

// Rethinking marginality; society, space, institutions in the light of the restructuring of capitalism

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Beyond traditional spatial (urban) imaginaries



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1.1 Copying with the interrelated nature of contemporary world

- **Growing (policy oriented) research** on the consequences of the extraordinary changes in the economy and society brought about by the restructuring of capitalism
- ... but **quite traditional research** (in particular policy oriented) on the effects generated upon territory and urban space by these processes.
- Much of the debate highlights the need to **explore the interrelated nature of contemporary world**, studying the interdependence and relationships between places...
- ...but we are still strongly related to consolidated binary forms of spatial representation: **peripheries, cleavages, divides, delays, “fracture territoriales”**

...

1.2 Rethinking the role of cities and agglomerations in contemporary capitalism

- **Cities and urban agglomerations in the Fordist-Keynesian phase of capitalist development** have been the subject of careful thought throughout the 20th century, with significant implications in normative and political terms on national/international levels.
- But for some time now, signs of **new forms and processes of economic development that involve contexts not traditionally at the center of the urban scene** have been emerging.
- They regard **territories that do not necessarily refer to the traditional urban/development coupling** (Scott & Storper, 2015).
- Thence **the need for new transcalar and relational viewpoints** that can take into account contemporary urban phenomena by **overcoming the more traditional urban or metropolitan models** (Roy and Ong, 2011).

1.3 Hints from urban studies

- Scholars are focusing their research on **processes of urbanization that contradict or stress the traditional “urban” paradigm and urban - economic development nexus.**
- **Brenner** and “critical urban theory”: the urban no longer appears to be a distinctive condition but rather a **generalized process unfolding on a global scale.** It involves distant and different places in **cross-scale relationships**, all participating to **different degrees in the organization of global space/economy/society** and producing new profiles of social differentiation and inequity (Brenner, 2017).
- Soja et al. maintain that today’s era might be defined as one of **regional urbanization** (Soja, 2015): **large urban regions are substituting cities on the international economic scene**, accompanied by new dimensions of the urban question (Balducci, Fedeli, Curci, 2017b).
- Other authors focus on the emergence of in-between regions (Nussli and Schmidt, 2016; Sieverts 2013) or society (Bonomi, De Rita, 2015), in places once referred to as “**peripheral**” or “**suburban**” where today some of the most important socio-economic-spatial innovations are taking place, even in the absence of specific recognition (Keil, 2017).

1.4 Unpacking nexus

- Merely an extension of the sphere of analysis?
- Rather, a substantive step forward in understanding and studying the means and consequences of a kind of economic development that is **consistently restructuring places and producing – just to mention a traditional (urban) policy issue - new profiles of marginality/centrality** that hardly can match with the consolidated identification of the XX century (Soja, 2011; Brenner, 2017).
- Need to focus back upon the relations between processes of urbanization and the restructuring of capitalism in order **to understand both the ways that differential and unequal urban development comes about, along with its consequences**: new socio-political-economic assemblages that produce new forms and patterns of inequity, together with new forms of power and conflict.

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Beyond traditional urban/territorial policies



Traditional Spatial imaginaries like periphery, marginality, still inform and feed many national urban and territorial policies, which are still based on:

- (1) simplified indicators in order to identify (2) target territories - the territorial geographies of problems and design (3) area based policies,
- where the local (scale) is seen as the most significant ingredient on which policies should be based, **in order to address a local problem, rather than as a problem of its own** (Behar, 2015).

i.e. politique de la ville, France Strategie

Couples like peripheral/central, exclusion/inclusion, global/local, city/country or proximity/distance are to **be re-conceptualized not as dichotomies**, rather as cohabiting conditions producing a **fractal geography rather than a geographies of fractures and cleavages** (Behar, 2015)

FROM URBAN/TERRITORIAL POLICIES TO URBAN-TERRITORIAL POLICIES?

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Rethinking marginality



3.1 Rethinking marginality: state of the art

- Mapping **peripherality and marginality**, has become harder than expected, so much so that institutions, looking for simple criteria in order to address complex societal challenges, seem **to be striving to catch the very nature of processes** and to adopt simplified strategy to distribute resources and tools.
- Notwithstanding some recent attempts to innovate this field (EU State of the EU Cities report, 2017; Espon, 2017), **marginality remains a spatial metaphor** indicating something on an edge with respect to a center in geographic, social, economic and symbolic space, the identification of which triggers the social construction of stigma.

- On the one hand the work of scholars like Simone (2017) or Waquant (2008, 2017) on the world's cities of the south might be particularly useful for a detailed critique of those approaches, with feedbacks also into the spheres of models of urban and regional policy (**advanced marginality**, Waquant, 2008).
- On the other hand marginality, **can and must be considered according to Mehretu et al (2000):**
 - - a phenomenon that does not have merely simple spatial or geographic connotations. It should be addressed as a **“universal phenomenon that unfolds in space in different ways“**
 - - *“complex condition of disadvantage which individuals and communities experience as a result of vulnerabilities that may arise from unfavourable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors”.*

- In the conclusion, the authors highlight the **relevance of spatial scale of inquiry** (varying from *megascales* to *in situ* marginality), suggesting that the **scale issue is crucial when considering marginality**, as well as that the spatial dimension of marginality must be read at the intersection of scales, producing unusual and unexpected geographies of co-presence

- Leimgruber later suggested that it is:

*“situations of marginality or of marginalisation – the process which contributes to augment the level of marginality – are **entangled in a maze of systems.***

*The only way to grasp a better understanding of how this marginality is created, and how the **power relations** have changed to bear this result, is to use a multilevel or multisystem approach”*

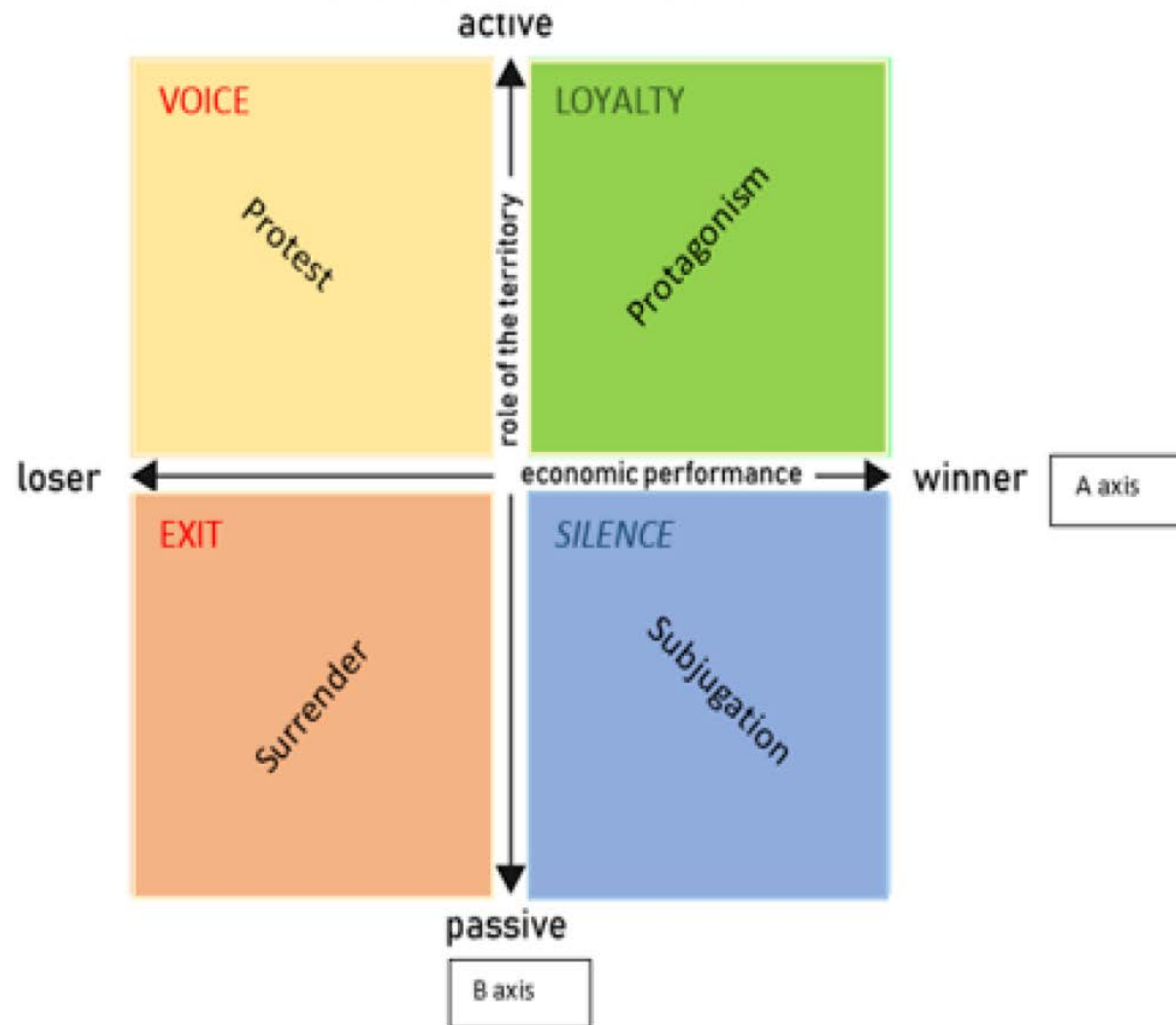
3.2 Rethinking marginality: a research hypothesis

- Moving from these approaches, in a recent research project based on qualitative approaches, we proposed to start from **Hirschman's exit-voice-loyalty model** formulated in the 1970s to study not only power relationships, but more widely the **new nexus space-society-economy**, from a specific economic perspective
- But **what happens the other way around?** How do territories react to processes of economic reorganization? (How) Do they observe, endure, reactivate, re-organize?

Can the **exit-voice-loyalty** model deployed in a **territorial perspective** be useful for understanding processes of the reconfiguration of the relationship among economy, space and society?

We elaborated a diagram that ideally locates:

- along the **A axis** the trajectories of apparent success and failure in terms of the economic performance, allowing to identify winner /loser territories, based on simple and complex socio-economic performances indicators.
- **along a B axis** the ability of territories (space/society) to play an active or passive role (active/passive territories) in intercepting the processes of restructuring of the global capitalism.



Marginalities (or centralities) can be read as a complex condition in which economic restructuring takes place locally as the result of a lack of capacity to react and take advantage from a global local relationship dynamic.

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- This conceptual scheme seeks to read “process” rather than “status”, identifying trajectories of stability (decline and passivity, development and protagonism) but also of change.
- **Marginality becomes, on the base of this scheme, only relatively detectable in relation to a (spatial) status (distance from resources, lack of accessibility and opportunities, material poverty...), but more in relation to the capacity of a place/society to interact with translocal economic processes.**

3.3 Relevant implications for the future research steps..

- help identifying **marginality out of traditional geographies, developing a transcalar, fractal, interrelated approach**
- the reference to a classic, like Hirschman exit voice loyalty model, though instrumental, can reinforce the aim of unfolding traditional categories with new conceptual tools
- in addition to that, this analytical model could help in a dialogue with an approach of urban studies, with reference to subjugation/protagonism relations among the different forms of the urban/development nexus (**concentrated and extended forms of urbanization, Brenner**)
- It aims at **contributing to creating a new generation of urban-territorial policies (no more urban/territorial)** that can profoundly renew the logic of public action to support development.

Thank you

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