

## **Alter-globalisation Social Imaginaries: a theoretical review**

Imaginarios sociales alternativos de la globalización:

una revisión teórica

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### **Abstract**

Social imaginaries refer not to something unreal or fictitious existing only in the mind of an individual, but to the shared frameworks within which people organise their collective social world. In the ubiquitous presence of the internet and the extended use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), market-oriented globalisation imaginaries have emerged, but also alter-imaginaries of globalisation sustained by advocacy organisations interconnected and spreading their concerns in the global sphere. This paper develops an exegetical analysis to establish the meaning and scope of social imaginaries and address along time the different approaches to this notion. The results show that despite their intangibility, social imaginaries are very 'real', thus feigning permanence, social imaginaries are dynamic and in constant change.

**Key Words:** Social Imaginaries; Alter-globalisation; Global Fairness.

### **Resumen**

Los imaginarios sociales se refieren no a algo irreal o ficticio que existe solo en la mente de un individuo, sino a los marcos compartidos dentro de los cuales las personas organizan su mundo social colectivo. En la presencia ubicua de internet y el uso extendido de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC), surgen los imaginarios de la globalización orientados al mercado, pero también imaginarios alternativos de la globalización respaldados por organizaciones de defensa y activismo social interconectadas y difundiendo sus preocupaciones en la esfera global. Este documento desarrolla un análisis exegético para establecer el significado y el alcance de los imaginarios sociales y abordar a lo largo del tiempo los diferentes enfoques del tema. Los resultados muestran que, a pesar de su intangibilidad, los imaginarios sociales son muy 'reales', por lo tanto, pese a aparentar permanencia, los imaginarios sociales son dinámicos y están en constante cambio.

**Palabras clave:** imaginarios sociales; globalización alternativa; justicia global.

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*There is no need to stress that the social imaginary, as we understand it,  
is more real than the 'real'*  
Cornelius Castoriadis (1987:140)

## Introduction

Nowadays in the jargon not only of academics, but from urban planners to politicians it is very fashionable to refer to the 'social imaginaries' of our time. But, what are social imaginaries? This study aims to unfold the ways this concept has developed, in an exegetical attempt to conceptualise social imaginaries.

The term 'social imaginary' dates to 1964 when it was first coined in the work of the Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. The paper revisits the work of Castoriadis (1987), Bronislaw Baczko (1984), the 'theory of the social imaginary' proposed by Juan Luis Pintos (2001) and the approach of the 'new social imaginaries' (Anderson, 1983; Arthurs, 2003; Taylor, 2004).

As a step forward to the uncontested definition of the social imaginary provided by Taylor (2004), the study analyses other approaches suggesting the emergence of global imaginaries (Garcia Canclini, 2014; Patomäki & Steger, 2010; Steger, Goodman, & Wilson, 2013). At the core of this research project are global imaginaries that advocate for an alternative model of society to the hegemonic market-driven imaginaries (Steger et al., 2013).

Political scientist Manfred Steger refers to the alter-imaginaries of globalisation as those of 'global justice', this paper prefers to use the term *global fairness*. Fairness is a more accurate sense of the notion of justice to describe the current endeavours of society for advocacy. Fairness is less structural (laws and rules, punishment and rewards) and more human, open to a global understanding of equality, solidarity, diversity, egalitarian participation and environmental responsibility.

## Approaches to the study of social imaginaries

The concept of social imaginaries steers research over time. Social imaginaries are understood as symbolic matrixes or frameworks within which people organise their collective world, where imagination, not simply reason, plays a part in the construction of social practices with a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

The concept of the social imaginary goes beyond the aesthetic notion that associates imagination and creativity to the fine arts: poetry, music, painting and sculpture. By intentionally placing together two vague and yet very meaningful notions, the Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis<sup>1</sup> (1987) builds a philosophical understanding of the social imaginary. This

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<sup>1</sup> Castoriadis coined the term 'social imaginary' first in his essays published in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* under the pseudonyms Paul Cardan and Pierre Chaulieu. In 1975, these essays were compiled in the book *L'institution imaginaire de la société* that was first translated to English in 1987 as *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Throughout this chapter, I refer to the reprint of this book from 2005.

has been considered as a theoretical framework for analysis and inquiry from a variety of perspectives from the social sciences and humanities (see e.g. Agudelo, 2011; Mountian, 2009; Salazar, 2012; Strauss, 2006).

Castoriadis argues that the way in which societies live cannot be analysed only from what can be sensorial perceived, nor from something thought (rational): 'we cannot understand a society outside of a unifying factor that provides a signified content and weaves it with the symbolic structures' (Castoriadis, 1987:160). This unifying factor is what he refers to as a 'social imaginary'. The imaginary of a society in a certain period is contained in 'its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence' (Castoriadis, 1987:145).

Social imaginaries mould societies, and give a specific orientation to them, over a determined period. For instance, women were prevented from attending higher education programmes until well into the 20th century, ascribed to a social imaginary that a good education would make women unfit for marriage and motherhood. This social imaginary was fuelled by Harvard professor Dr. Edward Clarke's study from 1873 which suggested that studying too much affected the health of young women, causing serious damage to the nervous system and even infertility (Lowe, 2003).

For women to have access to higher education, this social imaginary had to change. The type of change takes place in what Castoriadis (1987:147) terms as 'the social doing', this is when society provides the means to make evident a need to reconceptualise imaginary significations and re-establish harmonious life. Therefore, social imaginaries are dynamic and adapt to different circumstances, contexts, periods and societies.

In the psychoanalysis school of Jacques Lacan, the notion of the social imaginary takes a different turn from that of Castoriadis' understanding. Castoriadis (1987:1-6) argues that the imaginary is far from being just *an image of* something else, a mere representation of something different. However, the common and conventional grasp of the 'imaginary' is rooted in the 'other' understanding derived from psychoanalysis, which considers the imaginary as qualifying a false, inexistent and fictitious reality (Cabrera, 2004). As John Rundell (2013:3-4) states:

[The imagination] is viewed as equivalent to fiction, phantasy, madness, irrationality, and thus an essential untruth in relation to reason and/or reality. The imagination is pushed into the underworld and made equivalent to, if not demons of the soul, then to shadows which disappear once the cold light of understanding is thrown onto them.

The philosophical and scholastic grasp of the 'social imaginary' suggested by Castoriadis provides the term with a broad and enhanced meaning. Dilip Gaonkar (2002:1) suggests that Castoriadis offers the 'fullest contemporary elaboration' of the social imaginary while Claudia Strauss (2006:324) argues that Castoriadis' notion of the social imaginary embeds a 'greater role to the power of creative ideas'.

By this means, Rundell considers that Castoriadis' notion of the social imaginary becomes a solid elaboration through a 'war on three fronts': 1) against Marxism's functional analysis of society, 2) against structuralism, especially to the Saussurean school of linguistics, and that 3) these two battles are subsumed into a critique on the way reason has been viewed in the 20th century.

An example of the social imaginary provided by Castoriadis is the notion of the nation, sustained in a threefold imaginary reference to a 'common history' (Castoriadis, 1987:148); it is imaginary since: a) it is 'sheer past', b) it is not really 'common' since members of the society have not lived nor shared those past experiences, and c) what is known as, and is the basis for, collective identification is largely mythical.

The imaginary is conceived of as 'real', but not perceived by the senses, and therefore nor is it a 'rational' component of human common understanding, as the example of 'common history' shows.

The social, in the 'social imaginary', is expressed as 'society', understood as 'a network of relationships among autonomous adults' (Castoriadis, 1987:94). Nevertheless, in this relationship, society is in permanent conflict. As Castoriadis (1987:95) posits:

[Society] requires that people, as producers or as citizens, remain passive and restrict themselves to performing the task it has imposed on them. When it notices that this passivity is like a cancer within it, it encourages initiative and participation, only to discover that it cannot bear them, for they question the very essence of the existing order.

As put forward by Castoriadis, the social imaginary, while conceptual and therefore abstract, is a notion that needs to rely on the symbolic to express itself and to actually 'exist', 'to pass from the virtual to anything more than this' (Castoriadis, 1987: 127). Therefore, Castoriadis suggests that the social imaginary encompasses two aspects: 1) the 'actual imaginary', or what he calls 'the imagined', which ultimately remains in the subjectivity, and 2) the 'radical imaginary', which is more concrete; it is its way of representation:

[Social imaginary significations] can exist only through their 'incarnation', their 'inscription', their presentation and figuration in and through a network of individuals and objects, which they 'inform'—these are at once concrete entities and instances or copies of types, of eide—individuals and objects which exist in general and are as they are only through these significations. This relation sui generis to social individuals and things makes of them social imaginary significations and forbids our confusing them with significations in general, even less our treating them as fictions, pure and simple. (Castoriadis, 1987: 355-356)

Castoriadis points at the role these imaginary significations play in defining the 'being of the group and of the collectivity'. This is understood as the group's 'identity', which is made up by the world, the relation of the society to it, and to the objects it contains.

To summarize, for Castoriadis the social imaginary is considered 'immanent' to a society, and needs to be understood as a dynamic construction that is in constant flux in the collective to which it refers. Castoriadis always speaks in singular of the social imaginary as a notion that

contains a number of ideas and significations that can be embodied or materialised in a network of objects or individuals.

Another prominent scholar theorising on the social imaginary in the 1980s is the French-Polish philosopher Bronislaw Baczko (1984). Baczko also points to the relation between the social imaginaries and the collective identity. However, unlike Castoriadis, Baczko gives a normative turn to the social imaginary: 'one of the functions of the social imaginary is that of organising and mastering the collective time on a symbolic level' (Baczko, 1984:30, my translation).

Baczko suggests that the social imaginary has a definite intervention in the collective memory, where the reminiscence of the actual events is far less important than the imaginary and symbolic representations that a society has constructed around them. As an example, he refers to the events in Paris of May 1968, and argues that, in both testimonies and remembrances of the events, there is an underlying perception of the irruption of imagination and utopia in the public sphere. He argues it is not particularly important if the events were not so imaginative and utopian, since the collective memory amplifies the symbolism in which 'imagination' was enclosed.

In 1995, the Spanish sociologist Juan Luis Pintos proposes a *Theory of the Social Imaginaries and its Methodology* that operationalises social imaginaries as analytical tools to perceive, explain and intervene in social life. Pintos' theory, until recently, has not been available in the Anglophone sphere (see e.g. Randazzo, Coca, & Valero, 2011) compared to the burgeoning literature available in Spanish and Portuguese.<sup>2</sup>

As a constructivist approach, Pintos' theory is developed from the perspective of Niklas Luhmann's *Social Systems Theory* (Aliaga & Pintos, 2012). Luhmann (1982:131) suggests that 'social systems are self-referential systems based on meaningful communication'. Meaningful communication both constitutes and interconnects the events or actions that build up social systems, in this sense social systems are referred to as 'autopoietic' (capable of reproducing and maintaining itself), a terminology lent from the study of biological systems. Social systems 'exist only by reproducing the events which serve as components of the system' (Luhmann (1982:131).

Pintos' theory refers to the subjective frameworks that provide a sequence and priority to perceptions (i.e. spatial, temporal, historical and cultural) which can be operationalised in, for example, tactics, strategies, programmes and policies at the organisational level, and that are also manifest through their symbolic dimension in legends, myths, and culturally shared stories.

Through a 'code of relevance/opacity' the theory analyses what is inside and outside socially constructed schemes. To explain this code, Pintos (2001, 2004, 2005) uses the example of the

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<sup>2</sup> About this issue, Pintos argues that 'the traditional academic isolation of Hispanic scholars, resources scarcity and economic limitations faced in the last years have determined our intense dedication to the Spanish-speaking realm, leaving aside this flank [the English-speaking sphere] so important in the academic and cultural world' (personal comm., 28.06.14).

lens of a camera in a soccer match: something 'relevant' is visible to the lens of the camera whereas something else remains out of sight, acquiring the condition of 'opacity'. The position of different cameras at a game determines a diverse range of viewpoints and establishes a multiplicity of relevancies as well as many opacities.

In social life, this refers to those issues that, despite being present, current and almost ordinary, society is actually blind to; they are not a matter of concern, of neither agreement nor disagreement, they are simply opaque and impenetrable.

By applying the code of relevance/opacity it is suggested that it is not possible to refer to one single reality, therefore contemporary social systems are considered 'policontextural':

In a policontextural society, differentiation does not suggest a framework within which some partial activity might be thought of as essential, as all activities are recognised as essential. ... Unlike the 'context' (and the admitted adjective 'contextual'), which has as its primary reference the environment, contexture refers to the complexity of a system ...

As to maintain this multiplicity of possibilities, meaning must always be linked to the plurality; in that sense, a binary reduction of possibilities can never take place («or this or the other»), at least a triad must be considered («this, the other or another»). (Pintos, 2005:43; translation mine)

The quotation above must not be taken literally; when Pintos speaks of policontextural systems, a triad will never be enough, nor can the number of possible perspectives be counted as a limited number. The landscape should then remain open to a multiplicity or plurality of valid perspectives.

As put forward by Francesca Randazzo et al. (2011:108) '[the theory of the social imaginary and its methodology] is far from being a recipe to be followed and methods are not always explicit'. A number of empirical studies building on Pintos' theory of the social imaginary combine this systemic perspective with linguistic and semiotics to analyse discourse. For example, Pintos and Marticorena (2012) develop a 'socio-cybernetic discourse analysis methodology' in their study of the social imaginaries involved in health attention. The methodology applies a linguistic analysis by defining 'lexemes' and 'sememes' as units of meaning based on Algirdas Greimas' structural semantics and analysing them through the use of the relevance/opacity code proposed by the methodology of the social imaginary. The 'cybernetic', rather than being a conceptual notion, refers to the use of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) and visualisation through tables, charts, word clouds and word chains.

Julio Cabrera et al. (2009), in their study 'Poor Rich Latin America. Rebuilding the 'Latin America' imaginary', intertwine Pintos' theory of the social imaginary with a semiotics discourse analysis framework grounded on elements of Roland Barthes' semiology. The core concept in this study is to understand different existing imaginaries of Latin America in Spain, analysing both the official perspectives expressed in the media and that of the immigrants living in the country.

The study analyses how, in both cases, there is an expressed duality between rich and poor. While the Latin Americans stress the richness of the land and its productivity, they end up with an imaginary of fatality, dispossession and condemnation by external forces determining the imaginary of the 'poor'. In parallel, the government stresses the fact that the region is open to foreign investment and is a good market to invest in, forging the imaginary of the 'rich', but in order to avoid past recipes of colonialism it builds on the imaginary of 'cooperation', focusing on development, cultural and social programmes for 'the poor'.

Castoriadis, Baczkó and Pintos play an important role putting forward the notion of the social imaginary at a historical moment of society when global interconnections were not yet in the spotlight, as the ideas presented in the next section.

### **New modern/national social imaginaries**

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of the social imaginary acquires novelty in the work of a group of scholars researching 'how globalization of culture and communication is transforming contemporary societies' (Gaonkar, 2002:2). The outcomes of their research are published in a special issue of the journal *Public Culture*, concerned with the emergence of what is termed the 'new social imaginaries'.

Globalisation is a concept invoked by scholars from different academic disciplines 'to describe a variety of changing economic, political, and cultural processes that are alleged to have accelerated since the 1970s' (Steger, 2009b:23).

In the history of economics, the end of the 1960s marks the collapse of the Bretton Wood system of fixed gold convertibility exchange rates and regulated international trade. The 1970s upholds the explosion of neoliberal economic ideas and policies, stressing principles of the free-market, the reduction of the welfare state, the downsizing of government and the deregulation of the economy. It is in this landscape that new social imaginaries arise.

Within the logic of globalisation, scholars examine the construction of 'new social imaginaries' that could be described in parallel to the study of the 'new social movements', processes of collective action that started at the end of the 1960s.

Gaonkar (2002) is among the group of scholars that theorise upon the new social imaginaries. He argues that, while Castoriadis builds his work of the social imaginary by 'reacting against the deterministic strands within Marxism', the 'new social imaginary', while familiar with the work of Castoriadis, responds to a 'radically different intellectual and political milieu signalled by the cataclysmic events of 1989 and their aftermath' (Gaonkar (2002:1).

Another scholar of this group is the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. His work 'Modern Social Imaginaries' (2002, 2004) gives rise to a concerted definition of the social imaginary:

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (Taylor, 2002:106; 2004:23)

Taylor suggests that modernity is 'inseparable from a certain kind of social imaginary' and that this social imaginary, rather than a set of ideas, 'is what enables through making sense of, the practices of a society' (Taylor, 2004:2). Taylor's understanding of the social imaginary is heavily inspired by the work of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983).

Anderson (1983:6) defines the nation as 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'. He describes the nation as imagined in all of its dimensions. Firstly, it is imagined since 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them'; then it is 'imagined as limited' since even the biggest nation will define boundaries 'beyond which lie other nations; it is 'imagined sovereign' since the 'emblem of national freedom is the sovereign state', which is imbued in the social imaginary of modernity, and finally, it is 'imagined as a community' because, regardless of inequalities, the 'nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1983:6-7).

According to Anderson, the national imaginary ('imagining the nation'<sup>3</sup>) in the 18th century was the result of superseding three 'fundamental cultural conceptions': 1) the idea of a unique script-language that 'privileged access to ontological truth', 2) the believed divine status of monarchs and, 3) the conception of cosmology and history as indistinguishable. The rise of nationalism required a 'secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning' and nation-states 'always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future' (Anderson, 1983:9-10).

In the work of Taylor (2004:49), modernity is considered as the 'great disembedding'. Individuals from earlier societies were unable to imagine themselves outside of their particular context; they were always, and all times, 'embedded in society'. Modern societies introduce a break from this as individuals are first able to conceive themselves as 'free individuals', with the development of 'print-as-commodity' (Anderson, 1983:37) providing the means to spread this freedom.

As suggested by Taylor, social imaginaries are not expressed in theoretical terms, rather they are carried in images, stories and legends, and in the ways ordinary people display their social surroundings; it is possessed by a majority, not restricted to scholarship or to a single sphere of society. Social imaginaries derive 'from the usual, the quotidian, from everyday attitudes, behaviours, and opinion making .... [They flow] from events and ideas, the realities that citizens live with most intimately and immediately' (Arthurs, 2003:580).

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout Anderson's *Imagined Communities* the term 'national imaginary' is never present. It is first from Taylor's work *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2002, 2004) that the understanding of the 'national imaginary' is given to Anderson.

Taylor argues that it is impossible to talk about a unique social imaginary, since multiple modernities are envisioned, and thereafter multiple imaginaries. The three broad notions that characterise what Taylor names as 'Western modern social imaginaries' are: 1) the market economy, 2) the public sphere and 3) the self-governing people or civil society.

Arjun Appadurai (2000), another scholar from Taylor's group, suggests that, while globalisation has increased social exclusion, 'a series of social forms has emerged to contest, interrogate and reverse these developments' (Appadurai, 2000:3). Appadurai visualises an emerging worldwide order, a social imaginary resisting global market economy, anchored in horizontal relations 'on behalf of the poor', which he terms 'grass-root globalisation' or 'globalisation from below', headed by nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and concerned about matters of equity, access, justice and redistribution.

### **Emergence of the global imaginary**

Almost a decade after the studies of the 'new social imaginaries', political scientist Manfred Steger and his group suggest the emergence of the 'global imaginary' (Patomäki & Steger, 2010; Steger, 2009a, 2009c, 2009d). The global imaginary could be considered a step forward to Anderson's (1983:3) dictum: 'The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism', so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time'. The concept of 'nation-less', rather than Anderson's 'nation-ness', seems to put forward the current global imaginary.

The work of Steger and his group focuses on the subjective dimension of globalisation considering that 'while its material dimension is certainly important, it would be a serious mistake to neglect globalization's subjective aspects related to the creation of new cosmopolitan and hybrid identities linked to the thickening of a global imaginary' (Steger, 2013a:214). The advent of the 21st century determined the decline of the national imaginary and the dawning of the global imaginary, leading to common understandings and practices that recognise a global scope in all human activities (Steger, 2009a).

In order to understand the emergence of the global imaginary, Steger and his group utilise morphological discourse analysis (MDA), a methodological approach that sees language as critical to analysing the way that ideologies distort, legitimate, integrate and 'decontest' values and claims (Steger et al., 2013). This approach builds on Michael Freeden's (2013) 'morphological analysis of ideology', considered among the school of post structuralism.

According to Aletta Norval (2013) contemporary poststructuralists have revitalised the study of ideologies, 'they distance themselves from the end of ideology thesis, popularized in the 1960s by Lipset and Bell, and argue that our world is deeply and inescapably ideological in character' (Norval, 2013:156). Freeden's model suggests that 'because morphology relates to

patterns and structure, it invokes a consideration of the rigidity or flexibility of such structures as loci of linguistic and semantic power' (Freeden, 2013:124).

Freeden studies words as 'essentially contested concepts', where disputes over their meanings 'will in some cases be irresolvable rather than contingent' (Freeden, 2013:119). Words turn into contested concepts by means of polysemy, attribution of value or appraisal. This is the case for concepts such as liberty or democracy. When putting these words together with other logically possible words, there is a reduced number of acceptable combinations, as Freeden exemplifies: 'equality cannot simultaneously contain the conceptions of identity and of similarity nor – in the real world – the conceptions of equal desert and equal outcomes' (Freeden, 2013:119).

As sustained by Steger et al. (2013:11) the success of 'decontested' ideas is that they are gradually held as truth by large segments of the population, in that way those are no longer taken as assumptions but as 'the way things are'. Freeden explains the notion of 'decontestation' as follows:

An ideology attempts to end the inevitable contention over concepts by decontesting them, by removing their meanings from contest. 'This is what justice means', announces one ideology, and 'that is what democracy entails'. By trying to convince us that they are right and that they speak the truth, ideologies become devices for coping with the indeterminacy of meaning ... That is their semantic roll [But] [i]deologies also need to decontest the concepts they use because they are instruments for fashioning collective decisions. That is their political role. (Freeden 2003, cited in Steger et al., 2013:11)

Freeden argues that ideologies possess an elaborate structure composed of clusters of concepts that could be separated into three categories: core, adjacent and peripheral. Core concepts are the ones that signal the presence and long-term durability of an ideology and are 'indispensable to holding the ideology together' (Freeden, 2013:125).

For example, the notion of 'liberty' is a core concept of liberalism, it is both ubiquitous and indispensable and therefore it is present in all manifestations of liberalism. Adjacent concepts are also key concepts but with different proportional weight in each manifestation of the ideology. Close to the concept of liberty is the concept of autonomy, which could be present, or not in the discourse of liberalism. In other instances, autonomy could even be rejected, or contested due to its paradoxical condition, as explained by Castoriadis (1987:107): 'this 'action of one freedom on another freedom' remains a contradiction in terms, and a perpetual impossibility'. Moreover, the concept of liberty in combination with other adjacent concepts (autonomy, democracy, private property) could pull liberal ideology in different directions. The third category refers to peripheral concepts, which change at a faster pace, both diachronic and cultural, as suggested by Freeden. This is the case of the concept of colonialism or empire, concepts that are unable to reattach to the core and adjacent concepts after a period.

When analysing ideologies, concepts are in constant flux between the three categories described above (core, adjacent and peripheral). Through processes of decontestation, conceptual inconsistencies or contradictions are provisionally eliminated. As suggested by

Freeden, 'decontestation is bolstered both by rational and irrational preferences, each assisted by emotions –pride, loyalty, anger, or fear– and strong passions of commitment that lock them further into place' (Freeden, 2013:121).

A process of decontestation can be observed in the inclusion of prefixes such as 'neo-', or 'post-' to modernity's ideological '-isms': for example, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, postsocialism, postcommunism, neofascism and neoNazism. These prefixes suppose both an acknowledgement of these concepts as contested while providing them with renewed potentials (Steger, 2009d).

Steger and Paul James (2013) suggest the subjective dimension of social life takes place across three interrelated layers: ideologies, imaginaries and ontologies. Each of these progressive layers contain ideas, meanings, sensibilities and subjectivities that could be separated only as an analytical exercise, providing 'a useful way of tracking the changing, contradictory and overlapping nature of subjectivities' (Steger & James, 2013:23).

In this sense, the authors propose that, when ideologies ('normatively imbued ideas and concepts') become embedded in the dominant commonsense of a period or a place, they turn into social imaginaries. The third step is when these ideas define the 'ways-of-being-in-the world' as the current ontologies of 'linear time, territorial space and individualized embodiment' (Steger & James, 2013:23).

In Steger's work, the social imaginary is defined as 'patterned convocations of the lived social whole':

The notion of 'convocation' is important since it is the calling together—the gathering (not the self-consciously defending or active decontesting activity associated with ideologies) of an assemblage of meanings, ideas, sensibilities—that are taken to be self-evident. The concept of 'the social whole' points to the way in which certain apparently simple terms such as 'our society,' 'we,' and 'the market' carry taken-for-granted and interconnected meanings. (Steger & James, 2013:31)

Steger considers the notion of the 'social whole' to go beyond the dominant sense of community that prevailed in Taylor's definition of the social imaginary. The *social whole* supposes a higher level of understanding where 'the perception of intensifying social interconnections have come to define the nature of our times' (Steger & James, 2013:29). While the term 'international relations' is embedded into a national imaginary that suggests understandings between communities within the borderlines of a nation-state, this term becomes contested when describing relations that are no longer circumscribed to national boundaries. Here the 'global imaginary' emerges, destabilising the former national imaginary.

### *Operationalising the global imaginary*

Globalisation is being recognised as a historical stage in which 'the convergence of economic, financial, communication and migratory processes accentuates the interdependence between vast sectors of many societies and generates new flows and structures of supranational

interconnection' (Garcia Canclini, 2014:40). The global imaginary is suggested frequently to be strengthened, among other things, by technological change and scientific innovation (Steger, 2009d). Globalisation has involved subjective processes, particularly the 'thickening of public awareness of the world as an interconnected whole' (Steger, 2009a:9), which has only been possible through expanding people's 'mental-geographical and chronological horizons' (Steger, 2009d:182).

Globalisation has also created new ways to delimit the world. References to a division between North and South are often provided when talking about the global (e.g. Chakravarty, 2014; Ebrahim, 2003; Thompson & Tapscott, 2010). Rafael Reuveny and William Thompson (2007) suggest the concept of the North-South divide came into the realm of international relations following the end of the Cold War. Before, the global axis used was 'West-East', situating the wealthier nations in the West and the Soviet Union and China in the East. The need to categorise every nation saw the West become 'the First World', the East 'the Second World' and less competitive and developed nations became 'the Third World'. But, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a new categorisation was needed. The First World became 'the North' and the Third World 'the South', and progressively, as economies changed, countries from the Second World joined one or the other.

Julian Eckl and Ralph Weber (2007:4) argue that the binary opposition 'North-South' is lopsided, in the same way the binary opposition 'West-East' 'favoured over the other throughout most of the 'Western' narrative':

The notion 'North-South' seems to be indicative of an above/below situation: hence we appear to move up when going north and to move down when heading south. This indication strengthens the case against using a binary to label the problematic at hand, for the 'North' might thus easily be taken as the dominant side of a lopsided binary, standing for the more real, the better, and the higher. The 'South', by contrast, would assume the meanings associated with the recessive side. (Eckl & Weber, 2007:5)

Some scholars refer to a country's membership of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to define the boundaries of North and South (e.g. Karlsson, Srebotnjak, & Gonzales, 2007; Rohrschneider & Dalton, 2002). The OECD was created in 1960 by 18 European countries plus the United States and Canada. It now consists of 34 countries including those with emerging economies such as Mexico, Chile and Turkey, making the use of OECD membership for a clear-cut distinction of the boundaries of North and South becomes difficult (OECD, 2015). However, as suggested by Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell (2012), the term 'Global South' functions more as a metaphor with reference to a history of 'colonialism and neo-imperialism'.

Nestor Garcia Canclini (2014) is another scholar who embraces the notion of the social imaginary in relation to globalisation processes. In his work *Imagined Globalization* he analyses the complex, paradoxical and conflicting imaginaries that define social interaction and have contributed to the architecture of globalisation. He stresses that imaginaries are sustained in

metaphors and narratives, which give order to dispersed meanings, and are highlighted in a globalised world.

The author plays with the ambiguity of the term 'imaginary' in his analysis. He suggests that global imaginaries are translated in processes of cooperation and exchange of material and cultural goods that move across countries, and through messages that are coproduced and circulated at a transnational level. At the same time, he considers that globalisation is imagined because 'integration embraces some countries more than others or because it benefits elite sectors in those countries but remains a fantasy for the majority' (Garcia Canclini, 2014:15).

As suggested by Garcia Canclini, globalisation has destabilised all that was previously known, therefore it is from the perspective of culture that it is possible to act differently 'from those who see globalization as an exclusively economic exchange' (Garcia Canclini, 2014:xxxvii). He stresses the fact that the notion of globalisation is so pervasive that 'even the poor or marginalized cannot disregard the global':

When Latin American migrants arrive in northern Mexico or the southern United States they discover that the factory that hires them is Korean or Japanese. Moreover many of those who left their country arrived at that extreme decision because 'globalization' shut down jobs in Peru, Colombia, and Central America, or because its effects—combined with local dramas—made the society in which they always lived too insecure. (Garcia Canclini, 2014:xxxix)

Steger (2003) argues that the imaginaries of globalisation define different ideological realms. The hegemonic globalism ideology is that of 'market globalism', which emerged in the 1990s, superseding the ideas of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism refers to the resurgence, starting in the 1980s, of the ideas of freedom and liberation, namely 'liberalism' as postulated by the British philosopher John Locke in the 17th century. In his work Locke promoted the ideas of capitalism against feudalism and monarchy (Kaufman, 2014). Neoliberalism surged through a policy of privatisation, fiscal austerity and reductions in government spending to enhance the role of the private sector in a capitalist economy. As sustained by Kaufman:

This led to a worldwide challenge to any forms of government intervention in national economies, and a push for the privatization of public ownership of everything from utilities and pension systems to schools, as well as for a deregulation of everything from food production to rules on how capital flows between countries. (Kaufman, 2014:15)

Steger and Ravi K. Roy (2010) suggest that a characteristic of neoliberalism is the way it succeeded in translating its ideas and claims into concrete policies and programmes, which led market globalism to turn into the hegemonic ideology of globalisation.

However, as the next section shows, new voices are challenging the fatalistic idea that views globalisation from a dictum of planetary market and capitalism as the only possible model for human interaction. As Kaufman (2014:103) observes: 'getting outside of the bubble of capitalist ways of imagining social relations helps us to challenge the idea that we must accept things as they are because there is no alternative'.

### *Alter-imaginaries of globalisation*

Steger and his group suggest the emergence of global imaginaries involves, not only the ideology of market globalism, but the existence of three other variants of globalism ideologies: imperial globalism, religious globalism and justice globalism (Steger, 2009b, 2009d, 2013b).

The ideological claims of imperial globalism were broadly enounced following the attacks of 11 September 2001 when 'many market globalists believed that the best way of maintaining the viability of their project was to toughen up ... some of their ideological claims to fit better the neoconservative vision of a benign US empire backed by overwhelming military power. As a result, market globalism morphed into imperial globalism' (Steger, 2005:31).

Religious globalism entered the stage after the events of September 11 as well. It describes particularly 'jihadist Islamism', the contemporary armed 'jihad', which deals with the religious duty of Muslims to maintain their religion. The attacks against the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, the terrorist attack in Copenhagen in February 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016 can be framed in this ideational system.

The third alter-globalisation ideology suggested by Steger and his group is that of 'justice globalism'. It deals with the construction of the global imaginary of justice, which embraces globalisation as outside from the market-oriented imaginary and the neoliberal economic system. As suggested by Steger and Erin Wilson (2012:441), 'progressive thinkers and activists have gradually developed and articulated a form of political ideology that is committed to social justice not just at the national level but increasingly at the global level as well'.

In relation to justice globalism, Steger and his group studied 45 organisations considered as part of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) by applying Steger's variant of Freedden's MDA to analyse their discourse. The methodological process starts by disaggregating ideational systems present in the discourse into core, adjacent and peripheral concepts.

The second step evaluates the 'ability to arrange concepts of roughly equal significance into meaningful 'decontestation chains' or 'central ideological claims'' (Steger, 2013:12). In other words, this assesses the way concepts are put together and enounced in effective claims that produce particular meanings. Finally, the analysis identifies 'context-bound responsiveness' in relation to the discourse, these are the practical alternatives undertaken in a concrete time and place to reorient public issues in order to strive for agency. Figure 1 illustrates this methodological process.

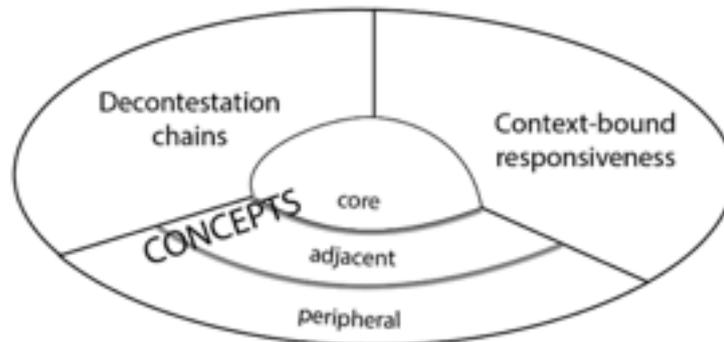


Figure 1. MDA process

Applying this methodology, the authors identify seven core concepts that portray justice globalism: 1) paradigmatic change, 2) participatory democracy, 3) equality of access to resources and opportunities, 4) social justice, 5) universal rights, 6) global solidarity and 7) sustainability (Steger et al., 2013; Steger & Wilson, 2012).

One characteristic of political belief systems is that of absorbing, discarding and rearranging 'large chunks of the grand ideologies' and, at the same time, incorporating new ideas (Steger, 2009a). This can be observed in the introduction of 'participatory' as an attribute of democracy, which differs from the conventionally accepted 'representative' that has been the dominant form of democracy in practice. The same happens with the attribute of 'social' ascribed to justice, which is different to the established 'procedural' justice. In addition, new contemporary concepts of 'paradigmatic change' and 'sustainability' enter into play. This is just to mention the core concepts, since the study identifies a wide range of adjacent and peripheral concepts and the 'sophisticated formations of meanings' that evolve around these seven core concepts (Steger et al., 2013:44).

Five core ideological claims ('decontestation chains') are identified: 1) Neoliberalism produces global crises, 2) Market-driven globalisation has increased worldwide disparities in wealth and wellbeing, 3) Democratic participation is essential for solving global problems, 4) Another world is possible and urgently needed, and 5) People power, not corporate power!

The study identifies responses of justice globalism to three substantive contexts ('context-bound responsiveness'): 1) the global finance crisis, 2) the global food crisis and 3) the global climate crisis. In regard to these responses, the study suggests that 'most justice globalists reject market-based solutions that exercise power through markets and commodities, whether in the form of derivatives, food futures, or carbon credits' (Steger et al., 2013:152).

Justice globalism, considered an alter-globalisation ideology (and not anti-globalisation as has been claimed by a number of scholars), is at the core of the GJM (Della Porta, 2009; Funke, 2012; Gee, 2011; Langman, 2005; Reitan, 2012; Routledge, Nativel, & Cumbers, 2006).

### The social imaginaries of global fairness

Castoriadis (1987) describes as 'radical imaginary' the concrete forms in which social imaginaries are voiced; consequently, translating this concept to digital interaction –the multi-way communication process mediated by the internet and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)– the radical imaginaries of global fairness could be emphasised and manifested in postings of social media. However, Natalie Fenton (2012) suggests that the primary function of social media is expressivity:

Social media are not first and foremost about social good or political engagement; their primary function is expressive and, as such, they are best understood in terms of their potential for articulating the (often contradictory) dynamics of political environments rather than recasting or regenerating the structures that uphold them. (Fenton, 2012:143)

Through this quote, digital interaction is at odds with the transformation of social imaginaries; consequently, it could not play any role in the promotion of social change, other than merely making visible current political environments. The expressive function is important in digital interaction, but digital interaction for advocacy goes further.

To analyse digital interaction regarding a global understanding of fairness, social media of five European NGOs working in partnership with Ecuador were studied through an iterative process of qualitative analysis, bringing data into few major categories, resulting in an explanatory model for the social imaginaries shared (Yepez-Reyes, 2018).

Table 1 shows both the core ideological concepts proposed by Steger and his group in their analysis of justice globalism and the major categories that emerge from the discourses of participants in digital interaction for advocacy within Yepez-Reyes study. In essence, there are no striking differences between the core concepts shared by advocacy organizations of justice globalism and those of participants in digital interaction.

<b>Justice globalism: core ideological concepts (Steger et al., 2013:18)</b>	<b>Major categories in digital interaction for advocacy</b>
Transformative change	Stressing equality
Participatory democracy	Conserving nature
Equality of access to resources and opportunities	Eco-farming
Social justice	Globalising concerns
Universal rights	Trading and economic issues
Global solidarity	Assessing policy
Sustainability	

Table 1. Core concepts in advocacy discourses

There are many similarities between Steger's core concepts and the major categories of this study. Discourses that stress equality, assess policy and highlight nature conservation and eco-farming might refer to the concept of 'transformative change' as their aim is to change and transform unfair situations and practices. However, manifest references to universal rights, which is a core category in Steger's study of SMOs, are not included in the analysed data. Participants in digital interaction do not explicitly refer to universal rights although issues involving economic, gender and cultural equality, and references to cases of perceived inequality, could

point to a contained social imaginary of universal rights, expressed in terms of fairness at different levels. Many comments assess the current political system, and many others focus on the economic system. Both are entwined when dealing with issues surrounding the provision of basic services such as drinking water, health, child and elderly care.

Steger's category of participatory democracy is not spelled out in the discourses. Katja Freistein (2014:6) suggests that 'there is no easy heuristic that accounts for the causal relationship between equality/inequality and democracy, much less even on a global scale'. This also applies to the data in this study where it can be suggested that the discourses about equality underlay participation and democracy, even though those are not explicitly spelled.

Equality is highlighted, together with fairness, in discourses on fair wages, the fair use of nature, ecological farming for a fair treatment of the land in order to achieve sustainability, fair trade, and honesty as opposed to corruption; a major concern that emerges in the data for global fairness. Steger's concept of 'transformative change' could be viewed in the comments dealing with extreme economic inequality and the need to change it.

Trading and economic issues is considered a major category in the discourses. This includes issues of fair trade where fair wages to producers, sustainability, nature conservation and health matters come together. This category also deals with international trading agreements and treaties that are global in their scope. Thus, social imaginaries of the market and its prevailing presence in all activities are firmly part of the social imaginaries. But imaginaries of the market as an overruling power, or what Freire (2004) describes as 'democracy founded in the ethics of the market', are not present in the discourses analysed.

Ecological farming and nature conservation are core categories in the data. Describing as 'conventional' extensive industrial farming practices that differ greatly from ecological farming practices is an example of how social imaginaries evolve. The hegemonic production system of industrial farming has acquired the attribute of conventionality and has thus become the ruling agricultural system in the current social imaginaries. As a result, proposals to dismantle this way of farming and move into ecological farming practices also require a dynamic change in the social imaginaries. In relation to Steger's concept of 'sustainability', the data, while related to sustainability, emphasises the environment and highlights the ecological dimension of production and the dynamics of ecosystems. It can be suggested that even though both ideas deal with the same notion, emphasis in the data is given to nature instead of durability.

Dystopian imaginaries of the internet that fear the dehumanising effects of technology are dismissed by the results of this study, showing that it is not only possible but achievable for people worldwide to have a say in the different social concerns raised in social media. In this way, the radical imaginary referred by Castoriadis, is uttered in our time also in social media where social imaginaries can also be constructed and deconstructed.

## Conclusion

Social imaginaries, despite their intangibility, are very real: they are recognised as something existent and socially common; they enable collective practices, are enacted in many different ways and are shared in communication and social interaction. This does not imply that social imaginaries are fixed, thus feigning permanence; social imaginaries are temporary collective frameworks, subject to change.

Currently, social imaginaries involve the notion of a globalised world, therefore authors such as Steger and Garcia Canclini speak about global imaginaries. This introduces a further level of complexity with which to approach the 'social whole', one that urges the abandonment of customary oppositions and dualities (e.g. the local and the global) to address the complexity of meanings of a globalised world.

Internet and ICTs allow digital interaction in this globalised world as a form of communication and participation where global imaginaries can be spelled out. As digital interaction is a communication process, meta-communication often forms part of the discourses. Concerns often raised in literature about virtual dystopias and the cultural pessimism of ICTs (Yar, 2014), which focus on the dehumanising nature of the media and its dominance, are nuanced in the discourses analysed where a personal engagement in politics and in humanitarian, social, cultural and environmental causes underpin the conversations.

Social imaginaries, as has been showed turn global by means of the overruling and ubiquitous presence of the internet and ICTs in our time, although concerns of fairness scattered through a wide variety of concepts that illustrate just how heterogeneous are people in different places and at different times which brings us back to the first idea of this paper, social imaginaries are more real than the real, as well as dynamic and changing. This opens up the research on social imaginaries for further study and new understandings.

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