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Capitalism and New Challenges: Considerations About the Sharing Economy

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the topic of “sharing economy”, which emerges more and more frequently, even in public debate, as an alternative economic form to the dominant capitalist vision.

The goal is to question the concept of “sharing” in order to understand if and in what terms we can speak of the sharing economy as a new “spirit” of capitalism. This economic system appears increasingly subject to crises of various kinds, which show the necessity of a rethinking of what we can intend with the concept of “spirit” of capitalism.

As already amply pointed out by Boltanski and Chiapello (2014), a current interpretation of the concept of “spirit” could be linked to the idea of the “ideology that justifies commitment to capitalism”. This is because capitalism manages to survive despite the predictions of its collapse, strengthening to an increasing extent.

In this direction, this paper asks how the sharing economy is positioned in relation to this theoretical framework. Is it a distinct economic form and opposed to the essential logic of the functioning of current capitalism? Or does it possess a logic of functioning similar to capitalism?

The sharing economy – or “collaborative economy” – seems to hide dynamics that are not centered on the idea of free sharing. We wonder if behind the label that this economic form advocates there is not the danger of a real introduction of capitalist logic – that is, the efficiency and profit logic – within areas previously governed by gratuitousness.

Keywords: capitalism, collaborative economy, sociology, sociological theory, spirit of capitalism