

Convivialism Facing the Territorial Question

New Spaces, New Times

Paulo Henrique Martins

The *Convivialist Manifesto* (in its first and second editions) synthesizes some of the most relevant normative and ideological elements of the social sciences for a broad restructuring of the perspectives of our civilization. It advocates a new way of life, that of conviviality, which emphasizes the value of the gift of mutual recognition between people and between people and nature. In this sense, it has an undisputed theoretical, normative, and utopian value. But how can the *Manifesto's* narrative be translated into political and civic actions that increase awareness of other solidary community networks and systems at the global level? This question makes sense when we consider that the pandemic has significantly altered the organization of virtual and face-to-face spaces by accelerating the pace of technical innovation. It poses new strategic challenges to counter-hegemonic movements such as convivialism at different scales: global, national, regional, and local.

1. New Spaces, New Times

The first important aspect that we must consider is that there has been a significant change in our space-time matrix. This change contributes to redefining the territories of sociability, which are the loci of producing meaning. With the new virtual technologies linked to biotechnology and artificial intelligence, we observe paradoxical effects in the territorial organization of human activities: These occur not

only within national borders but within the different physical and non-physical boundaries that are created by transnational social networks. On the one hand, the new technologies have helped to bring people closer together and to generate new interactions between the close and the anonymous, the national and the stranger. One only needs to look at the importance of virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams in the context of the pandemic, which allow many people to work from home, thus saving the costs and effort of physically traveling to other environments. But, on the other hand, the reorganization of spaces increases the social distances between the minority of the population who has access to the digital universe and the majority who does not have the financial resources to go digital or who carries out manual activities in industry or services that expose them to direct risks of contamination by the pandemic. Overall, we can speak of territorial fragmentations within national borders that exacerbate social and digital inequalities.

At the temporal level, it should also be noted that the idea of historical progress has become dystopian, pulling the imagination of the future back to the grim period of the present. This change in the representation of time serves to orient the contradictory initiatives of the mobilization of social, political, intellectual, and organizational actors towards the search for better strategic positions, both in national territories and in the new transnational territories. The flattening of time in the current symbolic abyss is reflected in the diminution of life perspectives and the multiplication of moral and psychic pathologies, especially for populations that cannot access wage labor or that are expelled from the labor market. In addition to the loss of all their civic rights, these people must also face the specter of precariousness created by COVID-19, which further degrades living conditions and social welfare policies.

Thus, we see that the effects of these shifts in the space–time matrix on the old and new boundaries of territorial power must be taken into account when analyzing the prospects for the dissemination of the convivialist ideas. How can the international convivialist movement benefit from the territorial changes brought about by the weakening of methodological nationalisms (Beck 2007) that circumscribed cultural

and social experiences within the framework of national territories on the one hand and by the emancipation of globalizing and pluralist experiences on the other? From another perspective, we might ask: Does the reorganization of space and time between the face-to-face and the virtual contribute to promoting the expansion of a liberating cosmopolitan philosophy in a global context where neoliberalism tends to instrumentalize tools, platforms, and artificial intelligence for the sake of commercial and utilitarian objectives, thereby diminishing the spaces of formation of democratic publics?

2. Reterritorialization and Delocalization

The inclusion of space and time is essential to judge the emancipatory possibilities of convivialism. The practice of anti-utilitarian global solidarity supported by certain principles such as those proposed in the *Manifesto* requires initiatives to shrink space and time. Today, the convivialist movement has to deal with the unfolding of multiple territorialities torn between the physically present and the virtual. Each of these territorialities reveals a particular way of perceiving the world, sometimes complementary, sometimes not.

The debate on territorial displacement is of strategic importance for understanding how the convivialist movement can generate an expanded subjectivity that values otherness and cultural and psychological pluralism. This reorganization of subjectivities is necessary to counteract the psycho-political agenda of neoliberalism that generates an absolute and flat subjectivity and in which the subject faces only itself (Han 2017). The *Second Convivialist Manifesto* (Convivialist International 2020 [hereafter cited as *SCM*]; 11) addresses this issue indirectly when it invokes global cultural pluralism:

“[T]he problem all countries are facing today is how to preserve yesterday's aspiration for solidarity within the framework of the nation imagined as multiethnic and multicultural. It raises the question of

the degree of compatibility between ultimate values and different beliefs (or absence of beliefs). This is the question of pluriversalism.”

The *Manifesto* also draws our attention to another aspect of the territorial question, that of the violence of neoliberalism on past modes of territorial activity. The territorial question is an increasingly important topic in this debate because the shift of sovereign power from the nation state to international forums dominated by big corporations weakens the administrative, political, and ideological arrangements that have helped sustain the reproduction of national and provincial narratives that have generated collective and individual identities. In this sense, the *Manifesto* suggests that the emancipation of a convivial global society based on an alternative philosophy to the hegemonic model requires:

“The concern to revive territories and localities and thus to reterritorialize and relocalize what globalization has excessively externalized. Convivialism can only exist in openness to others, certainly (in accordance with the principle of common humanity), but also in a sufficiently solid ‘entre-soi’ to be a source of trust and warmth (in accordance with the principle of common sociality).” (Internationale Convivialiste 2020: 80; my translation)

According to the *Manifesto*, conviviality can only be achieved through openness to others, through the formation of freely constituted councils that “weave the fabric of a global association of civil society” (ibid.: 37; my translation). If convivialism refers to a new philosophy that inspires ethical and political foundations in existing or yet-to-be-created territories, then the strategic value in the convivialist strategy of debating the location of networks, whether they are physically present or virtual, and the cyclical time of their processing must be considered. No doubt, changes in the cognitive, affective, and moral representations of space and time of individuals have an impact on the possibilities of founding convivialist territorial networks that generate languages of communication and the sharing of interpersonal and intergroup experiences of solidarity.

There is a proximity to be emphasized between the convivialist debate and the postcolonial debate on the subject of territory and locality, which makes it possible to build a bridge between the approaches to the crisis in the Global North and the Global South. The second manifesto recalls that “[t]he end of the colonial era and the decline of Eurocentrism pave the way for a genuine dialogue of civilizations, which, in turn, makes possible the advent of a new universalism. A universalism with many voices, a pluriversalism” (SCM: 5). This makes a clear commitment to the convivialist value of democracy. It is a question of seeking an experience of democracy that favors a genuine multivocal dialogue, a universalism of different voices that is built “on the recognition of equal rights, gender equality of men and women” (ibid.: 5).

The document also points out that among the dangers to democracy is “this fracturing of the social space, combined with the neoliberal laws of the market, the acceleration of the rhythm in all aspects of life, and de-anchoring resulting from deterritorialization, ruins the sense of social community” (ibid.: 10). These warnings are fundamental in order to visualize the current global tensions between democratization and authoritarianism, so that territorial strategies can be rethought in the production of webs of meaning that allow new associative and solidary pacts to be formed, whether we are referring to the Global North or the Global South.

Literature

- Beck, Ulrich (2007): “The Cosmopolitan Condition: Why Methodological Nationalism Fails,” in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 24 (7–8), pp. 286–290.
- Convivialist International (2020): “The Second Convivialist Manifesto: Towards a Post-Neoliberal World,” in: *Civic Sociology* 2020 (1), pp. 1–24. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.12721> [accessed 8/15/2021]. (= SCM)
- Han, Byung-Chul (2017): *Saving Beauty*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Internationale Convivialiste (2020): Second Manifeste convivialisme:
Pour un monde post-néolibéral, Paris: Actes Sud.