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

valeria fedeli, POLIMI
camilla perrone, UNIFI
Beyond traditional spatial (urban) imaginaries
1.1 Copying with the interrelated nature of contemporary world

- **Growing (policy oriented) research** on the consequences of the extraordinary changes in the economy and society brought about by the restructuring of capitalism

- … but **quite traditional research** (in particular policy oriented) on the effects generated upon territory and urban space by these processes.

- Much of the debate highlights the need to **explore the interrelated nature of contemporary world**, studying the interdependence and relationships between places…

- …but we are still strongly related to consolidated binary forms of spatial representation: peripheries, cleavages, divides, delays, “fracture territoriales”…
1.2 Rethinking the role of cities and agglomerations in contemporary capitalism

- Cities and urban agglomerations in the Fordist-Keynesian phase of capitalist development have been the subject of careful thought throughout the 20th century, with significant implications in normative and political terms on national/international levels.

- But for some time now, signs of new forms and processes of economic development that involve contexts not traditionally at the center of the urban scene have been emerging.

- They regard territories that do not necessarily refer to the traditional urban/development coupling (Scott & Storper, 2015).

- Thence the need for new transcalar and relational viewpoints that can take into account contemporary urban phenomena by overcoming the more traditional urban or metropolitan models (Roy and Ong, 2011).
1.3 Hints from urban studies

- Scholars are focusing their research on processes of urbanization that contradict or stress the traditional “urban” paradigm and urban-economic development nexus.

- Brenner and “critical urban theory”: the urban no longer appears to be a distinctive condition but rather a generalized process unfolding on a global scale. It involves distant and different places in cross-scale relationships, all participating to different degrees in the organization of global space/economy/society and producing new profiles of social differentiation and inequity (Brenner, 2017).

- Soja et al. maintain that today’s era might be defined as one of regional urbanization (Soja, 2015): large urban regions are substituting cities on the international economic scene, accompanied by new dimensions of the urban question (Balducci, Fedeli, Curci, 2017b).

- Other authors focus on the emergence of in-between regions (Nussli and Schmidt, 2016; Sieverts 2013) or society (Bonomi, De Rita, 2015), in places once referred to as “peripheral” or “suburban” where today some of the most important socio-economic-spatial innovations are taking place, even in the absence of specific recognition (Keil, 2017).
1.4 Unpacking nexus

- Merely an extension of the sphere of analysis?

- Rather, a substantive step forward in understanding and studying the means and consequences of a kind of economic development that is *consistently restructuring places and producing* – just to mention a traditional (urban) policy issue - *new profiles of marginality/centrality* that hardly can match with the consolidated identification of the XX century (Soja, 2011; Brenner, 2017).

- Need to focus back upon the relations between processes of urbanization and the restructuring of capitalism in order *to understand both the ways that differential and unequal urban development comes about, along with its consequences*: new socio-political-economic assemblages that produce new forms and patterns of inequity, together with new forms of power and conflict.
Beyond traditional urban/territorial policies
Traditional Spatial imaginaries like periphery, marginality, still inform and feed many national urban and territorial policies, which are still based on:

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

i.e. politique de la ville, France Strategie

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

FROM URBAN/TERRITORIAL POLICIES TO URBAN-TERRITORIAL POLICIES?
Rethinking marginality
3.1 Rethinking marginality: state of the art

- Mapping *peripherality and marginality* has become harder than expected, so much so that institutions, looking for simple criteria in order to address complex societal challenges, seem to be striving to catch the very nature of processes and to adopt simplified strategy to distribute resources and tools.

- Notwithstanding some recent attempts to innovate this field (EU State of the EU Cities report, 2017; Espon, 2017), *marginality remains a spatial metaphor* indicating something on an edge with respect to a center in geographic, social, economic and symbolic space, the identification of which triggers the social construction of stigma.
On the one hand the work of scholars like Simone (2017) or Waquant (2008, 2017) on the world’s cities of the south might be particularly useful for a detailed critique of those approaches, with feedbacks also into the spheres of models of urban and regional policy (advanced marginality, Waquant, 2008).

On the other hand marginality, can and must be considered according to Mehretu et al (2000):

- a phenomenon that does not have merely simple spatial or geographic connotations. It should be addressed as a “universal phenomenon that unfolds in space in different ways”

- “complex condition of disadvantage which individuals and communities experience as a result of vulnerabilities that may arise from unfavourable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors”.
In the conclusion, the authors highlight the **relevance of spatial scale of inquiry** (varying from *megascales* to *in situ* marginality), suggesting that the **scale issue is crucial when considering marginality**, as well as that the spatial dimension of marginality must be read at the intersection of scales, producing unusual and unexpected geographies of co-presence.

Leimgruber later suggested that it is:

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

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

- Moving from these approaches, in a recent research project based on qualitative approaches, we proposed to start from Hirschman’s exit-voice-loyalty model formulated in the 1970s to study not only power relationships, but more widely the new nexus space-society-economy, from a specific economic perspective.

- But what happens the other way around? How do territories react to processes of economic reorganization? (How) Do they observe, endure, reactivate, re-organize?
Can the exit-voice-loyalty model deployed in a territorial perspective be useful for understanding processes of the reconfiguration of the relationship among economy, space and society?

We elaborated a diagram that ideally locates:

- along the **A axis** the trajectories of apparent success and failure in terms of the economic performance, allowing to identify winner/loser territories, based on simple and complex socio-economic performances indicators.

- **along a B axis** the ability of territories (space/society) to play an active or passive role (active/passive territories) in intercepting the processes of restructuring of the global capitalism.
Marginalities (or centralities) can be read as a complex condition in which economic restructuring takes place locally as the result of a lack of capacity to react and take advantage from a global local relationship dynamic.
Amazon arriva in Polesine, Ikea invece scappa

Economia
This conceptual scheme seeks to read “process” rather than “status”, identifying trajectories of stability (decline and passivity, development and protagonism) but also of change.

Marginality becomes, on the base of this scheme, only relatively detectable in relation to a (spatial) status (distance from resources, lack of accessibility and opportunities, material poverty...), but more in relation to the capacity of a place/society to interact with translocal economic processes.
3.3 Relevant implications for the future research steps..

- help identifying **marginality out of traditional geographies, developing a transcalar, fractal, interrelated approach**

- the reference to a classic, like Hirschman exit voice loyalty model, though instrumental, can reinforce the aim of unfolding traditional categories with new conceptual tools

- in addition to that, this analytical model could help in a dialogue with an approach of urban studies, with reference to subjugation/protagonism relations among the different forms of the urban/development nexus (concentrated and extended forms of urbanization, Brenner)

  - It aims at **contributing to creating a new generation of urban-territorial policies (no more urban/territorial)** that can profoundly renew the logic of public action to support development.
Thank you

valeria.fedeli@polimi.it
camilla.perrone@unifi.it