



Citizenship and housing cultures after COVID-19

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Abstract

Citizenship appears to us as an incessant constituent process, as a dynamic that is never stabilised, as a continuous development of struggles, conflicts, tensions, relationships, contestations and negotiations between social groups and rulers, between subordinate movements and hegemonic institutions. On this level, we can already understand the city (both conceptually and practically) as a political space that crosses bodies, arranging, placing and dislocating them in a series of interactions and relations that configure sociality and power. It is from these interactions that a process of subjectification (valorisation and qualification) and social de-subjectification is initiated: a process that finds in the urban fabric the prerequisites for political realisation (individual and collective) and for the social recognition of human beings. Beyond the many aspects that accompany this discourse, what we are most interested in emphasising here – mainly from a theoretical approach – is the relationship between the idea of citizenship, the exercise of political rights and the cultures of living, which after the state of emergency linked to COVID-19 has redesigned an idea of public health as a form on which to redefine social relations.

Key words

Citizenship; inhabiting; plague; COVID-19; sociality

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Resumen

El carácter de ciudadano se nos presenta como un proceso constituyente incesante, como una dinámica que nunca se estabiliza, como un desarrollo continuo de luchas, conflictos, tensiones, relaciones, impugnaciones y negociaciones entre grupos sociales y gobernantes, entre movimientos subalternos e instituciones hegemónicas. En este nivel, ya podemos entender la ciudad (tanto conceptual como prácticamente) como un espacio político que atraviesa los cuerpos, disponiéndolos, colocándolos y dislocándolos en una serie de interacciones y relaciones que configuran la socialidad y el poder. Es a partir de estas interacciones que se inicia un proceso de subjetivación (valorización y cualificación) y des-subjetivación social: un proceso que encuentra en el tejido urbano los prerrequisitos para la realización política (individual y colectiva) y para el reconocimiento social de los seres humanos. Más allá de los múltiples aspectos que acompañan este discurso, lo que más nos interesa destacar aquí –principalmente desde un enfoque teórico– es la relación entre la idea de ciudadanía, el ejercicio de los derechos políticos y las culturas del habitar, que tras el estado de emergencia vinculado al COVID-19 ha rediseñado una idea de salud pública como forma sobre la que redefinir las relaciones sociales.

Palabras clave

Ciudadanía; habitar; plaga; COVID-19; socialidad

Table of contents

1. Introduction	742
2. A critical view of the concept of citizenship.....	743
3. A constituent concept of citizenship.....	745
4. State of plague.....	747
5. Problems of legitimation	748
6. Towards another abode.....	749
7. The pandemic experience and the relationship with space	751
8. Conclusions	755
References.....	756

1. Introduction

According to certain perspectives rooted in a critical vision of current political processes, the idea of citizenship should currently be ascribed to collective subjectivities rather than individuals. It should be reconsidered not in relation to the civic freedoms and rational law that define the horizon of civil society (an eminently bourgeois public sphere), but primarily in relation to social dynamics, which extend beyond abstract and formal citizenship, beyond the measure and practices of political belonging in its given legal form which is still tied to the exclusivity (and exclusion) of forms of national representation and the categories of classical political philosophy.

When seen from this perspective (which in some way indicates its overcoming as an abstract form), citizenship appears to be an incessant constituent process, a dynamic that is never stabilised, a continuous development of struggles, conflicts, tensions, relationships, contestations and negotiations between social groups and rulers, between subordinate movements and hegemonic institutions.

Today, the globalisation and dislocation of economic processes is replacing the rules of social inclusion and exclusion and political participation, on which Western culture – hegemonic all over the world – once built its universal values.

The notion of citizenship – rethought in the wider perspective of cosmopolitanism, from Kant to Habermas, with his idea of “inclusion between foreigners” (Habermas 1996) – no longer seems to represent a universal, shared value. We can get a sense of this change by looking at the latest studies by Partha Chatterjee. Retracing a path from Gramsci to Foucault, his studies analyse the concept of “political society” and the notion of “governmentality”, criticising the traditional paradigm of “civil society” as we know it, with its historic connections to representative democracy and rights (Chatterjee 2004).

From this point of view, democratic practices based on communitarian auto-regulation – forms of resistance and opposition that now prefigure new conditions of political autonomy – can be considered as laboratories for different knowledge tools (devices), beyond the traditional boundaries stressed by the political space of sovereignty (as interpreted in Western culture). For instance, we can consider different political conceptions through the critical approach of the “Subaltern Studies” Collective (Guha 1982), and investigations by Balibar (2002) and Rancière (1998).

Starting from here, democratic practices based on communitarian auto-regulation can be considered as different ways of knowledge, beyond the traditional boundaries stressed by the political space of sovereignty.

Based on these perspectives, and returning to Max Weber’s studies of the “Western city”, we can reconsider an idea of dynamic and “constituent” citizenship (Weber 1978) as opposed to the concept of static and “established” citizenship. We can completely rethink the idea of social inclusion with reference to the political space of the city, where the very concept of citizenship is developed.

On this level, we can understand the city both conceptually and practically as a political space that crosses bodies, arranging, placing and dislocating them in a series of interactions and relations configuring sociality and power. It is from these interactions that a process of subjectification (valorisation and qualification) and social de-

subjectification begins: a process that finds the prerequisites for individual and collective political realisation and the social recognition of human beings in the urban fabric.

Beyond the many aspects accompanying this discourse, what we are most interested in emphasising here is the relationship between the idea of citizenship and the cultures of living. After the COVID-19 emergency, the idea of public health has been redesigned as a form on which social relations can be redefined.

The brief considerations below do not, therefore, claim to provide an exhaustive, systematic study of a topic that undoubtedly deserves broader and more serious treatment. Instead, they are limited to identifying some of the central themes that characterise the relationship between citizenship and housing cultures after COVID-19.

2. A critical view of the concept of citizenship

Before addressing this problem, which inevitably leads to the present day, we believe it is worth re-examining one of the most relevant “Subaltern” critical approaches to the Western idea of “citizenship”. For the sake of simplification and brevity, we will focus on Partha Chatterjee’s interpretations of the modes of traditional civil society which have been a basic feature of Western rationalist thought, and which have directly or indirectly offered an ideological basis for different perceptions of the problem of citizenship.

In short, the classical idea of popular sovereignty, expressed in the legal-political facts of equal citizenship, produced the homogenous construct of the nation, whereas the activities of governmentality required multiple, cross-cutting and shifting classifications of the population as the targets of multiple policies, producing a necessarily heterogeneous construct of the social. Here, then, we have the antimony between the lofty political imaginary of popular sovereignty and the mundane administrative reality of governmentality: it is the antimony between the homogenous national and the heterogeneous social. (Chatterjee 2004, p. 36)

Chatterjee has given us a major and urgent work that provides a full perspective on the possibilities and limitations of democracy in the postcolonial world: *The Politics of the Governed*, published in 2004.¹ The book argues that the rise of ethnic or identity politics – particularly in the postcolonial world – is a consequence of new governmental administration techniques (an idea taken from Foucault). Using contemporary examples from India, the book examines the different forms taken by the politics of the governed. Many operate outside the traditionally defined arena of civil society and the formal legal institutions of the state. The book considers the global conditions affecting local forms of

¹ In *The Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee intends to sign up to “the first phase of the subaltern studies project”, where “the issue was the political split between the organized elite and the unorganized subaltern people” (Chatterjee 2004, p. 53). It is on this basis that we can appreciate the book’s contribution, which introduces the Foucauldian problematic of governability into the understanding of democratic politics in the contemporary world. This problem allows him to revisit the distinction between “civil society” and “political society”, which was present in Gramsci’s thinking. In a series of investigations, Foucault asserted that the modern Western state owed its survival to exercising “governmentality”, which he defined as steering people. This requires the application of governmental techniques of power, starting with objective empirical knowledge of the people, gaining legitimacy less by actualising ideals of civic equality and liberty than by committing to secure their security and welfare. From these basic elements, Chatterjee’s reflection consists of thinking through the conflicting effects of superimposing governmental techniques onto the construction of a postcolonial nation.

popular politics and shows us how both community and global society have been transformed. Chatterjee's analysis explores both the strategic and the ethical dimensions of the new democratic politics of rights, claims and entitlements of population groups. It provides a new understanding of the dynamics of world politics both before and after the events of September 11, 2001.

In other words, Partha Chatterjee looks at the political mobilisation of the governed in former colonies, people who lack access to the modes of traditional citizenship. He argues that these people are not powerless and that they engage in a different kind of democratic politics to the democracy of national sovereignty.

These (community) claims are irreducibly political. They could only be made on a political terrain, where the rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure. The success of these claims depends entirely on the ability of population groups to mobilize support to influence the implementation of governmental policy in their favour. But this success is necessarily temporary and contextual. The strategic balance of political forces could change, and rule may no longer be bent as before. As I have pointed out, governmentality always operates on a heterogeneous social field, on multiple population groups, and with multiple strategies. Here there is no equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship. (Chatterjee 2004, p. 60)

Chatterjee estimates that the number of the governed without sufficient mediations to enjoy real citizenship is "three quarters of the world's population". From this failure of real citizenship, should we conclude that there is an absence of democracy for all the governed who are not part of civil society?

Chatterjee explicitly rejects this conclusion, arguing that the governed are not necessarily reduced to powerlessness, and that within governmentality there is in fact a different kind of democratic politics from national sovereignty. The "politics of the governed" is popular politics asserting itself in the context of a multiplicity of heterogeneous populations that are formed through governmental techniques. Heterotopic in relation to civil society, it asserts itself in "political society", grounded in "heterogeneous social policy". Like shantytown squatters or Calcutta street vendors, the protagonists of "political society" occupy public spaces and work illegally, take public transport without paying, and sometimes steal water and electricity. That is why it is impossible, both objectively (it would be a violation of constitutionally guaranteed property rights) and subjectively, for them to rely on claiming equal rights for the whole community, through the institutional channels of civil society. Nevertheless, they can obtain arrangements with governmental agencies (regarding housing or the use of water and electricity) which eventually recognise the existence of paralegal devices, and the application of governmental social development programs in health and education.

Therefore, the "politics of the governed" does not operate in the form of citizens' claims as in the battle for civil rights. It is compelled to develop a multitude of strategic responses related to the flexibility of the elites' political techniques. But an essential point

is that when they are mobilised, the governed commit “the community’s moral content” (Chatterjee 2004, p. 91).²

Stabilised paralegal devices in property and the moral community are the two means by which political society can include the governed in the modern idea of citizenship. In this way, the politics of the governed takes on a politically democratic dimension, but it is through exceptions to civil legitimacy and national sovereignty that most of the world experiences democracy.³

3. A constituent concept of citizenship

Based on this perspective, we can go back to Max Weber and his studies of the genesis of the Western city (Weber 1978). This is because we are convinced that his studies describe the origin of the modern Western concept of citizenship, considered as an autonomous space. This also provides us with an idea of a constituent concept of citizenship.

As we know from Weber, the well-known saying “city air makes man free” originated in central and northern European cities. It means that urban citizens usurped the right to break with lordly law – and this was the great innovation, the greatest revolution in the medieval cities of the West.

As Weber wrote, differences in status disappeared in the city – at least regarding the ordinary differentiation between freedom and lack of freedom. The city configured a space of liberty and autonomy precisely because it flourished at an extremely peculiar time in the West’s history. It emerged within a feudal context, which was already based on the contract. It established a contract between its citizens, who made up a community on all levels, including in terms of cultural meaning and action. The city’s essence was the defence of freedom shared by equals. As well as becoming part of the fabric of the feudal world, it had thereby escaped the logic of domination underpinning social formation. This was a unique moment in world history: it established its autonomy vis-à-vis the ruling classes in the context of overall feudal social life, turning traditional domination into a non-legitimate phenomenon.

Weber sets out two conditions for the existence of an urban community. They are: 1) political and military autonomy: opportunities for autonomous administration by authorities who were elected by citizens; 2) the ability to defend the new democracy against feudal lords, who opposed cities, and the peasantry. The field of autonomy.

² Chatterjee gives the example of a colony of squatters who describe their association not in terms of common interests, but of the “family” (Chatterjee 2004, p. 72), “which however is not defined by any biological or even cultural affinity, but rather by the collective occupation of a piece of land” (ibid.). This is not a matter of community identification, but of a method of collective subjectification in the shared practice of a conflict. This aspect of the politics of the governed is extremely important; in addition to foiling governmentality’s attempts to reduce identities to objective categories of statistical science, it demonstrates the governed’s unique capacity for collective agency, that is, for a movement of “internal transformation” through the process of politicisation. In the action of the governed, identities (including religious ones) can therefore be shifted, and material conflicts coincide with conflicts for recognition.

³ The potential of the subaltern classes and their ideologies of discontent and resistance in reshaping the state have prevented the bourgeois from gaining hegemony over civil society. The legitimacy of democracy no longer depends on the hegemony of the elites, but on the politics of the governed.

Furthermore, the development of free labour and identity of interests in defending new associations against feudal lords led to the emergence of the city as a community.

The city is a free association in which individuals participate with their own rights. The new political community, with its democratic forms of association, depended on the presence of a new class – the urban bourgeoisie. “The characteristic of the city in the political definition was the appearance of a distinct ‘bourgeois’ estate” (Weber 1978, p. 1226).

In his discussion of the emergence of Western cities, Weber focuses on the development of rational-legal institutions in cities, which enabled individuals to be free from traditional groups and develop their individuality.

Weber describes the formation of the corporation of burghers as formal-legal, and their authorities as legitimately constituted. However, the revolutionary usurpation of rights also occurs in the most important cases.

In a formal legal sense, the corporation of burghers and its authorities had its “legitimate” origin in real or fictitious privileges granted by political or manorial powers. To some extent, the actual process corresponded to this formal pattern. But quite often, especially in the most important cases, the real origin lies in a revolutionary usurpation of rights from a formal legal point of view.

A “derived” burgher association was formed when the city founder or his successors issued a contracted or legislated grant of limited rights to autonomy and autocephaly.

Despite Max Weber’s extensive argument, we believe this perspective serves to rethink the idea of citizenship, rather than a constituted concept, as a *constituent* moment, or an expression of the process of “not-legitimate” power. It is particularly important today, at a time of globalisation: Western institutions are losing their cultural, economic and political hegemony all over the world, and our concept of citizenship is being criticised by different points of view (as we saw with Chatterjee). However, in this sense (which coincides with our multicultural society), we must return to Weber and rethink a spontaneous, autonomous, bottom-up process of inclusion between others (constituting the citizenship of our time) which is not based on developing rational-legal rights and institutions, or the strength of an excluding military and political power which protects and separates citizens from outsiders, or even the hegemony of the free market and the universal paradigm of exchange. Instead, it should be based on the idea of a housing culture built on political coexistence and open to new forms of living experience. A space, as we well know, that cannot exist without conflicts and tensions. It is nevertheless only from this point of view that we can try to imagine a dynamic process of citizenship today. And it is according to this “constituent” perspective that we also encounter, to some extent, the model of the city conceived by Henri Lefebvre as opposable to that ceaselessly produced by urban and global capital. A model that envisions the creation of a “movement” capable of transforming to everyday life in the city. On this level, the right to the city should in fact be configured as an inclusive and participatory path of citizenship (and, at the same time, as a demand, an appeal) addressed to access to resources and social justice declined at the territorial level and as a possibility to experience an urban life alternative to the logics and processes of industrialization and accumulation of capital (Lefebvre 1967).

4. State of plague

From this perspective, it is appropriate to rethink the idea of citizenship in relation to the cultures of living. Following the COVID-19 emergency, it has redesigned an idea of public health on which social relations can be redefined.

Before proceeding in this direction, however, it is important to return to the relationship between city and power, as experienced in times of emergency and exceptionality.

As is well known, Michel Foucault's analysis of the plagued city gives us a genealogical example of disciplinary power as a permanent system of surveillance and control.

During the 17th century, when plague broke out in a city, surveillance, discipline and security measures were taken immediately. Widespread control of the population was carried out. The city was divided into strictly controlled sectors; thereafter, the city and surrounding farmland were closed off, and people were banned from leaving. Each family had its own supplies, and small wooden pipelines were built between streets and houses to deliver supplies. The only people circulating in the town were stewards, mayors, soldiers and gravediggers, who took away the corpses and buried them.

In this sense, writes Foucault, the plague "as a form, at once real and imaginary, of disorder had as its medical and political correlative discipline. Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of "contagions", of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder" (Foucault 1995, p. 198).

A whole power of control, and a whole series of disciplinary schemes, are built around the "plague condition (the "state of plague"). "The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies – this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (*Ibid.*).

The utopia of politics, of generalised disciplinary power, widespread control and total surveillance, finds its fundamental paradigm or genealogy in the plagued city, in the state of emergency conveyed by the plague. "To see the perfect disciplines work, the rulers postulated the plague state" (Foucault 1995, p. 217). All the surveillance and control devices that were still an exception from "regular" social norms in the 17th century, with disciplinary power taking hold in the early 19th century, become the rule, the ordinary and "normal" function.

What is essential in this excerpt from *Discipline and Punish* is the definition of modern society as a "disciplinary" society; however, discipline cannot identify itself with either an institution or an apparatus, precisely because it is a type of power, a technology, that traverses all sorts of apparatuses and institutions to reconnect them, prolong them, make them converge, make them perform in a completely new way.

From this point of view, power is a strategy, rather than a property or an appropriation, and its effects are attributable to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functioning.

5. Problems of legitimation

Foucault's reconstruction of the plagued city is undoubtedly important in understanding the genealogy of the discipline, surveillance and control that, from a state of exception, has emerged in modern Western society.

However, the experiences of the past cannot fully explain what is happening today.

The socio-political structures of pre-modern societies are quite different from the complex structures of today's global societies. While the former are subject to the coercion of political power, the latter need consensus and legitimacy. In these societies, political power cannot be based on coercion alone, since it requires factual legitimacy. It is therefore necessary to look at the legal forms of legitimacy that await the lawmaker's choices and decisions.

In other words, we immediately understand that the current health emergency is not so much a coercive power that is legitimately entrusted with the function of governing and managing the crisis, but rather "science" (with its own court and procedures referring to legal logic) in its ability to provide legitimacy for decision making. "Science" is asked above all to provide quick pointers to handle the emergency through emergency regulatory tools.

In this sense, we need to understand a historical moment that, precisely through the pandemic experience, bears witness to the gradual expansion of technological rationality and procedures for the scientific administration of reality.

Now is not the time to go over the sociological – and the legal, philosophical and political – tradition, which, starting with Weber and continuing with Luhmann, has taken on different connotations and arguments. However, returning to the problem of the types of legitimation that support lawmakers' decisions, we can briefly rethink the ideological conditions that, in the West at least, guide lifestyles in our secular or post-secular societies.

Thanks to Weber, we understand that, in modern society, the reign of "*polytheism of values*" has supplanted the absence of universal, commonly accepted conceptions (religious, dogmatic, metaphysical, etc.) capable of guiding life, political decisions and legislative measures (Weber 2004). Since the primacy of any theological or metaphysical absolute a universal reference has waned, paradoxically we now ask "science" to rise to the status of a "value" capable of giving legislators useful indications for their political and social decisions. Science, matured in doubt, ordered to the "objectivity" of method and not to ontological "truth", thus finds itself performing a dogmatic function that, by statute, is not its own. Not by chance, today we are asked to have "faith" and "trust" in science: we ask it for certainties with a view to effective and shared action.

We live in a political, social, economic and cultural context, which increasingly sees the shifting and entrenchment of conflicts from the ideological to the epistemological (subject to their possible reinterpretation through ideological perspectives). We could also speak of ideologies as epistemologies or, conversely, epistemologies as ideologies. It is a fact that in our day and age, the radicality of the conflict no longer focuses solely on disputes over the affirmation of values and ideals or the struggle to satisfy material interests. Instead, it raises the possibility of legitimising scientific and technical readings,

concerning the objective processes used to construct reality, allowing us to make decisions that affect the way we legally define life (especially on biological, medical, ethical, social, political and financial levels).

We should also consider the radicalisation of epistemological conflict seen in some of the most recent “post-colonialist” sociological trends, from the epistemic deconstruction of Subaltern Studies (Spivak 1988, pp. 66–111), to the critical revision of Western hegemonic knowledge, identified with a range of discourses, narratives, practices, representations and political relations that perpetuate and nurture the asymmetrical distribution of power and wealth globally (Santos 2016).

One thinks especially of the recent health emergency, and how “science” (which has its own internal processes of criticism and control) is asked to provide quick pointers for governing it through emergency regulatory tools.

In this context, the focus on epistemological presuppositions for the way we recognise and understand reality can only foster the reformulation of a sociological-legal knowledge capable of posing itself as a perspective, not so much alternative to the “scientism” hegemonic in contemporary culture, but, above all, inclusive of those socio-cultural processes within which scientific thought itself is specified.

Indeed, we need to understand an era that records the gradual expansion of technological rationality and procedures for the scientific administration of reality.

This has coincided with a political way of governing life that, based on the health emergency, saw a shift from the order of citizenship to that of subservience. Put another way, the rank of the citizen responsible for his or her actions has shifted to the rank of the obedient subject. One thinks of the language used by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte to address Italians during the pandemic: “you are allowed to (...); you are not allowed to (...)”.

However, the pandemic has also fostered other experiences that affect the way social space is lived, especially in cities.

6. Towards another abode

We can return, then, to the city as a typical place for the modern way of dwelling (albeit “late-modern”, “post-modern” or “hyper-modern”). It is precisely the global process of “encroachment” and “deterritorialization” or “trans-nationalization” recorded in urban, sociological, economic, political and legal studies that allows us to critically rethink the problem of estrangement in all its ambivalence, far beyond the categories of Marxism. It is felt particularly by those who, no longer firmly “protected” by “safe” borders guarded by state law, are “uprooted” and experience permanent estrangement in the “world” in which they dwell, even without physical displacement (without moving from one country to another, without crossing a political border or national frontier).

Sociologists have been saying this for more than two decades: we dwell in a world where “natural boundaries” are progressively disappearing; a “nomadic” world, a “fluctuating territory” (Maffesoli 2006) in which distances tend to be erased and the sense of geographical location loses its meaning; a world of “nonplaces” – according to Marc Augé’s famous expression: a space of “provisional identity,” perennial transit,

ephemerality and passage (Augé 1995); indefinite and global space, home of today's "exile" (Marci 2009).⁴

On the urban level, we are reminded of the image of the "de-urbanized", "decentralized" yet "hyper-concentrated" space that Paul Virilio referred to back in 1984 as the "era of non-separability": a "dromospheric", "nodal", eccentric space with respect to the traditional "form-state" (Virilio 1998, pp. 125–6). It is precisely here that our condition as "exiles", beyond the legal and political meaning of the term (which presupposes a politically and legally determined physical space) and beyond the various exclusions that still accompany the building of walls and borders, becomes the symbolic and concrete figure of an estrangement elevated to global level; an estrangement, however, that in its exposition reveals, paradoxically, its own ethos, its own fundamental ethical trait.

Reconsidering the condition of the exile today means placing oneself in a paradoxical perspective; it means thinking of foreignness as a more "authentic dwelling" of our current worldly and global sojourn and as a more specific condition of being citizens of the world and in the world. For it is precisely exile, in its exposure to radical otherness (and in relation to global deterritorialization processes), that reveals, in this very condition, an openness to the ethics of welcome and hospitality; ethics that can be elevated, moreover, to a category of law (Marci 2003). And we are not referring to simple and "codified" moral behaviour, but rather an ethos that, deeper down, by recognising the stranger among our own, the foreigner in what belongs to us most, the presence of the other in our homes, leads to an experience of estrangement by exposing us to the risk of non-protection.

Beginning here, "on the side of the exile", we can then consider, paradoxically, the "unavailability" of an even more "proper" world since it is consigned to the "improper," the "not appropriable", the "unavailable", the "inappropriate" (that is, the current experience of what we continue to call "citizenship"). At the same time, we can consider the inescapable "universal" need for an ethos that surpasses all specific, particular and territorial "belonging"; an ethos that defines those who – as referenced by Bataille, Nancy and Blanchot – share an original absence of community (the impossibility of a communitarian being a subject, the impossibility of one's own immanence) – "the community of those who have no community" (Blanchot 1984, p. 43).

From this point of view, community is not the space where a new subjectivity is realised; on the contrary, it is that of the outflow from the limits of the subject, the infinite otherness, the "out-of-self" as the last unavailable, inaccessible stake of being in communion (no more than the checkmate of perfect union). In this sense, paradoxically, the only possible community is the "negative community," the "community of those who have no community," those who share this absence, this continuous lack.

The city of the global era therefore presents itself as an "open city," the theatre of otherness, the hybrid, "not-coincidental" and incomplete space of foreignness and

⁴ One can also refer to the critique of the project of modernity raised by decolonial thought, which argues that the benefits of this project have only benefited a minor percentage of the world's population (freedom, civil rights, access to wealth), at the cost of the domination and exploitation of the rest of the planet's population (Dussel *et al.* 2000, Quijano and Ennis 2000).

mutual estrangement. There is no longer a reference to the distinction between society and community (the reference, of course, is to Tönnies), and it is not even a play on the composition or articulation of different communal subjects. But somehow we are closer to the idea of “good neighbourliness without intimacy” which Jane Jacobs – also mentioned by Richard Sennet (Sennet 2018) – used to describe metropolitan life: a friendly but detached atmosphere, dispossessed of any inclination to appropriation and belonging (Jacobs 1961). Beginning with this close bond of mutual “not appropriation,” we can perhaps reconsider, paradoxically, the (cosmo)politics of urban space. This seems even more urgent when we stand on the wave of the experience of “suspension” into which the COVID emergency has inexorably thrown us.

7. The pandemic experience and the relationship with space

In this regard, before we rethink the concept of citizenship, it may be useful to reflect briefly on the pandemic experience in relation to living space and culture.

Without any warning, the COVID-19 outbreak exposed almost every country in the world to risk scenarios, first within national boundaries, then increasingly on a global scale, ultimately removing any certainty of neutralising or at least containing the risk. On March 11, 2020, it was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation. Individuals and communities suddenly became aware of the vulnerability of their social systems, governments and health institutions. COVID-19 highlighted the fragility of the territorial systems produced by globalisation, and imposed the need to rethink traditional settlement models and our way of inhabiting. The sudden abnormality, and the total deviation from crystallised lifestyles and habits, was a crucial passage in the individual and collective experience. Over two years later, we can now speak of a disruptive and unstoppable phenomenon, onto which a further component of instability was grafted: existential *epoché* and the paralysis of everyday life.

A wider reflection is necessary in this sense. All of us realised that the world is not only what we think or imagine, but also what we live and inhabit. By inhabiting the world, we develop habits, and these habits pertain to a knowledge that is in our hands and legs, and relies on bodily space. The *I-space* relationship should not only be addressed as the “body moving in space”, but as the “space of the body”, since it is an indissoluble relationship (Merleau-Ponty 2009). In turn, the world – things – sends information to the body, and the physiognomy indicates different possibilities, triggering closeness or estrangement. As an operative power, the body therefore has a meaning within the reality where it performs an action: it is precisely the action that makes the external space and the space of the body a single system. Being in the world means having a world not only as a place that hosts, but also as a boundary onto which we project ourselves (Ciampi 2011). The body goes beyond sensory possibilities and is concerned with intentionality, planning, the vital interest in what surrounds it. Therefore, an external space can only come into being through the body: the objective space of geometry only acquires meaning from the space oriented by the body. In essence, each body has its own location, each matter must conquer its own space, its own power of expansion beyond geometric boundaries: the space of the body and the space of the world are *consonant*, they touch and mingle.

The place is a set of elements that coexist in a certain order, and space is the animation of these places caused by mobility. Space, therefore, is not reduced to simple schematic relationships, while the existence that extends into it turning geometries into life experiences. If, in a mathematical space, people bump into each other, in a lived space they communicate and meet each other. Therefore, the experience of inhabiting a place refers to more than the vital space to which one belongs: it is also the constitutive moment of the *social structure*, since it has to do with everything concerning the individual as a social actor, singly or in a group⁵.

We can therefore speak of the “humanisation of space”, which becomes *familiar* when individuals are properly related to it, when distance and proximity are in a balanced relationship (Minkowski 2004). The balance between distance and proximity, and, more generally, the profound relationship between the body and its space (both social and private) have been totally transformed by the pandemic experience. The COVID-19 pandemic led all governments to impose high states of alert and restrictive political measures, the total closure of activities and the confinement of people. People lived and experienced “lockdown”, a term that abruptly made its way into the vocabulary and daily life of entire communities, and whose meaning was unknown before the health crisis.

Isolation imposed physical distancing,⁶ and the fear of catching the virus; they became an integral part of our lifestyles, but allowed us to rediscover two essential things. On one hand, a sense of limitation and our temporality as mortal beings: a crucial realisation, since only when we become aware of striding towards death does the self develop fully. On the other hand, we rediscovered the awareness that is inevitably tied to a *you* and an *us*, and that we are linked to a “whole”, without which we cannot imagine our existence, and of which we are each a distinct, conscious and responsible part.

The seriousness of the virus resulted in high mortality rates, but also in its strong ability to paralyse the existence of entire communities. European populations had probably not experienced this kind of limitation since the 1918 influenza pandemic (Parmet and Rothstein 2018, Batty 2020). Suddenly, the frenzied and tireless individuals of contemporary society, who made travelling and mobility a symbol of their inalienable rights, were forced to fall back on themselves and their families and carry out their everyday lives within their homes, inventing new strategies for managing time and experimenting with smart working (Colombo and Rebughini 2021).

The domestic space became the *everything space*: it took on and absorbed “other” functions, which previously were not its concern (smart working, digital sociality, inter-family communication). In order to open up to new uses, homes became increasingly susceptible to changes and renovations, forced by contingent needs or imagined scenarios in a realm of uncertainty and vulnerability. So “the pandemic has converted the space of freedom and family intimacy into something totally new on an experiential

⁵ This is a subject that has been extensively worked on in urban studies. Among all see Lefebvre 1974.

⁶ Governments attempted to slow the spread of the disease by issuing “social distancing” guidelines, including staying at least 6 feet – 2 metres – away from anyone outside one’s household. Early in the implementation of social distancing, the World Health Organisation announced that the term “physical distancing” better captured the essence of the guidelines, so that people should remain *physically* but not *socially* distant from others.

level and difficult to assimilate on a psychological level. Especially in Europe and the core countries, it has redesigned and continues to modify the physiognomy of living and its semantic complexity, imposing the home as the primary space, both as a defense against health risks and as a new ergonomic place" (Ciampi 2021, p. 74).

In different ways, the front doors of our homes were shut, shifting from boundaries between the private and the public to pure elements of geometric separation between the inside and the outside, the latter devoid of sociality. The home became a refuge but also a "prison", a site of safety and punishment: nonetheless, it was a privilege with respect to those who did not have a home and lived in conditions of marginality.

The pandemic was an invasive and inexorable change; it was a *turning point* in relation to housing conditions: the configuration of living spaces was progressively negotiated, rethought, claimed, as was the urban equilibrium.

We lived in captivity. Precisely because we were confined to our homes, we realised we had a deep need for citizenship. We were mentally and psychologically projected towards the external space, which appeared all the more emptied of meaning and de-functionalised the more the private internal space was re-functionalised and loaded with unusual "burdens". What we used to take for granted – the world where we "felt at home", our reference landscape, the lights and voices of the city – turned out to be insubstantial. The city, with its spaces of aggregation, interaction, conversation and playful enjoyment, became an object of desire that was inhibited by restrictive regulations and, precisely because it was prohibited, even more pressing. Large, high-density urban areas are clearly vulnerable to health risks (Matthew and McDonald 2006, Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir 2020) and these "weaknesses" will be exacerbated in the future unless organisational and planning measures are taken.⁷

In this context, the idea of *urban preparedness* (Matthew and McDonald 2006) emerges, as the COVID-19 pandemic has struck at the heart of our urban world, generating a profound sense of individual and societal uncertainty (Glaeser 2020).

COVID-19 had the most significant effect on the inherently spatial aspects of social relationships. As a result, the restrictions changed how people interact with their surroundings. Today, our bodies obsessively search for external spaces, wanting to be occupied in new ways and forms; they push into unusual or residual urban and peri-urban places, to make new encounters and social interactions. Communities, especially urban ones, must create new imaginaries, new cultures and housing practices that respond to the possible lack of populated and social public space. Homes have opened up new possibilities of integration with the outside world, towards shared spaces and services located outside the domestic perimeter. These new housing needs follow a logic based on access rather than the possession and consumption of goods, claiming alternative and more conscious forms of citizenship. We refer to alternative housing practices involving the *co-housing* model, whereby private spaces are open to common

⁷ The success of any pandemic response depends, above all, on a complementary partnership between the state and the citizenry. Each partner is responsible for upholding their end of the contract. However, the continuing pandemic has revealed the fault lines of the state-citizenship contract. The "pandemic citizen" will always have to face new risks, including health risks, confronting government and health institution measures, but above all appealing to the principle of responsibility towards oneself and others.

areas, services and shared solutions (solidarity condominiums, eco-villages or eco-neighbourhoods). As a result, people are living according to the principles of cooperation, solidarity and sustainability, forming real networks and enriching social capital (Deriu and Bucco 2013).

These forms of community collaboration present undoubted benefits, both economic as well as environmental and cultural. The co-housing model launched in Denmark in the late 1960s has spread, especially in urban contexts. It is oriented towards mutual help and a more *collaborative life* (Perini 2020, p. 190), while respecting the autonomy of individuals and families. The integration of private and common places – vegetable gardens, terraces, gardens, laundries, kitchens – corresponds to the idea of a “collaborative community”, i.e. cooperating groups, which share services and establish relationships based on a high degree of mutual trust. These forms of housing encourage virtuous and sustainable behaviours by citizens, the complete opposite of the idea of dormitory blocks of flats, based on anonymity and lack of interaction.⁸

Living according to collaborative models perhaps means taking advantage of the pandemic experience, demonstrating a real openness to others, concretising our harmony with our neighbourhood and care for surrounding spaces. More generally, it means feeling part of a creative and collaborative community.⁹ Although these housing models are not yet a legal entity in their own right under some national law, which would make them more feasible, co-housing is a resource for different types of inhabitants: pensioners, vulnerable families, couples with no children or children living far away, or simply people who wish to share choices, goods and services.

Co-housing might reshape a new concept of living, with the domestic space no longer just a nest, but a place from which we can rethink our encounters with others.

As Komninou notes, in addition to imposing a burden on humanity, the lockdown experience might help develop new and better methods of using or re-using spaces. Changes are certainly underway, and we should use them to our advantage. The question is how substantial these changes are and whether they will last in the long term. All in all, there is widespread uncertainty for the future, since we do not know how far our use and perception of space will change (Komninou 2022).

Each of us consumes our anxiety alone, living it as an individual problem. We seek personal solutions to systemic contradictions, singular salvation from problems that can only be solved collectively (Bauman 2000). As Bauman reminds us, it seems we can only seek security in the private sphere, and even in physical integrity, of which our homes, possessions and neighbourhoods become extensions and pillars. Instead, we need to formulate new strategies and practices for a culture of inhabiting places, aware of the vulnerability and fragility that have always defined us as human beings: incomplete, flawed and exposed to the events of others. In this sense, the condition we live in today allows us to re-think our presence in the world, our ethos, and our act of inhabiting as prerequisites for a new relationship with what – as other – belongs to us. This will allow

⁸ Reference can also be made to private and common places such as co-working environments: eg. local hot-desk office spaces, public libraries etc.

⁹ Regarding the debate on creative communities, forms of active citizenship and bottom-up participation experiences, see Ciampi 2022.

us to assess the depth and the extent of the crisis we are still experiencing. It not only affects work, technology, health and urban planning, but the whole of society, the entire human family. It is, in fact, the essential relationship between humans and the world. And it is precisely from this relationship between humanity and the world that we can think or rethink citizenship as an open and evolving process.

8. Conclusions

According to the perspective adopted in this paper, how can we rethink citizenship in this sense?

Citizenship (which, in some ways, also indicates its overcoming as an abstract form) appears to be above all an incessant constituent process, a dynamic that is never stabilised, a continuous development of struggles, conflicts, tensions, relations, contestations and negotiations between social groups and rulers, between subaltern movements and hegemonic institutions, between exclusion and social inclusion. It is no longer bound, constituted, defined, standardised or immunised by fixed, rigid and formal legal configurations.

We cannot conclude, however, without recalling that the process is always accomplished through the constitutive and dissipative work of otherness, of the Other in its transcendence towards any politically, socially, juridically or culturally pre-constituted identity. Inclusive citizenship of the Other is always “open” citizenship, exposed to the experience and risk of its continuous establishment and dismissal, exposed to its inescapable and unceasing transformation.

So, how can we rethink “open” citizenship?

As mentioned above, the dislocation of economic processes is abruptly changing the rules of social inclusion/exclusion and political access on which, until recently, Western culture had built its values, coating them with a universal character. The very concept of “citizenship” (also considered the basis of cosmopolitanism that is open to “integration among strangers” in the Habermasian reading of Kant) seems to have lost its ability to rise to a universally shared value. As mentioned previously, this can be seen in recent studies by Partha Chatterjee. By tracing an analysis of “political society” and “governmentality” in Gramscian and Foucauldian perspectives, he re-proposes a critique of the traditional model of “civil society” in the essential features that link it to representative democracy, rights and parliamentary institutions (Chatterjee 2004). And we understand it, equally, from the different epistemologies of the political that run through the aforementioned research by Balibar and Rancière.

Beyond the multiple aspects accompanying this discourse, it is most interesting to emphasise the relationship between the idea of citizenship and the exercise of political rights (recognised as fundamental and, therefore, universal rights). The rights of “participation” that should allow the citizen alone to actively cooperate in the democratic process of opinion building can only remain such if they are exercised within the community in which one permanently lives; here the coincidence between citizens and people permanently residing in a given territory becomes essential.

“So far,” Habermas also reminds us, “inherently political citizenship rights do not go beyond the scope of the nation state” (Habermas 2001, p. 119). But in segmented,

stratified and multi-ethnic societies with an increasing presence of immigrants, the coincidence of legal citizenship and national identity can no longer be reasonably sustained. “A democratic political citizenship”, writes Habermas again, “has no need to be rooted within the national identity of a people; however, regardless of the multiplicity of different cultural “forms of life”, it requires that all citizens be socialized into a common political culture” (Habermas 2001, p. 117).

The proposed solution is almost a foregone conclusion. If a stronger name is to be given to the concept of political citizenship, it can only be – from a Kantian perspective – “cosmopolitan citizenship.” A solution is also offered by Dahrendorf: “Citizenship,” we read, “will never be complete until world citizenship exists. Exclusion is the enemy of citizenship” (Dahrendorf 1993, p. 16).

The ideological substratum supporting such positions certainly betrays a strong faith in the universal, foundational and legitimising value of human rights and the effective inclusive capacity of the institutions of liberal and representative democracy. It affirms a rather abstract and universalistic, rather than a dynamic and pluralistic, vision of citizenship. It also betrays an overconfidence – perhaps still anchored in the assumptions of a view of history as a progressive and coherent development of cosmopolitically oriented reason – in the realisation of a “common political culture” that might hegemonically extend the values of Western culture to the rest of the planet. A critical review of the fundamental political categories behind such perspectives was made recently by Étienne Balibar in a short work investigating the institution of “citizenship”. Rather than an aprioristically constituted universal value, it is rethought as a moment of collective autonomy, a power and constitutive process historically grasped in dynamic, dialectical yet antinomian relation to democracy – to the incessant need for the “transformation of the political” (Balibar 2015).

As we said, from our perspective, citizenship involves an ongoing constituent process that is always accomplished through the presence of otherness, involving the experience of risk, vulnerability, uncertainty and fragility: as the pandemic has taught us to some extent, these factors always threaten our lives, our communal living and the culture of our inhabiting.

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