

# The urbanization of poverty: rethinking the production of unjust geographies

SÒNIA VIVES-MIRÓ



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Hegemonic studies understand urban poverty as a consequence of an uneven distribution of resources differentially distributed throughout the city. In this context, this article aims at further understanding the production of urban inequalities and socio-spatial injustice through a Lefebvrian approach, which considers space as an active agent and not merely a physical environment. It proposes the use of the concept “urbanization of poverty”, understood as the trialectic production of poverty through urbanization, leading to unjust geographies through processes of unequal geographic development and accumulation by dispossession.

Keywords: urbanization of poverty, unjust geographies, uneven development, city, urban inequalities

Sònia Vives-Miró (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7142-663X>), Department of Geography, University of the Balearic Islands, Spain. E-mail: [so.vives@gmail.com](mailto:so.vives@gmail.com)

## Introduction

Most definitions of poverty associate it with a “lack” or “deficiency” of needs required for human survival and well-being, and use income, consumption, or other indicators to classify social groups. Some definitions also include non-material deprivation and social differentiation (Wratten 1995). The concept of poverty has generated a broad and deep discussion among social scientists, which has evolved in specific ways throughout time and in different geographical spaces.

The concepts of “new poverty” and “new poor” were adopted by sociological theory in Western Europe in the late 1980s to refer to new impoverished groups (Kessler & Di Virgilio 2008). Notions like “social exclusion” and “disaffiliation” emerged in the 1990s, but “new inequality” was considered a

more appropriate expression to characterize the increase in income differences between different social groups (Gaffikin & Morrisey 1992). With the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of social exclusion assumed greater intellectual and, above all, political relevance in Europe and the United States. In the United States, this category has been used to examine the “declining middle class,” the “new urban poverty,” and the “new second generation” (Kessler & Di Virgilio 2008).

Specifically related to the category of urban poverty, while the literature has focused on the economic inequalities between the poor rural and the urban populations in the South, the analysis in the North has addressed the problems of peripheral urbanization, unemployment, and lack of income (Wratten 1995, 18). Urban poverty has been considered as relative poverty, since, according to Ziccardi (2008, 11), “in the urban space it is harder for generalized situations of absolute poverty to prevail, if by such is meant lack of food, water, clothing, education, health, a precarious home.”

In this regard, Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2013) estimate that one out of seven people lives in poverty in urban areas worldwide, most in the Global South, mainly in overcrowded informal dwellings with inadequate water supply, sanitation, health care, and schools. The surge in urban poverty, aggravated by growing social inequality, has spread to cities in the form of residential and urban segregation. This has led to the concepts of dual city, fragmented city, and divided city. Studies on new urban poverty, under the concept of social exclusion, move away from the middle class and examine the so-called underclass. However, studies on urban poverty, new urban poverty, social exclusion in cities, dual cities, and fragmented cities tend to consider space – urban space in this case – as a passive agent. In other words, poverty is understood as a consequence of an uneven distribution of resources in space (throughout the city), either as a consequence of social policies or the capitalist structure. In response, this article argues that social sciences committed to emancipation that understand space as an active agent in social processes and the underlying power should transform this line of discourse and agencies of social construction of poverty.

Therefore, the objective of the article is to further the understanding of the spatial roots of inequalities in cities, specifically analyzing the production of spaces of poverty as a cause – and not as a consequence – of social injustice. In short, the main contribution of the text is the conceptualization of “poverty capital” and the explanation of its operation and its entry into circulation in cities through devalued built environments, the rentier culture of real estate speculation, working classes and precarious lives, and the discourses of fear and social control. In this sense, the paper focuses, through a Lefebvrian approach, on the production of poverty as the production of spaces necessary for the survival of capitalism, spaces of poverty that are built through urbanization. Thus, it is about delving into the understanding of the production of inequalities that occur in cities and that generate situations of social injustice, from a perspective in which space is considered an active agent and not a simple physical setting.

The works and thoughts of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Neil Smith, Edward Soja, and Iris Marion Young, as well as of the intellectuals who have discussed their ideas and texts, are first thoroughly studied in the literature review, followed by a qualitative analysis. First, a review of the discussions of radical and critical theories that have proposed spatiality as a cause – and not as a consequence – of social injustice, approached in terms of inequality, is presented. An overview of the approaches to the concept of spatial justice and the production of unjust geographies is then provided. Second, the production of unjust urban geographies is addressed, specifically through urbanization and uneven geographic development. Third, the urbanization of poverty is conceptualized as one of the forms of production of unjust and unequal spaces.

### **Spatial justice and the production of unjust geographies**

Soja (2016, 104) pointed out that “a geo-historical look at the concept of spatial justice would take us back to the Greek polis and the Aristotelian idea that the urban individual is the essence of the political individual.” His thinking lies in the idea that early notions of spatial justice focused on “civil” rights based on the city, considering the organization of a public sphere that made decisions on how to maintain equitable access to urban resources for all who qualified as citizens (Soja 2014 [2010]). A spatial conceptualization of justice based on the city that was progressively displaced at

the end of the eighteenth century, with the American and French revolutions, and with the “attempts to universalize justice as a ‘natural’ right supported mainly by a legal system [ ...] that did not define citizenship in terms of the right to the city, but rather as rights and duties determined by the nation state” (Soja 2014 [2010], 117).

Since the late 1960s, with the so-called “spatial shift,” the debates related to the spatial question have once again been placed at center, especially those related to the urban condition. The work and ideas of Lefebvre on the social production of space and the right to the city play a fundamental role here. Lefebvre defined the production of space by developing the classical concept of production, which indicated that a “change in production had occurred since there was a shift from production in space to production of space” (Lefebvre 1991, 219). His main argument was that space is a social product, and therefore, the production of space is also a political process. Consequently, each society and each production model, which also inextricably entails its specific social relations of reproduction, produces a space, its own space (Lefebvre 1970, 1991).

These ideas represented a turning point in considering spatiality as a cause – and not merely a consequence considered as a (collateral) effect – of social justice or injustice. In this regard, the subsequent discussions on the relationships between space and production of justice or injustice were structured through the publication in 1971 of Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls (2009 [1971]) defined justice as equity, not equality. It was a theory of distributive justice, which aspired to universality, and focused on the individual, not the community. However, theories of distributive justice have long been criticized. Marxist critics have pointed out its inability to assess institutional contexts, social structures, and class relations and inequalities, since it only considers the distribution of goods and material resources and does not consider that there are many claims of justice they do not refer primarily to the distribution of income, resources, or jobs (Young 2000).

Therefore, the publication of Harvey’s *Social Justice and the City* in 1973 was a milestone in the construction of a radical perspective on spatial justice. In this book, Harvey (1977) refers to the principles of “territorial social justice” as a form of justly achieved fair distribution. It is the result of a distribution of income that covers the needs within each territory, a distribution of resources that aims at maximizing the multivariate effects between regions, an investment of additional resources that helps to overcome the special difficulties arising from the physical and social environment, and mechanisms (institutional, organizational, political, and economic) that ensure that the prospects for less advantageous territories are as favorable as possible (Harvey 1977). Harvey’s main criticism of Rawls is related to the structure of the capitalist system and its relation to a possible fair distribution.

In this line of thought, in the 1970s, and as a result of the urban crises caused by the Fordist crisis, Lefebvre’s idea of the “right to the city” started gaining strength. To criticize the conversion of the city into a commodity, Lefebvre constructed a political discourse to demand the reappropriation of the city. He presented the right to the city “as a claim, as a demand” (Lefebvre 2017 [1968], 138). For him, the right to the city “could not be conceived as a simple right to visit or as a return to traditional cities. It could only be formulated as a right to urban life, transformed, renewed” (Lefebvre 2017 [1968], 139).

In parallel to Marxist arguments, feminist critics have pointed out that, in order to expose situations disregarded by the distributive paradigm, theories would have to be defined in terms of specific social processes and relationships (Young 2000). In this regard, Young (2000) argues that oppression and domination should be the central terms used to conceptualize injustice. Therefore, by integrating the five aspects of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence – she discusses distributive justice theories by adding three main categories of non-distributive issues that distributive theories tend to ignore (structure and decision-making procedures, division of labor, and culture) and proposes a theory of oppression (Young 2000). In it, Young, renouncing a general theory of justice – and its universality – proposes to identify, in the first place, the injustices of which certain social groups are victims. Therefore, she presents social justice as the recognition and acceptance of otherness and encourages a territorial policy attentive to the rights of groups, not communitarian but of affinity (Gervais-Lambony & Dufaux 2016). In other words, for her, “the ‘fair’ decision arises from the negotiation between different social groups” (Gervais-Lambony & Dufaux 2016, 71).

In conclusion, the ideas of territorial justice, the right to the city, and justice of difference have been the most discussed within Marxist, feminist, radical, and critical currents that have sought the causes of social injustice from a spatial perspective.

### Urbanization of injustice and uneven geographical development

In the context of the production of unjust geographies, this section focuses on those produced by the urban condition, specifically through the urbanization of capital: the urbanization of injustice. As explained in the previous section, one of the first milestones of thought on the relationships between justice, power, and urban space was the publication of *Social Justice and the City* by Harvey in 1973. The purpose of this work is to formulate a theory of urbanism that explains how the city and its planning reflects social inequality, but also contributes to reproduce it and, moreover, reinforces and strengthens it. In this regard, Harvey defined the city under capitalism as a machine that creates inequality and injustice. Therefore, the work presents pioneering explorations of urban land use, ghetto formation, and the circulation of surplus value within urban economies (Zimmerman 1998). It also incorporates Lefebvre's ideas on the conversion of "urbanization as a productive force" (Lefebvre 1970 in Harvey 1977 [1973], 322) and criticizes the idea that the secondary circuit of capital (fixed capital) is replacing the primary circuit (industrial capital). Ultimately, this work provided an intellectual basis for thinking on the connections between moral philosophy, notions of justice, social relations, and spatial form (Zimmerman 1998).

Harvey published *The Urbanization of Capital* in 1985, and the ideas in this work were later expanded in other essays, such as the *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985), *The Urban Experience* (1989), and, already in 2005, *The New Imperialism*. His objective was to understand the role of the urban space production process (urbanization) in the capital accumulation processes. In this regard, he explains the process of what Lefebvre considered crucial when he stated in the *Urban Revolution* (1970) that "urbanization is necessary for the survival of capitalism through the concept of space-time fix" (Harvey 2005). A process that has suffered a change in scale as a result of globalization, and that, from a space-time solution for a city, has become a space-time solution at a global level (Harvey 2008).

Merrifield and Swyngedouw published *The Urbanization of Injustice* in 1997, and, in a context in which debates about social justice were full of new dilemmas, sought, not a return to Marxist purity, but a critical rethinking of the relationship between spatiality, power, and justice. Their purpose was to promote a "political and intellectual agenda that focuses on the development of socially just urban practices" (Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1997, 3 in Zimmerman 1998).

In parallel to this discussion, Harvey had also revisited, two decades later, *Social Justice and the City*. He published *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* in 1996. Here, he pointed out that "in «postmodern» times, «universality» is a word that conjures up doubts and suspicions [...] and, as a consequence, any application of the concept of social justice becomes problematic" (Harvey 2018 [1996], 441). Therefore, it agrees that "there can be no universal concept of justice to which we can refer as a normative concept for assessing an event", understanding that "there are only particular, competing, fragmented, and heterogeneous concepts and discourses on justice that arise from the specific situations of those involved" (Harvey 2018 [1996], 441). Consequently, he affirms that "the task of deconstruction and postmodern criticism is to reveal how all discourses on social justice hide power relations" (*ibid.*, 442).

However, the first complete theory of uneven geographic development was developed by Smith in his book *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, published in 1984. For Smith, uneven geographic development is understood as "a fairly specific process that occurs exclusively in capitalist societies and that is rooted directly in the fundamental social relations of this mode of production" (Smith 2012 [1996], 140). His theory is based on three fundamental aspects: tendency toward equalization and differentiation, valuation and devaluation of capital in the built environment, and reinvestment and pace of inequality.

Since Smith published the theory of uneven geographical development, many authors have integrated it into the construction of their thought and have been criticizing and modifying it (Hadjimichalis 2011). In this regard, urbanization is the manifestation of uneven geographical development at a certain scale (Harvey 2018 [1996], 552).

## Urbanization of poverty

There are many ways of producing uneven and unjust geographies through the urbanization of capital, which are expressed and involve multiple geographic scales. Here, I focus on one form of uneven geographic development on an urban scale, which I conceptualize as the urbanization of poverty. Therefore, I first conceptualize poverty as a form of trialectic production of space based on Lefebvre's ideas, then frame the urbanization of poverty in uneven geographic development, and finally think of it as a process of accumulation by dispossession.

### *Production of spaces of poverty*

When referring to the urbanization of poverty, I use a concept of poverty that includes four meanings: urban, social, emotional, and symbolic.

First, urban poverty is what constitutes the material space and refers to the spaces of disinvestment. These are those urban spaces that have been devalued or are in the process of being devalued and are waiting to be able to absorb investments in fixed capital. In other words, they are profitable spaces, in which the potential rent of the urban area is much higher than the capitalized rent. In the words of Smith, these would be the spaces generated by the production of rent gaps. The spaces of urban poverty constitute spatial practices. According to Lefebvre (1991), spatial practices result from the way individuals generate, use, and perceive space. A space produced, used, and perceived in everyday reality – everyday life – and urban reality – routes and networks linked to reserved spaces at work, private life, and leisure. Therefore, it is in spatial practice that the spaces of production and reproduction are generated (Lefebvre 1991). It is about the material dimension of the territory, the concrete space.

Second, with social poverty, I refer to those spaces that, from an intersectional perspective, constitute spaces without class, race, and gender privileges. That is, the spaces of oppression. Paraphrasing Young (2000), these would be the spaces of exploitation, marginalization, impotence, cultural imperialism, and violence. According to Young, these are the processes through which she defines the production of oppression and difference. In this context, the production of spaces of social poverty is associated mainly, although not only, with spaces of, for example, lower class, racialized, and gendered oppression. Since, according to Young, oppression is the opposite of justice, by mentioning these ideas, I am referring here to the production of spaces of injustice. It is about the dominated spaces, a structural process in capitalist economies.

Third, emotional, immaterial, or cultural poverty refers to lack of experience. Therefore, it is about the production of empty spaces of experience, of precarious, alienated, unstable, uncertain ways of life. The concept of poverty as lack of experience takes us back to Benjamin's concept of experience, widely discussed especially by the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School. Benjamin (1973) wanted to repeatedly show his conviction that "we are witnessing the dissolution of a world that, in the hands of a generation that seemed to have settled out of necessity in the poverty of experience, would never repeat itself" (Valero 2001, 47). He affirms that "the poverty of our experience is not only poor in private experiences, but in those of humanity in general. It is a kind of new barbarism" (Benjamin 1973, 169). The crisis of experience, therefore, was considered a human disaster only comparable to the reification that, as Lukács had argued in *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923, constituted the essence of capitalist exploitation and the notion of alienation (Sepúlveda 2010, 22).

Both the production of social and emotional-immaterial-cultural poverty refer, in Lefebvre's terms, to spaces of representation. The spaces of representation are the spaces that are lived, produced, and modified throughout time. They represent local and less formal forms of knowledge (*connaissances*), which are dynamic, symbolic, and saturated with meaning. These constructions are, therefore, rooted in experience and articulated in everyday life (Lefebvre 1991). Hence, this type of space, according to Lefebvre, has the political power of becoming a space of revolution.

Fourth, symbolic poverty is articulated through the discourses of poverty, which are also part of the social construction of poverty (Gutiérrez 2003), and are, in fact, the representation of the space of poverty. The representations of space refer to the conceived spaces, which derive from a particular logic and technical knowledge that serve to establish the bases of the dominant power structures.

These include “the conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urban planners, and social engineers” (Lefebvre 1991, 38). Lefebvre argued that spatial practices precede the representations of space in traditional societies, while the opposite applies in post-industrial societies, that is, before space is experienced through spatial practices, it has already been represented. Through these discourses, poverty is attributed to the poor and not to the social processes that impoverish them, thus disassociating them from public policies.

In summary, the production of spaces through the urbanization of poverty includes, considering this concept of poverty as it has been conceptualized, a) Lefebvre’s spatial trialectic between the production of spatial practices, through spaces of material poverty as devalued or devaluing urban areas; b) the spaces of representation, through the production of social poverty as spaces of oppression and of immaterial poverty as spaces empty of experience; and c) the representation of spaces, through discourses of social construction of poverty. This process can be termed spatial trialectic production of poverty through urbanization.

### *Urbanization of poverty in uneven geographical development*

Following Smith’s (2020 [1984]) *Theory of Geographic Development*, urbanization of poverty is one of the forms articulated through uneven geographic development. Specifically, poverty, as one of the forms of uneven development, occurs as a result of contradictory tendencies toward the differentiation and equalization of levels and conditions of development associated with urbanization.

The urbanization of capital, understood as a spatial-temporal solution (Harvey 2005), and necessary for the survival of capitalism (Lefebvre 1970), develops at different scales. Depending on the needs of spatial and temporal movement of capital flows, the production of space a) is centralized in the city (implying the internal differentiation of urban space through the rehabilitation of the center and other depressed urban areas, the gentrification processes); b) is decentralized (leading to suburbanization); or c) is recentralized in the metropolis (in rural-urban migration and leading to new gentrification processes). Discussions have subsequently arisen that address the concept of gentrification in rural areas (Phillips 1993; Phillips *et al.* 2021). Thus, according to Smith, in a globalized world, each of these processes demands a scalar analysis of uneven urban development (Smith 2020 [1984]).

However, global urbanization is a rather contradictory process. On the one hand, urbanization is one of the strongest equalizing forces of uneven development, but, on the other, is one of the most powerful differentiating forces. On the one hand, the tendency to equalize urbanization has been explained through its potential to be a spatial and temporal solution to the need to absorb and fix financial capital that can be reinvested in the secondary circuit to not stop the circulation process. This tendency toward equalization, in a global world, is driven by urban competitiveness led by neoliberal urbanism and the new urban governance.

On the other hand, the tendency to differentiate urbanization occurs through a) investment in specific urban spaces and the abandonment of others (which leads to the difference in land rents, production of rent gaps, gentrification); b) the spatialization of class, ethnic, and gender privileges and the hegemony of an urbanism thought mainly by Western men of middle or upper class, white, educated, middle-aged, heterosexual, without functional diversity, and with mental health; c) the prioritization of the city’s exchange values as opposed to the values of use; d) the permanent discourses of competitiveness, of winners and losers; e) the urbanization produced without experience; and f) thinking of a rented and profitable city rather than a habitable city – thinking of production and not reproduction. Putting profit, and not life, at the center.

The differentiated spaces that urbanization creates, those that constitute the articulation of poverty, are a) abandoned, degraded, or underprivileged urban spaces; b) impoverished, lower-class, or marginalized spaces, ghettos, racialized spaces, with gender oppression and violence; c) spaces empty of experience, with precarious, alienated, unstable, uncertain ways of life; and d) are the spaces in which poverty has been constructed with blaming discourses, which have been called spaces of “losers.” In short, these spaces constitute what I have called the spatial trialectic production of poverty. Therefore, this spatial trialectic production of poverty is one of the results of the tendency toward differentiation promoted by the urbanization process.

In conclusion, the spatial trialectic production of poverty is necessary for the production of urbanization, and, therefore, necessary for the circulation of capital. In short, it is about the structural production of unjust and uneven spaces through urbanization.

### *Urbanization of poverty as a process of accumulation by dispossession*

Harvey (2007, 36) warns that “any theory of uneven geographical development within capitalism must incorporate accumulation and devaluation by dispossession as a fundamental force in order to have general validity.” Therefore, he proposes incorporating the analysis of the processes of accumulation by dispossession as strategies of uneven development.

Accumulation by dispossession has been explained as “a generalization of the Marxist concepts of ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ accumulation within which pre-existing goods are assembled – as labor force, money, productive capacity, or as commodities – and put into circulation as capital” (Harvey 2007, 21). However, feminist criticism has incorporated into the understanding of the concept of primitive accumulation a series of factors that are absent in the analysis of Marx and Harvey and that are considered inherent to it. Federicci (2004, 23) adds the following: “i) the development of a new gender division of work that subjects female work and the reproductive function of women to the reproduction of the labor force; ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based on the exclusion of women from paid work and their subordination to men; iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers.”

Finally, the processes of accumulation by dispossession are fundamentally about the struggle for the appropriation, control, and use of surplus, since there is not enough surplus to incorporate into circulation without dispossession, a necessary condition for the survival of capitalism. In the case under consideration here, I am going to try to present, as a synthesis and without the intention of further elaborating on each one of them, what are the processes of accumulation by dispossession that specifically integrate or entail the urbanization of poverty. Paraphrasing Harvey, I can say that, as capital is urbanized through the explained process of “urbanization of capital” (Harvey 1977), with the concept of urbanization of poverty, I argue here that poverty is urbanized. But how is poverty urbanized? The fact that poverty is urbanized means that it enters circulation. How can poverty enter circulation? Effectively, with this concept, I mean that, poverty – in capitalism – is a type of capital. Therefore, it can be urbanized, circulated in the circuits of capital accumulation, and I can also say that poverty is necessary for capitalist reproduction. Next, I am going to try to explain how poverty is introduced into the circulation of capital through the four meanings of poverty that we have previously defined. It is about what, jointly and dialectically, I am going to term here “poverty capital,” based on the four main forms in which capital is presented according to Bourdieu’s (1986) distinction of economic capital in a strict sense, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), the distribution of these different types of capital determines the structure of the social space and the life opportunities of social agents (Fernández 2013).

The first type of poverty capital that enters circulation through urbanization is the devalued or devaluing fixed capital. As already explained above, this type of fixed capital involves the production of rent gaps and the mobilization of capital toward this type of devalued built environments, thus causing gentrification processes and the differentiation of urban spaces in terms of production of land rents – and, with it, processes of residential and social segregation. The housing dispossession (Vives-Miró & Rullan 2017; Vives-Miró *et al.* 2018) is one of the key and inherent elements of this type of accumulation strategies by dispossession. The accumulation by housing dispossession constitutes managing to preserve the system of accumulation of urban rents – from real estate businesses – through the commercialization of sectors of the real estate activity that until then were closed in the market. This implies the separation of individuals from their means of reproduction, such as housing. Therefore, it is a process of class violence (of exploitation) that consists of excluding, prohibiting, separating, or discriminating against the right to housing, the city, and, ultimately, the urban common areas. The housing dispossession is an essential, inseparable, and inherent part of the real estate income accumulation process. Thus, without housing dispossession, real estate

income cannot be produced, appropriated, captured, or accumulated. Both processes are the two sides of the same coin. Without one, the other cannot exist (Vives-Miró *et al.* 2018).

The second type of poverty capital that can enter circulation is the cultural capital of real estate speculation. This is what can be understood by a rentier culture as a way of life. According to Blanco (2005, 2), the “rentier culture” can be defined as

the set of beliefs and attitudes that embody a behavior that privileges the search for profit without taking risks in the process of producing goods and services. In particular, although not exclusively, the search for financial income associated with solely speculative activities (in the pejorative sense of the term) that, when they acquire a certain level, become a brake on the possibility of wealth creation and economic development of Society.

This rentier culture, which in our case is carried out by valuing housing and urban space not for their good use, but for a good exchange, has led to the social way of understanding the city as a business space rather than a living space. In this regard, the dispossession caused by entering this type of cultural capital into circulation is poverty, understood as the lack of the Benjamin’s experience. It concerns the dispossession of the experience of the everyday life, heritage of tradition, popular culture, in this specific case referring to, for example, vernacular architecture, the most emotional space, space lived from a specific type of reproduction relationships. This is what Benjamin was referring to when he stated that “we have become poor. We have given away one portion after another of humanity’s heritage, often having to leave it at the pawnshop for a hundred times less than its value so that they advance us a small amount of current money” (Valero 2001, 129). This lack of experience entered the market with the entry of post-modernity and could be understood as a process of original or primitive accumulation.

The third type of poverty capital that enters circulation through urbanization is precarious social and human capital. Bourdieu (2001, 137) defines social capital as “the totality of the potential and current resources associated with the possession of a lasting network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual knowledge and recognition.” In other words, it is “the totality of resources based on belonging to a group” (Bourdieu 2001, 148). I think of social capital here as poverty when I refer to a precarious social class based on work (and its gender division) from a model subordinated to urbanization. In this regard, I understand that the working classes have been dispossessed of a life that, as feminists argue, is worth living, and they function under the logic of accumulation as workers forced to live and work in exploitative conditions.

Finally, the fourth type of poverty capital that enters circulation through urbanization is symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is a form of power and symbolic violence, and through this, I have referred to the discourses that promote the social construction of poverty. Wacquant, Slater and Borges Pereira (2014) have conceptualized it as negative symbolic capital that contributes to the territorial stigmatization of neighborhoods. The fact that this form of capital enters circulation may imply a certain form of dispossession of social empowerment. This is carried out by controlling lives through domination strategies, such as urbanism of fear (Carrión Mena & Núñez-Vega 2006), revenge, and other forms of social construction of guilt of precariousness and vulnerability.

In conclusion, “poverty capital” is articulated through devalued built environments (fixed capital), the rentier culture of real estate speculation (cultural capital), working classes and precarious lives (social and human capital), and the discourses of the fear and social control (symbolic capital). Its circulation through urbanization is structurally associated with the dispossession of urban space as a) commodity, housing, public space, the right to the city and urban common goods; b) the experience of the everyday live; c) of dignified lives; as well as d) emancipation. All these processes, in a dialectical manner, constitute the processes of accumulation by dispossession through the urbanization of poverty.

## Conclusions

This text has sought to further the understanding of the production of inequalities that occur in cities and that generate situations of social injustice. This has been done from a perspective in which space is considered as an active agent, through an approach that can be called Lefebvrian. That is, without considering the urban space as a simple physical scenario, in which the inequalities and injustices that

occur are only consequences that have nothing to do with the space itself. Thus, the production of poverty is understood as the production of spaces necessary for the survival of capitalism, which are built through urbanization. In this regard, the use of the concept “urbanization of poverty” is proposed to refer to the spatial trialectic production of poverty that occurs through urbanization and that produces unjust geographies primarily through processes of uneven geographical development and processes of accumulation by dispossession (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Urbanization of poverty through spatial trialectic production, processes of differentiation and accumulation by dispossession.

Type of poverty	Spatial trialectic production		Differentiation processes	Accumulation by dispossession		
	Spatial trialectic	Definitions of poverty		Capital in circulation	Poverty capital in circulation	Dispossession spaces
<b>Urban material</b>	Spatial practice	Urban spaces that are devalued or in the process of being devalued. Abandoned, degraded, or with substandard housing.	Investment in specific urban spaces and abandonment of others. Difference in land rents, production of rent gaps, gentrification.	Fixed capital	Devalued built environments	Urban space as a commodity. Housing, public space, and urban common goods. The right to housing and to the city.
<b>Social</b>	Spaces of representation	Spaces of class, race, and gender oppression. Impoverished, lower class, or marginalized spaces, ghettos, racialized spaces and with gender oppression and violence.	Spatialization of class, ethnic, gender privileges. Hegemony of a patriarchal urbanism.	Social and human capital	Working classes and precarious lives	Dignified lives
<b>Emotional, immaterial, or cultural</b>	Spaces of representation	Spaces empty of experience, with precarious, alienated, unstable, uncertain ways of life	Prioritization of the city's exchange values as opposed to the values of use, and of production as opposed to reproduction	Cultural capital	Rentier culture of real estate speculation	The experience of the everyday life and the culture of the value of the use
<b>Symbolic</b>	Representations of space	Discourses of social construction of poverty. Stigmatized territories.	Permanent discourses of competitiveness, of winners and losers	Symbolic capital	Discourses of fear and social control	Social, collective, and individual emancipation

The production of poverty through urbanization derives from the trialectic interaction between a) the production of material poverty as devalued or devaluing urban areas – as a spatial practice; b) the production of social poverty as spaces of oppression and immaterial poverty as spaces empty of experience, such as spaces of representation; and c) the production of discourses of social construction of poverty – as a representation of spaces. Therefore, it concerns uneven and unjust geographies that are, on the one hand, the product of differentiation processes, such as a) divestment and abandonment of specific urban spaces, the production of rent gaps, gentrification; b) the hegemony of patriarchal urbanism, and the spatialization of class, ethnic, and gender privileges; and c) the prioritization of the city's exchange values as opposed to the values of use, and of production as opposed to reproduction; as well as the permanent discourses of competitiveness, and of losing territories. On the other hand,

through the processes of dispossession of urban space that means the entry into circulation of “poverty capital” articulated through devalued built environments, the rentier culture of real estate speculation, working classes and precarious lives, and discourses of fear and social control.

In conclusion, the concept of ‘urbanization of poverty’ is proposed, to contribute to the understanding that the production of urban inequalities and situations of socio-spatial injustice are not a mere consequence of economic logics, but rooted in the structure and are necessary for the dynamics of the urbanization of capital to continue its course. In this regard, this concept is used to facilitate a clear and critical approach and help unravel, based on critical social sciences and urban social movements for the right to the city, the hegemonic discourses on what has been called ‘urban poverty as collateral damage of the economic growth of cities’.

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