**FIG 4** Marcha de los bastones, Santiago, Chile.

Fuente / Source: Rocca De Luca, © Creative Commons. En / In : <https://vimeo.com/kekadeluca>

& Goertz, 1986), Marx's time. With a smaller world population, these were minor cities in relation to those where the urban poor live today. In 1851, London was the world's largest metropolis with 2.4 million inhabitants (Bairoch & Goertz, 1986), which is only one tenth of the megacities currently in the Third World. The workday's imaginary and – particularly – the conquest and protection of the workers 'own free time,' had a contractual and manufacturing reality. The division between the hours 'sold by the worker' and his own were established by a contract materialized when retiring from his post and leaving the factory. In small-sized cities where workers usually lived contiguous to productive activity, what happened during the distance between dwelling and factory, and vice versa, did not appear as an important cost.

An exception, however, were the coal miners. In Baldomero Lillo's *Subterra* [*Underground*] (1904), the story "El pago" [The Payment] describes the inhuman conditions of Chilean miners in Lota, for whom payment depended on the quantity and quality of the material produced, being installed hundreds of meters deep inside underground tunnels beneath the sea, striving in the vein in contorted postures, choked by dust, and always at risk of landslides, floods and explosions. Lillo depicts how the miners did not see the light of day, since they rose at dawn to get to their shifts and returned to the surface when it was already dark. Little is known of the struggle coal workers undertook (and won) so as to establish a workday starting the moment they arrived at the mine's gates and not when they were already installed inside the vein. The journey to reach their workplace involved more than an hour a day circulating through lifts, rails and passageways inside the tunnels. The image of this conquest meant the workday initiated and ended when the miners' lamps went on and off at the mine's access point.

A century later, when most Latin American economies have de-industrialized and labor is concentrated in the service sector – representative of highly unequal societies (Palma, 2011, 2014) – the urban configuration produces similar conflicts to those existing during the *Subterra* times. An investigation by Blanco et al. (2013) inside gated communities in Buenos Aires showed a simile proper of our times:

<b>Australia</b> Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne <b>Bélgica</b> Hasselt <b>Brasil</b> Itatiaiuçu, Eusebio, Anicuns, Maricá, Silva Jardim, Mount Carmel, Potirendaba, Paulinia, Muzambinho, Pitanga, Ivaiporã, Porto Real, Agudos <b>Canadá</b> Saint-Joseph-du-Lac, Winnipeg, Calgary <b>China</b> Chengdu, Changning	<b>República Checa</b> Frýdek -Místek <b>Dinamarca</b> Ikast, Læsø <b>Inglaterra</b> Manchester, Sheffield, Rotherham, Bradford <b>Estonia</b> Tallinn, Faroe Islands, Tórshavn <b>Finlandia</b> Mariehamn <b>Francia</b> Toulouse, Vitry, Noyon, Libourne, Gap, Compiègne, Colomiers, Châteauroux, Castres, Aubagne	<b>Grecia</b> Athens <b>Islandia</b> Akureyri <b>Italia</b> Livigno <b>Lituania</b> Skuodas <b>Malasia</b> Kuala Lumpur <b>Polonia</b> Głowno, Otmuchów, Bełchatów, Świerklany, Ornontowice, Lubin, Goleniów, Mława, Nowogard, Nysa, Gostyń, Ząbki, Żory	<b>Rusia</b> Chermushki <b>Eslovenia</b> Velenje <b>España</b> Torrevieja <b>Suecia</b> Kölsillre, Avesta, Hallstahammar, Övertorneå, Kiruna, Jokkmokk <b>Tailandia</b> Bangkok <b>Turquía</b> Ovacik	<b>Ucrania</b> Energodar <b>EE.UU.</b> Kansas City, Columbus, Boston, Missoula, Miami, Salt Lake City, Pittsburgh, The Staten Island Ferry, Savannah, Bozeman, Whidbey Island, West Memphis, Watauga County, Summit County, Park City, Island County, Hawaii, Hanover, Corvallis, Commerce, Clemson, Chapel Hill, Cache Valley, Baltimore <b>Gales</b> Cardiff
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**FIG 5** Ciudades con sistemas de transporte público gratuito, agrupadas por países. / *Cities with free public transport systems, grouped by country.* Fuente / Source: <https://farefreepublictransport.com>

Given gated communities' configuration, workers must travel long distances from its entrance to the building where they perform their work activity or to central services (...) this distance within the gated community raises possible concerns regarding the notion of workplace and the extension of the working day (Blanco et al., 2013:323-324).

It is already possible to notice an impact on the working day's imaginary in union activity, as in the case of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de Entidades Deportivas y Civiles* [Sport and Civil Organizations' Union] in Argentina. One of its delegates clearly identified the daily experience and the conflict it posed: "If a worker reaches the gate at 7:55, the bus that takes him to the workplace arrives at 8:00, reaching his destination at 8:10, and so the employer considers the latter as the starting time" (Blanco et al., 2013:324). The example of gated communities illuminates a current issue. For these workers, as for the rest, these times are usually added to the two to three hours of commuting (if not more) they ought to cover daily to access their workplace. Is that time part of their workday? Is it the whole city part of a place where they sell their own time?

The question of when do the hours the workers are selling end and their own time begins has changed its materiality. Now, fighting to conquest the equivalent to the 19<sup>th</sup> century eight-hour day implies imagining a materiality that is not only contractual and manufacturing, but also includes urban configuration and mobility systems. It's no longer enough to regulate the abandonment of the workplace, but it involves also the interaction with the city, including the dwelling's location, the diversity of family composition and the location of the various activities undertaken. The concept of transport as a commodity or as a social right is translated both in people's daily experience as in institutional settings articulating

socio-technical systems to provide connectivity and accessibility. The prevailing view is that of mobility as a private problem, mediated by market interactions, where specific state interventions and even the existence of public transport are due to mere market failure (Echenique, 2008). There is a disputed imaginary that, as we will see, encompasses struggles, rights and institutional responses.

## **IMAGINING AND IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT TO CONNECTION**

A new reading on social change from the perspective of the conquest of new rights and citizenship status is understanding social mobilization, the rights arising from its struggles and the institutional responses delivered. However, at the same time, a city where these new rights are exercised needs to be imagined in order to be built: covering the distance between the present and the future through imagination. As De Sousa Santos (2010) and Mangabeira Unger (2010) point out, it is necessary to unlock the future. Imaginaries necessarily appear in a double exercise of this praxis: occupying a deductive method so as to imagine visions that guide action, but also reflecting from an inductive perspective on ongoing practices for the conquest of rights.

In this sense, the changes described so far have been accompanied by new expressions in Latin American citizenship. The region's most urbanized countries, such as Brazil and Chile, have met new forms of protest and organization where mobility, and especially public transport fares, became an expression of greater social conflicts. In the case of Brazil, 2013 massive mobilizations were initiated by the rise in public transport fares (FIG. 2). Thus, organizations such as Free Pass Movement (MPL) became popular by not only convoking the protests but also formulating the demand for free public transport (Vieira, 2013).

In Chile, during 2015 an unprecedented protest called *Marcha de los bastones* [Cane's Demonstration] sought to represent the demand of the elder for a fare reduction in public transport system (FIGS. 3, 4). In this case, elder's clubs – a kind of local organization that has grown enormously in recent years – were the backbone of the mobilization. As in Brazil, the rate of public transport became a device to articulate a discourse grounded in the cost of living and the plight of retirees under the privatized pension system. In both cases, public transport fares and the possibility of access represent a prerequisite for freedom and urban life, appearing as new devices to articulate struggles, rights and possible answers.

One of the consequences in Brazil was the emergence of institutional experiments. As of December 18, 2014, Maricá became the first Brazilian city over 100,000 inhabitants to have a system of entirely free public transport financed by the municipality through oil companies' royalty payments (Prefeitura Maricá, 2014). In Chile, the proposal of a free public transport system (Muñoz and Cerda, 2016) has promoted debate, although a limited one. Currently, there are cities in at least 26 countries with some kind of free public transport system (FIG. 5).

The struggles for considering transport a social right and its implementation through free public transport systems is a reflection of a greater reality: the importance of access to connectivity as the gateway to citizenship. Daily commuting and connections – both in quantity and quality – are essential aspects of life in current urbanized Latin American societies. The issue of fare payment, while reflecting an important aspect regarding the definition of who profits from travel time in the city, reflects only partially the challenge of imagining new cities and possible rights.

Mobility in the metropolitan areas where new forms of citizenship are developed is mediated and structured by socio-technical systems (Graham and Marvin, 2002). The fares issue corresponds to just one of the three main stages of the public matter concerning the production of these systems. These moments are the expansion of infrastructure networks, their operation, and their qualitative expansion through innovation and technological development.

While an important conquest could be made in terms of daily payment for operation and access, there are other crucial costs for developing countries, which involve mainly the access to investment capital. The government's availability of public resources or its dependence on private capital generates different outcomes and social impacts (Valenzuela, 2016; Kantor et al., 1997). On the one hand, for countries in the process of urbanizing, the issue of expanding their infrastructure network to serve new urban population implies a huge pressure to invest in terms of quantity. On the other hand, the qualitative expansion of connectivity systems – as for the case of increasing bandwidth for internet networks – is currently supported by private capital and users' segmentation: new services are developed for those who can afford them.

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Más que respuestas, esta exploración abre más preguntas. ¿Cómo sería la ciudad de la conectividad libre? Más allá del transporte, ¿qué otras formas de conectividad básica existen y existirán? ¿Cómo sería una ciudad en la que se logran estos nuevos derechos para expandir la ciudadanía? ¿Qué derechos son los que harían posible esa ciudad? ¿A través de qué instituciones podrían implementarse? Y sobre todo, pensando en la arquitectura y el ejercicio creativo en general: ¿qué nuevos imaginarios podrían articular nuevas luchas, derechos e instituciones? **ARQ**

The possibility of governing the future so that connectivity becomes a source of equality – rather one of social inequality, as it has been so far – is at stake. It could be interesting to deepen the knowledge about cases such as Colombia and Bolivia, who have managed to strategically invest public resources into inclusive transport for the urban poor. Tracking such cases shows that the trend change concerning the orientation of their socio-technical connectivity systems has been linked to social mobilization against privatization of public assets (Valenzuela, 2016).

Rather than answers, this survey arises new questions. What would the city of free connectivity be like? Beyond transportation, what other forms of basic connectivity exist and will exist? What would a city where these new rights are achieved to expand citizenship be like? What are the rights that would make that city possible? Through which institutions could it be implemented? And above all, regarding architecture and creative exercises in general: what new imaginaries could articulate new struggles, rights and institutions? **ARQ**

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