

The ‘hedonistic citizen’: dialogues on consumption and participatory citizenship in contemporary society

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Abstract

This paper aims to understand the challenges that hyperconsumerism poses for participatory citizenship in Brazilian society from the perspective of theories that seek to understand the implications of the key role played by consumption in contemporary society. The inspiration for this study has been government policies that have encouraged the acquiring of bank accounts and the promotion of easier access to credit as well as the creation of income distribution plans, and their potential impact on participatory citizenship. In methodological terms, this paper is a theoretical essay. In terms of its results, it points out that the creation of a hedonistic consumer culture in our society may lead to the emphasizing of individualism at the expense of collective demands. That is, public policies implemented during this period may have indirectly, as one of their consequences, stimulated citizenship by inclusion through consumption, which is regarded as an unequal, depoliticizing, and alienating construction of citizenship. Therefore, while social inclusion through consumption may minimize some of the social inequalities present in this country, it may also lead to the confusing of participatory citizenship with mere monetary inclusion in the consumer market. This form of inclusion may contribute to the diminishing of the differences between the social classes through consumption, but it also frequently just provides these people with the illusion of being in a higher class and that they can enjoy the benefits that this class has to offer.

Keywords: Public administration. Consumption. Citizenship. Social classes.

O “cidadão hedonista”: diálogos sobre consumo e cidadania na sociedade contemporânea

Resumo

Este trabalho objetiva compreender os desafios que se impõem à cidadania com o advento do fenômeno do hiperconsumo na sociedade brasileira pela perspectiva das teorias que procuram entender as implicações da centralidade do consumo na sociedade contemporânea. Esse objetivo surge da reflexão sobre o aumento gradativo das muitas políticas governamentais de incentivo à bancarização, ao acesso facilitado ao crédito, bem como à criação de planos sociais de distribuição de renda e aumento dos salários ocorridos nos últimos anos e seus possíveis impactos sobre a cidadania. Em termos metodológicos este trabalho é um ensaio teórico. Como resultados, aponta-se que produzir uma cultura de consumo hedonista em nossa sociedade poderia enfatizar o individualismo em detrimento das demandas coletivas. Ou seja, as políticas públicas implementadas no período poderiam ter como uma de suas consequências, ainda que indiretas, o estímulo à cidadania pela inclusão do consumo, considerada um processo de construção desigual, despoliticizador e alienador da cidadania. Portanto, dizer que pelo consumo as pessoas se tornarão socialmente incluídas minimizaria os efeitos sociais decorrentes da desigualdade social presente em nosso país e ainda contribuiria para que o exercício da cidadania fosse confundido apenas com a inclusão monetária no mercado de consumo. Em outras palavras, contribuiria para que as distâncias existentes entre as classes sociais diminuíssem pelo consumo, ou pela ilusão de que o consumo as colocasse em uma classe superior, podendo comungar dos benefícios propiciados pelo capital econômico.

Palavras-chave: Administração pública. Consumo. Cidadania. Classes sociais.

El “ciudadano” hedonista: diálogos sobre el consumo y ciudadanía en la sociedad contemporánea

Resumen

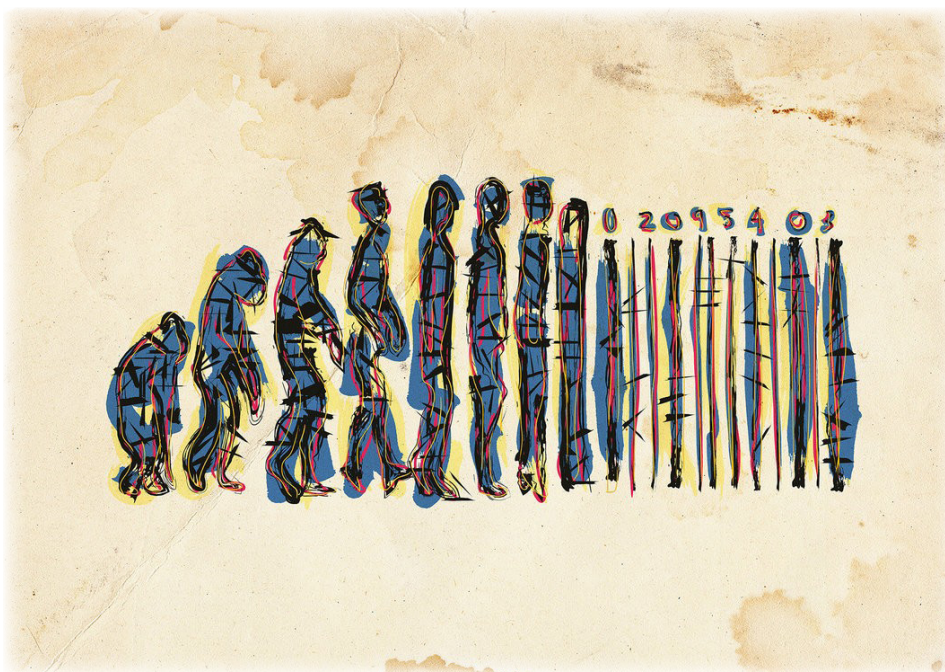
Este trabajo pretende comprender los desafíos se imponen a la ciudadanía con el advenimiento del fenómeno de hiperconsumo en la sociedad brasileña por medio de la perspectiva de las teorías que tratan de comprender las implicaciones de la centralidad del hiperconsumo en la sociedad contemporánea. Este objetivo surge de la reflexión sobre el incremento gradual de muchas de las políticas gubernamentales para estimular la atracción, facilita el acceso al crédito, así como la creación de planes sociales de la distribución de los ingresos y un aumento en los salarios que se han producido en los últimos años y sus posibles impactos sobre la ciudadanía. En términos metodológicos el presente trabajo es un ensayo teórico. Como resultado, se señala que producir una cultura de consumo hedonista en nuestra sociedad podría enfatizar el individualismo en detrimento de las demandas colectivas. Es decir, las políticas públicas implementadas en el período podrían tener como una de sus consecuencias, aunque indirectamente, el estímulo a la ciudadanía mediante la inclusión del consumo, que se considera un proceso de construcción, desigual, alienante y de despoliticización de la ciudadanía. Por lo tanto, afirmar que las personas serían socialmente incluídas por medio del consumo minimizaría los efectos sociales derivados de la desigualdad social presente en nuestro país y además contribuiría para equiparar el ejercicio de la ciudadanía con sólo la inclusión en el mercado de consumo monetario. Es decir, podría contribuir para que las distancias existentes entre las clases sociales fuesen disminuidas por medio del consumo o por medio de ilusión de que el consumo fuese capaz de elevarlas a una clase superior para compartir de los beneficios del capital económico.

Palabras clave: la administración pública. El consumo. La ciudadanía. Las clases sociales

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1994 was emblematic for Brazil due to the elaboration and implementation of the Real Plan, which signified the country's return to contemporary economics. After the passing of several years and two presidential terms, many socio-economic changes occurred in the country, especially in terms of the lower classes, beginning in 2002 (VICENTE, 2013). According to the author, many governmental policies encouraged the public to use banks and offered easy access to credit and income distribution plans, which were accompanied by a gradual rise in salaries. In addition, various policies to stimulate consumption were implemented by the Brazilian State as an alternative for sustaining the growth of the country's internal market. Among these policies, we can highlight the reduction of the Tax on Industrialized Products (IPI) for cars and basic appliances (YACCOULB, 2011; COHN, 2013).

According to Neri (2008), these factors were crucial to the increasing participation of the lower Brazilian social classes in the acquisition of consumer goods, which consequently led to the heating up of the Brazilian economy. In this way, "from this point on, the emerging classes began to be viewed as new consumers by the government as well as the market, changing the design of graphics representing official statistics and the classification of the country's economic classes" (VICENTE, 2013, p. 81). Studies indicate that at the end of 2003 almost 40% of the Brazilian population was below the poverty line, and by 2009 this percentage had fallen to 24%. This sharp growth in the income of the lower classes implied the entering of many new families into this "new middle class". Thus, more than half the Brazilian population is now part of this "new middle class," which now represents more than 100 million people (IBOPE, 2010). The vertiginous growth in the proportion of the population in this new class went from 38% in 2002 to 53% in 2012, and has drawn the attention of academics, researchers and the government. It is estimated that this growth has continued with 58.3% of the Brazilian population occupying this group in 2014 (MEIRELLES, 2011).

There has been an intense debate in this country in academia and other environments as to whether this possible "new social class" really exists. However, even though debate over this issue has taken place in various spheres, it has been in academia that it has been most meaningful. Authors such as Neri (2008), Lamounier and Souza (2010), Souza (2010), Yaccoub (2011),

* Image source: RGDart. Available at <http://rgdart.deviantart.com/art/Barcode-Evolution-310044616>. Accessed on 05 October 2016.

Xavier Sobrinho (2011), Kerstenetzky and Uchôa (2012), Scalon and Salata (2012), Vicente (2013) and Grzybowski (2013) have prepared analyses of this possible phenomenon using various conflicting epistemological matrices. It's important to make clear that consumerism doesn't just apply to the "new middle class" (NERI, 2008). In the analyses of the above mentioned authors, consumerism is a broader phenomenon that encompasses all of society. However, currently in Brazil this social class has been the subject of great interest due to the various public policies directed towards it, which justifies the focus of this article on this portion of society.

In this work, as in Yaccoub (2011), we do not intend to dwell on the concept of social classes as understood by the social sciences, but instead we will extend the discussion about this "new middle class" to the realm of participatory citizenship. At the heart of this academic debate there is an issue that cannot be ignored by public researchers and professionals (PIRES, SILVA, FONSECA et al., 2014): "What are the challenges to participatory citizenship posed by the advent of this social class based on hyperconsumerism?" This study will reflect on the current role played by this "new middle class" in terms of the issue of hyperconsumerism in contemporary society.

In opting for a theoretical critique, we can point to support from Box (2005), Jun (2006), Miller and Fox (1997) and, above all, Andion (2012), Fadul and Silva (2009), Fadul, Silva and Silva (2012) and Valadares, Pinto and Vilas Boas (2014) in studying public administration in a manner that is neither functionalist nor positivist. It is understood that looking for new ways to comprehend the phenomena inherent in the field of public administration contributes to its renovation by using theoretical lenses that can help ensure that it doesn't lose its identity or fall into a paradigmatic crisis. In this context, we make use of the contributions made by the work of Fadul, Silva and Silva (2012). These authors demonstrate that the renovation of the field of public administration is necessary to take a sharper look at issues in this context, given that "the study of public administration is interwoven with the story of the formation of the Brazilian public sector, which has created traps which the discipline has been unable to avoid, and this has eliminated the field's capacity to go beyond the limits created by its own history" (FADUL, SILVA and SILVA, 2012, p. 1445).

In methodological terms, this is a theoretical essay. The essay's concept follows the perspective of the debate proposed by Meneghetti (2011a; 2011b) and Bertero (2011). In operational terms, it weighs the thinking of both authors showing that, even though there was initial planning, the process of its construction did not follow previously laid out paths. In this way, the theoretical essay "is constructed collectively, even though its limits are defined by what it writes" (MENEGHETTI, 2011a, p. 348), being "the interaction between the subjectivity and objectivity of those involved," (MENEGHETTI, 2011a, p. 321) which is a way to permanently demonstrate its dialectic character (BERTERO, 2011).

This essay is structured in the following manner. It consists of a total of five sections including the introduction. The second section deals with the academic debate about the centrality of consumption in contemporary society and its possible consequences. The third section presents different views of the "new middle class" in the literature. The fourth section analyzes the challenges that centrality of consumption in Brazilian society presents to participatory citizenship, given that this "new middle class" represents a significant part of the Brazilian social fabric. The final section presents the essay's final considerations and offers reflections on the debate between consumption and participatory citizenship.

DEBATES: CONSUMPTION AND SOCIETY

Ever since the end of the 1970s, the so-called "consumer society" has piqued the interest of social scientists and historians throughout the world. As Barbosa points out (2006, p. 7) "certainly this movement deserves attention and needs to be explained. After all, consumption is one of the most basic of human activities – you can live without producing, but not without consuming." Among the various authors who have attempted to understand the centrality of consumption in contemporary society, Baudrillard (1995), Featherstone (1990), Lipovetsky (1989) and Bourdieu (2007) have written about this topic from an anthropological as well as a sociological point of view. In Brazil we can find in the work of Mancebo, Oliveira, Fonseca et al. (2002), Retondar (2008), Costa and Teodósio (2011), Caniato and Nascimento (2010), Santos and Fernandes (2011), and Alfinito and Torres (2012) discussions of consumption within the context of environmentalism as well as adolescence, in addition to technical discussions of this subject.

Preserving their idiosyncrasies, we can say that in the view of the authors cited above, in general, "post-modern" society is based on consumption. The individual in this context can be seen as a consumer, mainly due to the proliferation of the current automated system of production. Based on the field's theoretical constructs, one can observe that consumption has become central to "post-modern" society which makes it an element in the interpretation and evaluation of the relationships that individuals establish.

Two aspects stand out as fundamental in the characterization of post-modern consumption. The first is the triumph of desires over needs, considering that, even though the search for meeting needs is still present and plays a part in the choices made by the post-modern consumer, the preoccupation in fulfilling desires has taken a preponderant role. Another aspect is unbridled individualism, to the extent that consumer goods are acquired for personal use and the ideological and value systems associated with this which give the individual the right *per se* to decide which goods he or she wishes to consume. These two characteristics end up contributing significantly to this area along with other aspects of modern consumerism, such as what is in fashion, and the gamut of goods offered, and consequently a wide range of choice (CAMPBELL, 2001).

Veblen's theory of the leisure class, published in 1899, is traditionally considered the first study of culture and consumption (BARROS, 2007). In his arguments Veblen emphasizes the role of consumption in going beyond the utilitarian needs of consumers and argues that consumption functions as a form of communication characterizing social relationships and the structure of society. In this way, consumption makes it possible to distinguish and identify people, groups and the social structure itself, thus enabling social stratification. His main contribution to the theory of consumption was going beyond the utilitarian view and elevating consumption to a question of social, collective, symbolic and cultural status.

Another influential work was *The Gift* by Marcel Mauss, published in 1923. The author affirms that social life is not just made up of the circulation of goods related to physical needs, but that gift exchanges also represent social relationships symbolically. Gifts occur to meet cultural needs and not just economic needs. Consumption would be, then, a gift exchange with connotations of retribution, honor, prestige and power which symbolize the alliance or divide between the parties involved.

Another work that offers a valuable contribution to this debate in terms of consumer culture was produced by the anthropologist Sahlins (1979). In his work, *Culture and Practical Reason*, the author states that culture shouldn't be analyzed as a variable, but as a point of departure for analysis, since it is through culture that individuals fit in and are classified in society. In this way, western capitalist society and the production of goods are the results of the instituted cultural structure, and are made up precisely of the significant differences between products which are the elements that form the general scheme of social classification. He explains that consumer goods as material artifacts and culture as a social construct, are not antagonistic forces, but are interwoven in the gift exchange relationship. From this perspective, production goes from being considered a logical system of material efficiency to being considered the result of cultural intentions that govern and rule social relationships.

The works of Veblen, Mauss and Sahlins already represent a distancing of the field of consumption from economic theory, which up to then had been dominant (ROCHA, BLAJBERG, OUCHI et al., 1999). This scenario was, over time, confirmed by the publication of other works of great relevance to the consolidation of this new perspective. And in the 1970s consumption became a subject of note in the social sciences, with investigations by sociologists and anthropologists seeking to understand the phenomenon of consumption from a broader perspective than had been used during the previous century (GAZUREK, 2012).

Authors like Baudrillard (1995), Bourdieu (2007), Douglas and Isherwood (2006), Featherstone (1990) and Lipovetsky (1989) used distinct analytic perspectives in their search for explanations of consumption in modern industrial society, which has gone beyond the satisfaction of needs in a movement of unbridled consumption (ROCHA, BLAJBERG, OUCHI et al., 1999). This led to the appearance of the theory of consumer culture which, according to Arnould and Thompson (2005), is linked to a group of theoretical perspectives that assume that consumer and market actions and their cultural significance can be viewed as dynamic relationships.

The theory of consumer culture explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of meanings present in the superimposition of the cultural values that exist in the broader socio-historical context of globalization and market capitalism (ARNOULD and THOMPSON, 2005). From this perspective:

More than seeing culture as a homogenous system of collectively shared meaning, the theory of consumer culture explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of groups and cultural manifestations that exist in various current socio-historical formations, or in other words, this line of research also involves the concept of an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts and objects that groups use by establishing practices, identities and meanings that are superimposed on feelings created in their environments to guide the experiences and lives of its members (PINTO and LARA, 2011, p. 45).

Consumption and product symbols made for the market induce the central desire of consumer culture, the perpetuation and reproduction of the current system's logic (the capitalist system) through personal choice. Perhaps more importantly, according to Pinto and Lara (2011), the theory of consumer culture can be viewed as an experience in itself with its own meaning and action. The vision distributed by the product's cultural significance emphasizes the dynamics of fragmentation, plurality, and fluidity interlaced with consumer traditions and lifestyles. In terms of the theoretical postulate, the theory of consumer culture seeks to study how particular manifestations of consumer culture are constituted, sustained, transformed and shaped by broader historical forces (such as cultural narratives, myths and ideologies) based on a given specific socio-economic context. Thus the central theme of the theory of consumer culture:

[...] is the way in which it articulates issues that deal with how we should live and how we wish to live in terms of the organization of society. All of this occurs in everyday life: the material and symbolic structure of the places where we live and our way of living in these places; what we eat; the clothes we wear; the types of scarcity and inequality that we face, and so on (PINTO and LARA, 2011, p. 45).

To Barbosa (2004, p. 10) one has to make a distinction between society and culture because:

[...] the culture of consumption or consumers [...] and the culture of post-modern society, and the issues discussed under this umbrella are quite specific. This includes the intimate and almost causal relationship between consumption, lifestyle, social reproduction and identity, autonomy within the cultural sphere, the conversion of reality into aesthetics and commodities, signs as merchandise and a group of negative attributes associated with consumption such as the loss of authenticity in social relations, materialism and superficiality.

According to Featherstone (1990), there are three main perspectives in terms of consumer culture. The *first* believes that the expansion of the production of merchandise led to a vast accumulation of cultural material in the form of consumer goods and places to shop, facilitating ideological manipulation and the "seductive" control of the population's consumption. In this way, possessions have come to assume a gamut of associations and cultural illusions, with advertising being an especially savvy form of taking advantage of these possibilities.

In this respect, a work that stands out is Jean Baudrillard's book *The System of Objects*, in which the author presents a vision of consumption as a form of interaction with collectivity, with objects understood as manipulative signs which become coherent in relation to each other through an abstract relationship between the objects-signs that compose them. Or in other words:

[...] we never consume an object in and of itself (in terms of its useful value) – objects (in a broad sense) are always manipulating the consumer with signs that distinguish the consumer as an individual, trying to associate the consumer with his or her own group as an ideal reference, marking it as a reference for superior status (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, p. 60).

Thus, consumption is based on group values and this is how a given product's value is determined. A valuable contribution by Jean Baudrillard is the perception that consumption renews itself and is sustained by group values, because it's the moment when the consumer feels fulfilled by buying a certain product, or in other words, when the consumer is influenced to change his or her buying habits due to the conditions imposed by the consumer culture industry, and buys a product not for itself, but rather for what it represents.

Slater (2002, p. 144) adds that this problem occurs where marketing and advertising rule. According to the author, "we don't just buy an object, but a lifestyle which evokes a system of meaning." The object-sign becomes an element that contributes

to the concretization of consumption and an element of social differentiation. In other words, the object-sign wasn't made to be consumed; it was made to be an element of distinction and status. The object-sign represents the perspective of the value of the gift exchange as it does the value of usage. In the words of Baudrillard (2006, p. 169-170), within the context of the object-sign:

The consumer [...] is part of and spontaneously assumes this obligation without end: buying what society continues to produce in order to pay for what has already been bought [...]. Each person is an accomplice of the production order without having a relationship with the producer – he himself or she herself – who is the victim of it. This dissociation between the producer-consumer is the heart of the integration with this concept: everything is done so that one never perceives this contradiction in a vivid, critical manner.

From this perspective, it can be said that the consumer society comes to refute what is real, or in other words, we stop consuming an object to consume “a model (an idea or a system) that comes with it” (SANTOS, 2011, p. 130). Consumption then becomes a new mode of socialization and even becomes moral, condemning society to poverty, alienation and living under domination. Seen in this light, in the view of Baudrillard (1995) pieces of merchandise come to be treated as signs, or better, consumption arises from this relationship as a response to the reigning cultural system.

The *second*, according to Featherstone (1990), is the strictly sociological point of view that assumes that the satisfaction derived from possessions is related to access to the social structure in which satisfaction and status depend on the exhibition and maintenance of differences in an economic context. It focuses on the different ways in which people use possessions to create ties and establish social distinctions (TRIGG, 2001; BOURDIEU, 2007). This highlights the doubly symbolic aspect assumed by consumer goods, which can be seen in their design and in the imagination involved in the processes of production and marketing as well as the symbolic associations of the goods, which are used and altered to emphasize different lifestyles, thus delimiting social relationships. In other words, even though possessions can break down social barriers, they can also act in the opposite manner, restricting, controlling and channeling the gift exchange process. Thus, even in societies in which the goods offered are constantly being renewed – which creates the illusion of unrestricted access – legitimate “taste” (knowledge of the principles of classification, hierarchy and appropriateness) is still limited.

In this context, there is a notable work by Bourdieu entitled *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* in which the author analyzes the mechanisms of social reproduction which portray the way in which societies maintain order between social groups and the power relationships of each group in relation to the others. According to the author, social life can be constructed based on three different types of resources that compete for status (BOURDIEU, 2007). The three resources of this multidimensional game are economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. Economic capital consists of financial resources and/or economic resources which contribute to the life of society in the sense of obtaining possessions. Social capital has to do with relationships, organizational affiliations and contact networks. Cultural capital is understood as a collection of tastes, abilities, knowledge and practices that are rare and distinctive.

There are some characteristics of the Bourdiesian theory that apply only to the concept of cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 2007; HOLT, 1998; TRIGG, 2001; USTUNER and HOLT, 2010). First, cultural capital is personified, or in other words, is presented through practical knowledge, abilities and dispositions, reflected in the individual's behavior and manner. Second, it is objectified through cultural objects, reflected by possessions and the judgements of taste involved in their purchase. Third, it's institutionalized through certificates and diplomas, conferring honor and ensuring the possession of this capital. In addition to this, according to Holt (1998) and Bourdieu (2007), cultural capital is accumulated and reproduced essentially by the educational system. Taste, in this sense, is a series of essential mechanisms of differentiation, being a product of education. Thus, the choices and styles of consumption are explained by the individual's level of cultural capital: “taste classifies, and classifies the classifier.” From this perspective, we can infer then that certain social classes share given tastes, rites and relationships that become distinctive when compared to those of the other classes.

In this context, the concept of *habitus* also proves to be relevant, because it designates the existence of relatively stable groups and identifiable social classifying principles that serve to delimit the borders between these groups (BOURDIEU, 2007). In other words, classes socially and symbolically construct a *habitus* that promotes the distinction between individuals in a society. In this manner, to Bourdieu (2007), *habitus* is a scheme of principles that generates and organizes practices and representations, classifying the world and structuring action.

Douglas and Isherwood in the book *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption (O mundo dos bens para uma antropologia do consumo)* have also contributed significantly to this perspective, emphasizing that how individuals gain from the consumption of goods is only partly due to their physical consumption, with the other part being the use of their purchases as social markers. Thus, the “joy of sharing names is a reward for a long investment of time and attention as well as money” spent in learning and classifying them (DOUGLAS and ISHERWOOD, 2006, p. 124). To them, the relationship between culture and consumption constitutes a form of construction and edification of values, identities and social relationships that together define a shared culture. Thus, consumers in their consumption practices seek to meet their symbolic needs according to the cultural codes that have been instituted.

In addition to this, the act of consumption can be understood as a way of classifying the individual in society (BARBOSA and CAMPBELL, 2006), or in other words, the way in which individuals position themselves in the world that surrounds them. These meanings are a form of social communication, and to the extent that goods maintain relationships with other goods, they form a network of meaning which forms a culturally constituted world (MCCRACKEN, 1986). Thus individuals can read and interpret these meanings and decode the messages produced by consumption. Therefore, in addition to their functional utility, consumer goods are used by individuals to express something about themselves (DOUGLAS and ISHERWOOD, 2006). The need for goods, in this sense, stems from the desire of the individual to express individual and collective distinction. Since goods carry significance (MCCRACKEN, 1986), they are used as social mediators which establish a combination of symbolic systems which make up culture. Goods give meaning to relationships, being a non-verbal method for people to create and recreate themselves.

The *third* has to do with the emotional pleasures of consumption, the dreams and desires that become symbolic artifacts for the propagation of the consumer culture as well as the consumption locations that offer various types of physical stimuli and aesthetic pleasure (FEATHERSTONE, 1990). In this dimension we can see that the cult of the body and aesthetic pleasures are driven by professionals who work directly with the creation of demand for these products (LIPOVETSKY, 1989). Society, in this sense, defines itself by fashion, because at bottom fashion “is that which reorders production and mass consumption through the laws of obsolescence, seduction and diversification, that brings economics into the orbit of a kind of fashion” (LIPOVETSKY, 1989, p. 159).

In a more recent work, Lipovetsky (2007) discusses the paradox of happiness and the society of hyperconsumerism. According to the author, this society has raised consumption to such a pitch that it can consider commercializing references that modern society (the previous one) never made available, such as the family, school and ethics. That being so, previously constructed values are being eroded and commercialized in a new type of consumption based on subjectivity, emotion and experience. The characteristics of this consumer are:

[...] “the taking advantage of a more qualitative and balanced materialistic existence,” without giving up the advantages of the modern world. There is nothing aesthetic in new age spirituality. On the contrary, “the ideas of renouncing the world have been exchanged for self-help techniques that supposedly offer material success and inner peace, health and confidence, in and of themselves [...], in other words, internal happiness without renouncing anything external (comfort, professional success, sex, leisure).” [...] These are thus paradoxes... (FONTENELLE, 2008, p. 105).

In this sense, Lipovetsky (2007) argues that the reason for consumption in modern society is more related to hedonism than the search for distinction among classes. To the author, hedonism and the search for experiences are the motivating mechanisms for consumption in post-modern society. As Toaldo states (1997, p. 91):

Gilles Lipovetsky characterizes the current epoch of consumption as the searching for “pleasure for pleasure’s sake.” According to him, human needs are in the value of usage – which Baudrillard says is just support – in utility allied with image. Intimate pleasure, the object’s qualities, the feeling, the spectacle, the cult of the body, the new, autonomy, and information... dominate in the preoccupation with what is different.

Based on these *three dimensions*, Featherstone (1990) argues that it’s important to concentrate on the growing importance of consumer culture and not just consider consumption to be something isolated with no relationship to other spheres of human life. In the author’s words:

The current phase, with excessive offers of symbolic goods in contemporary western societies, and trends toward cultural declassification and disorder (which some label post-modernism) is bringing cultural issues to the fore and has greater implications for our concept of the relationship between culture, the economy and society. These phenomena have resulted in a growing interest in conceptualizing questions of the desire, pleasure and emotional and aesthetic satisfaction derived from consumption experiences, not just because of some logic involving psychological manipulation (FEATHERSTONE, 1990, p. 31-2).

Bauman is another author who has made a useful contribution to the debate concerning consumption. From his point of view, society's obsession with consumption is a search for fame. To him, this phenomenon has been rhetorical for contemporary individuals. From his perspective "being famous signifies nothing more than (and nothing less than) appearing on the front page of thousands of magazines and millions of screens, being seen, noted, commented on and, therefore, presumably desired by many – just like shoes, skirts or accessories which are displayed in luxury magazines and on TV screens and for this reason are seen, noted, commented on, and desired" (BAUMAN, 2007, p. 20). The author aligns himself with Marx in terms of the market fetish. In a society composed of consumers, no one can be anyone without first becoming merchandise, and no one can maintain subjectivity without reanimating, resuscitating and restocking the demands established for merchandise.

In terms of the market fetish, Bauman (2007) is emphatic in mentioning that the phenomenon of remaking occurs in a constant and uninterrupted fashion. From the perspective of consumption, the consumer becomes treated as merchandise in this context like consumer objects that are outdated, less than fully satisfactory and/or no longer desirable, which are used for the design of products and advertising campaigns calculated to constantly increase sales. Bauman (2001a) adds to this the phenomenon of online purchases and even social relationships on social networks like Facebook. In this context, Bauman (2007) observes that market goods begin to continually supply and restock the epistemological base of the fetish of subjectivity. It's at this moment that the consumer loses the ability to look at others. Not being able to look at others, the individual is also unable to look at himself or herself, losing the capacity to interpret and reflect on reality.

Thus, what was invisible before (each person's intimacy) in this liquid society is exposed on a public platform (BAUMAN, 2007). According to the author, in the consumption society, consumption is an objective in itself and that's why it is a self-propelling process (BAUMAN, 2001a). Armed with these three ideal types in the author's conception (BAUMAN, 2007) – consumerism, consumer society and consumer culture – it's possible to see his clear contribution to the debate over consumption. Based on his assumptions, he understands consumerism as a key role in a productive society. He also affirms that "until we learn why people need luxury goods [or in other words, goods which exceed their needs for survival] and how they use them, we won't be close to seriously considering the problems of inequality" (BAUMAN, 2007, p. 53).

To meet these new needs, impulses, compulsions and vices, as well as offering new motivation, orientation and monitoring mechanisms for human conduct, the consumer economy has to base itself on excess and waste. It's also possible to perceive that a "now" culture which establishes pathological relationships with the environment and other facets of human life puts the most characteristic value of consumer society, in truth its highest value to which all other values defer, on a happy life. Therefore according to Bauman (2007), the consumer society inhibits the use of words like dissatisfied and uses instead phrases like completely dissatisfied.

Thus, from the point of view of Featherstone (1990), contemporary consumer culture cannot be seen as an institution with rigid controls, but is rather sustained by an underlying flexible generative structure that can deal with formal control and processes of change in a globalized world where change is occurring at an ever increasing rate. The theory of consumer culture therefore shows that consumers are made up of multiple realities and that they use consumption to experiment these realities through fantasies, desires, aesthetics and identity games (ARNOULD and THOMPSON, 2005). As seen by Pinto and Lara (2011) the understanding of consumption behavior is based therefore on the search for heterogeneous meanings that are created and transferred in a rapid manner.

In the light of these discussions of consumption present in the literature, in the next section we'll turn our attention to the problematic consumption stimulus policies implemented by the Brazilian State, especially over the last twelve years, and the ascension of a possible "new social class" in Brazilian territory.

DEBATES CONCERNING THE "NEW MIDDLE CLASS" IN BRAZIL

According to Vicente (2013) there are at least two ways to understand the phenomenon of the "new middle class" in Brazil. One school, led by Neri (2008), defends the applying of the concept to Brazil, mainly based on income. The other school, led by Souza (2010), argues that social class can't be defined just in terms of income.

From the point of view of Neri (2008), this "new middle class" or even this "new C class" would be located in the social pyramid between classes A and B (above) and D and E (below). This school's argument is sustained by the appearance of "new consumers," which occurred in Brazil due to an increase in income, a policy of low interest rates and easy credit for durable goods such as appliances which elevated this group's status through its new pattern of consumption. According to Yaccoub (2012, p. 197) "through their consumption, mainly of cars and appliances, they crave to enter another social strata, the middle urban layer." In this way, Neri (2008, p. 5) declares that the C class has "the image that's closest to Brazilian society." In technical terms this "new class" was classified as those with monthly family incomes between R\$ 1,064 and R\$ 4,561 which corresponded to 52.67% of the Brazilian population or 98 million people. In the author's words, "all the indicators, whether they're from the point of view of the consumer or the producer, point to a boom of the C class: purchases of houses, cars and computers and the possession of working permits were all at record highs in 2008" (NERI, 2008, p. 7).

Using this construction, we can see consumption as a structuring element of inclusion in terms of this phenomenon of the "new middle class." This central role includes the ability of these individuals to acquire these goods as an element in the construction of their social identity. It elevates consumption, in this way, to the status of being an element that contributes to people leaving conditions of poverty and changing their social class. In other words, it sees consumption as a central element to changing social class (BARROS, 2009). Lamounier and Souza (2010) add that the idea of this "new middle class" is being advanced despite the fact that this pattern of consumption is based on credit, which makes family security fragile by accumulating debts associated with consumption.

The phenomenon of the emergence of this "new middle class," was of significant importance to the opening of long-term credit, instead of a simple rise in the income of this emerging new class. In this sense, it is argued that this class "has already been born in debt and there is a great chance that it won't be able to pay for what it is buying" (RODRIGUES, CALGARO and PEREIRA, 2014, p. 106). This fact has already been verified by various studies by Soares, Souza and Cunha (2014), Brasília (2013), Gutierrez (2012), Costa (2011), and Cotta and Cavalcanti (2011) who note this group's high degree of debt and the difficulties that it is facing in maintaining its newly acquired standard of living. Vicente (2013) questions the chances that these individuals who make up the "new middle class" will be able to sustain their pattern of consumption over the long term through their jobs, which often are not the most stable. The author also questions whether the consumption of this new class will create life values and plans consistent with the middle class, and how they'll provide continuity to the process that has begun with consumption.

It's in this context that Souza (2010) returns to deconstruct this view that consumption and income are central to defining social class. According to the author, the concept of class cannot be reduced to a debate about income and consumption, given that a debate about class involves a gamut of elements that include a discussion of each class's shared values which includes not just economic capital, but also social and cultural capital. In this sense, "the use of the term new middle class by opinion makers, economists and researchers is a banalization of the term class, linking it directly to income and consumption. It is known that what classifies social strata and layers is much more than possessions, the power of consumption and access to credit" (YACCOUB, 2011, p. 200-1).

Corroborating this argument, Gonçalves (2012) believes it is abusive to associate the income of this "new class" with the middle class, considering its social fragility, its poverty and needs which distance it from categories sociologically consistent with the middle class. To illustrate this argument, Gonçalves (2012, p. n1) provides data from the Family Budget Survey, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), which reveals that

[...] of the 31.5 million households in this 'new middle class', 82.9% don't have overdraft checking, 65.0% don't have a credit card, 75.1% don't have a health plan and 71.4% don't have higher education, and

75.1% of these households have 1 bathroom or none at all” The author further adds that “9.1% of the heads of these households are illiterate!

Thus, from this perspective, instead of the term “new middle class,” what we have is

[...] a new class of workers who are the result of neoliberal capitalism, in which flexible production has been responsible for structural employment, and today they occupy positions that do not demand great cultural capital or technical academic specialization, and therefore they can be dismissed from their places of work at any moment (VICENTE, 2013, p. 84).

The legacy of this, according to Souza (2010), is that one can't clearly define this new emerging class of Brazilian workers. In this sense, the author points out that consumption represents the reward for this portion of society's willingness to work and this then turns into a form of a guarantee of a better life.

To Grzybowski (2013), the concept of consumption as a guiding element for the formation of this “new middle class” may be linked to the concept of development that still exists in this country. According to the author:

To us development is still growth at any cost, with profoundly unequal social and political relationships based on polluting, mercantilist, industrialist, productivist, and consumption driven operations which still have ties to colonialism and dependence, as the strategic priority in the production of commodities which accentuate its predatory nature in terms of the great natural heritage of Planet Earth, which it is our duty to protect. Brazil can be seen today as an example of good tardy social democracy and capitalism – due to the fact that it is of “low intensity” to tell the truth (GRZYBOWSKI, 2013, p. 97).

The perception of the author above addresses a broader issue. In this he corroborates Souza (2010) by showing that, because this debate about alternative forms of development is still marginal, it is used as an orienting element of a “productivist and consumer driven development, except with the addition of social inclusion” (GRZYBOWSKI, 2013, p. 98). In this sense, to the author, easy access to credit and reductions in taxes such as the IPI do not guarantee *per se* sustainable development for the country. In the author's words:

[...] income and credit, as in fact has been happening, feed and drive the growth of the economy, the same economy that creates social inequality, poverty and misery. In terms of substance, the policies adopted result in more consumers rather than more active citizens (GRZYBOWSKI, 2013, p. 99).

Thus it should be noted that according to the author, this discourse which turns the element of consumption into the central element in defining social classes is politically motivated (COHN, 2013). Thus, it is possible to imagine that, to this public, faced with the established context, the construction of each citizen's identity passes through the perception of consumption as an element of social recognition and acceptance. In this manner, we can imagine citizenship based on egoistic and hedonistic assumptions, following the preaching of, and amplified by, the liberal ideal.

THE “HEDONISTIC CITIZEN” AND THE CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATORY CITIZENSHIP

According to Farazmand (2012), there are currently at least five elements that challenge public administration in ways that will mark the identity of the future of this field. The author lists the following challenges: a) the globalization of capitalism (which is becoming more and more predatory); b) the weakness of governmental institutions and the emphasis on market capitalism; c) the current impoverished view of public administration as an intellectual pursuit; d) the success of the field itself; and e) technology. Thinking about public administration in this context is reflecting on themes such as the way in which the market has influenced it in its context. In truth, as we've pointed out, public administration is now filled with market enclaves. The central problem is the propagation of neoliberal thinking in this context and how public managers begin to imitate market management practices in the public sector.

In terms of the debate about the new middle class, there are studies that state that producing a hedonistic consumer culture in this layer of society will lead to individualism to the detriment of collective demands (RETONDAR, 2008; CANIATO and NASCIMENTO, 2010). In analyzing the problem raised in this study in terms of the argument proposed by Souza (2010), it may be perceived that stimulating citizenship to include consumption is yet another process of constructing inequality which depoliticizes and alienates participatory citizenship.

Taschner (2010), in confluence with the previously presented debate, emphasizes that consumption is also a mechanism of social integration. In this manner, "the possession of certain products and access to certain services have become instruments for the construction and reinforcement of social identities and, as a result, the recognition of the individual as a citizen" (TASCHNER, 2010, p. 49). In this conception, citizenship is understood as belonging to a given community or nation. But beyond this it "addresses the recognition of the humanity of an individual and his or her acceptance, not just as a member of that community, but as an equal, a visible being deserving of respect" (TASCHNER, 2010, p. 49). In this way, consumption in contemporary societies presents elements that go beyond the market fetishism pointed out by Marx, or even, the mere alienated consumption of goods. Consumption signifies, especially for the economically disadvantaged layers of these societies, being included, recognized and respected. Taschner (2010) affirms, therefore, that the relationship between consumption and participatory citizenship is one of "congruence and not of opposition."

According to the author:

It's possible to have (and certainly there are) consumers absorbed by the consumer culture and by the cultural and entertainment industry that sustains consumption, as Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) state, that can't perceive the reality beyond what is apparent and immediately visible. The preoccupation of Bauman (2001) with the lack of organized social participation on the part of citizens and the damage this causes to democracy, which the author sees as being linked to consumer behavior makes sense. We also shouldn't ignore the point made by Sennett (2006), in relation to contemporary citizens who make decisions and political choices according to the same logic that governs their consumption: they act as if they were buying products of a certain brand. But these facts shouldn't be assumed as being universal, because the impact of the consumer culture is not homogeneous in a society. In addition, they don't exhaust the spectrum of existing or possible relationships between consumer culture and citizenship today (TASCHNER, 2010, p. 49).

In light of this thinking, we should address the issue of the ambiguity also present in public policies that seek inclusion through consumption. Are they just spurring hedonism? Or individualism? Or consumerism? Or are they responding in some way to the complex meaning of participatory citizenship in our contemporary context? What does participatory citizenship mean these days? Are incentives toward consumption being given just by the State and by recent public policy? Or are they also responding to the ambiguities of the relationship between capital and culture?

It's evident that participatory citizenship as a concept and a political-normative horizon goes beyond consumption and it's in this direction that this work intends to address the problematic nature of this relationship. According to Marshall (1967) the classic concept of participatory citizenship involves access to civil, political and social rights. The development of participatory citizenship dates back to the 18th century, initiated by civil rights, later amplified by political rights conquered in the 19th century and social rights in the 20th century. It's important to point out that participatory citizenship is a process of constant construction, full of advances and setbacks. It's the result of political action and conditioned on the context and degree of institutional organization and adherence by political actors in every nation. Political and civil rights are recognized as rights of a "liberal" nature which seeks to guarantee the full functioning of capitalist relationships and a minimalist Modern State, capable of enforcing contracts and private property. They make formal rights concrete (TASCHNER, 2010).

Social rights, however, according to Carvalho (2004), continuing the argument of Marshall (1967), have to do with the division of socially generated wealth. Or in other words, as Taschner says (2010, p. 48),

[...] participatory citizenship is treated like a type of counterpoint to the structure of the social classes. If these divide society and are linked to inequality, participatory citizenship integrates and makes its members equal. In this sense, participatory citizenship is linked to the idea of belonging to a community.

Since the publication of Marshall's concept (1967), which has been widely accepted in the debate on this topic, there have been changes not only in social structures but also in conceptions of participatory citizenship. Thus two new generations of rights have emerged: the third generation of rights, known as diffuse rights, and the fourth, rights related to bioethics. Third generation rights

[...] deal with diffuse interests, such as the environment, quality of life, consumers, women, children and adolescents, the elderly, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities. They are not concerned with the individual, but rather certain social segments (TASCHNER, 2010, p. 48).

Participatory citizenship in Brazil has had singular aspects in its development. Carvalho (2004) demonstrates that social rights have been used as a strategy of legitimization by authoritarian governments and were broadened during this country's recent history during these periods, especially when political and civil rights were restricted. This kind of development places a series of limits on the effective exercise of participatory citizenship and popular sovereignty, especially in terms of social control and demands for guaranteeing rights and quality public policies for part of the population. In addition to this, Santos (1979) explores mediated citizenship, a long-term strategy that was initiated under the government of Getúlio Vargas, which sought to control lower class workers politically through unequal access to social rights. Thus, one can see that the question of participatory citizenship is quite complex and the ambiguities produced in relation to it by consumption may be considered another element, but not the cause of a problem which is more serious, deeper, and of longer duration, and whose roots are in political construction and Brazilian society, as various Brazilian interpreters of it have pointed out.

From the point of view of the development of participatory citizenship over the past few decades, Dagnino (2004) points to the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s which promoted the construction of a new meaning of citizenship as a critique of the model that was developed over previous decades and whose conception directly inspired the Constitution of 1988, known as the "Citizen's Constitution." This new citizenship, forged in the context of these movements, is expressed not only as a political strategy, but also as a cultural policy and is anchored by three constituent elements.

The first refers to the redefinition of the notion of rights based on the concept of "the right to have rights" (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 104). "This concept is not limited to legal provisions, or access to previously defined rights, or the effective implementation of abstract formal rights. It includes the invention/creation of new rights, which arise from specific battles and concrete practices" (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 104). In this way, this new citizenship implies a second element associated with the right to have rights. In the words of the author

The new citizenship, in contrast to traditionally accepted concepts of citizenship in Brazil, is not associated with a strategy by the dominant classes and the State to gradually incorporate excluded sectors politically, in order to maintain greater social integration or as a legal or political condition for the installation of capitalism. The new citizenship requires – and is thought of as consisting of in this process – the constitution of socially active subjects (political agents), defining what they consider to be their rights, and fighting for the recognition of these rights. In this sense, it is a strategy of those who aren't active citizens, the excluded, it's a participatory citizenship that's "emerging from this bottom layer" (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 104).

The third element has to do with going beyond the liberal paradigm of citizenship, given that it transcends "demands for access, inclusion, participation, being part of an already existing political system" (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 104). With this, it intends to consolidate its right to "participate in the definition of the system itself" (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 104). In this sense, the experiences generated by the Constitution of 1988 in relation to citizen participation sought explicitly to "reinforce the existence of citizen-subjects and a rights culture that includes the right to be a co-participant in local government" (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 105). Evidently, as Dagnino (2004) herself points out, this process is also full of ambiguities, advances and setbacks, but the sense of participation and demands for social movements and for a participative political movement consistent with these principles and the assumptions on which the constitution is based seek to deepen this notion of the citizen- subject.

Despite recognizing the advance of this conception of citizenship and its importance in relation to the guiding of the practices of the social movements, political parties and institutional changes that result from it which have been included in the Constitution of 1988, Dagnino (2004) emphasizes the "perverse confluence" of this movement in terms of its dispute over the meaning of the concepts of participation, civil society and citizenship with those proffered by the neoliberal movement, which has gained force in Brazil since the 1990s.

To the author, the neoliberal movement redefines the meaning of citizenship by reducing its “collective meaning” to an individualist notion. Based on this conception, this discourse establishes a connection between citizenship and the market. According to her, beginning in the 1990s and above all during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), “becoming a citizen came to mean one’s individual integration into the market as a consumer and producer” (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 106). This is the meaning that was adopted by FHC’s government in various programs to “acquire citizenship” in terms of the market, as well as an enormous offensive against social and universal rights, especially workers’ rights. To have rights in this context came to mean having privileges, and public policies associated with guaranteeing this universality were associated with “backwardness.”

During Lula’s government, the ambiguity in relation to the meanings of citizenship returned, but acquired different forms. If, on one hand, there was an emphasis and strong investment in classic universal social policies, like health, education, retirement benefits, welfare and unemployment benefits (FAGNANI, 2011), there was a strategy to diminish social inequality without threatening the established order, as Singer (2009) points out in describing Lulism; this author indicates that the electoral success of Lula was due to this formula, which combined developmental elements in economic and social policies with a mediated political strategy that didn’t stir up class contradictions that could have, indirectly, had a cultural and political impact on maintaining the logic of the market and consumption. However, great importance must be attached to the increase of the minimum wage, the reduction in the cost of living through price controls for basic items, affirmative policies, the fight against poverty, and the value placed on local markets, among other measures which were important in promoting the social inclusion of thousands of Brazilians and were relevant to the economy’s increased dynamism during this period of international crisis. The goal of these developmental policies was not to develop consumption, but rather to promote social inclusion, which is also understood to be a form of citizenship, above all in the fight against misery and inequality. However, considering the complex cultural and social context in a consumption society and the ambiguities related to the creation of citizenship in this country and its relationship with consumption, one of the effects of this policy was the acceleration of consumption. In this case, we can agree with Taschner (2010) that the impact was greater for the subaltern classes, precisely because they were the principal beneficiaries of these poverty reduction policies and were the ones who lacked, for superstructural reasons, recognition and dignity as citizens.

As has been well demonstrated by Tenório, Villela, Dias et al. (2008), participatory citizenship reflects the gamut of democratic processes which guarantee individual freedom in every sphere of life, or in other words, seek a transformational logic of the individual. In analyzing consumer culture – when induced by the State, but it is also influenced by the subject’s needs and cultural context – it may be perceived that consumption can become a channel for social inclusion.

In this context, Grzybowski (2013, p. 98) presents a greater challenge for social policy in terms of the country’s concept of development, tying it into the critique aimed at the emergence of the “new middle class.” According to the author,

[...] making social policies merely conditional and dependent on economic growth for their viability ends up placing a limit on possible developmental changes and the search for sustainability. Even worse, social policies stop being a strategy used to spread broader participation in economic as well as political processes, offering more people access to full participatory citizenship – its real inspiration. It’s not the universalization of rights and social emancipation that are in play, but rather the mitigation of the more perverse effects, without transforming the exclusionary logic that is based on misery, poverty and inequality. [...] The social policies adopted minimize these effects, but don’t change their causes (GRZYBOWSKI, 2013, p. 98).

The issue of aligning social inclusion with the consumer perspective would be simply helping to maintain the place of phenomena such as inequality and poverty in our social fabric. To say that more people are included in society through consumption is minimizing the social effects of the social inequality that exists in Brazil, and simply helps people confuse the idea of participatory citizenship with monetary inclusion in the consumer market. In other words, it would help people bridge class distances through consumption, or the illusion that consumption puts people in a higher class and can enjoy the benefits that capital offers.

However, it can be seen based on Bourdian theory, more specifically the concept of *habitus*, indicators that, despite the ability to be part of the monetary market of consumption, the poorer classes can’t consume the symbolic elements present in

the social capital as well as the cultural capital of the higher classes. In this sense, traditional middle classes end up distancing themselves from the symbolic representation of the masses by seeking an art that is assumed to be legitimate. In regard to this, we can appreciate the broad contribution made by Bourdieu (2007) in the understanding of the consumer society by considering that economic capital is just one of the elements that define classes.

Therefore power relationships such as domination, being the intersection of power relationships with various forms of organized actions that favor the ability of individuals to elaborate strategies, don't go beyond relationships of social inequality. (SOUZA, 2004; VASCONCELLOS, 2002). This means that in promoting the consumer culture, the State comes to contribute to "the ideal of being and belonging" based "on the activity of consumption as a channel for social inclusion." However, it can be perceived beforehand that this type of inclusion is "superficial inclusion." In this sense, "by imagining the feeling that this emerging class feels in terms of belonging through consumption, [...] changes in consumption patterns alter the possibilities and ways in which participatory citizenship can be exercised" (VICENTE, 2013, p. 28-29). This perception is consistent with the argument presented by Grzybowski (2013, p. 98) which is that "the main objective of adopted social policies appears to be monetary inclusion in the consumer market."

From the perspective of Bauman (2007), the State would thus be helping to create a hedonistic vision of citizenship. Or in other words, "the hedonistic citizen" denies the other elements that form a class perspective and even participatory citizenship and comes to see consumption "as something necessary to achieve happiness and success" (HEMAIS, CASOTTI and ROCHA, 2013, p. 201). Consumption, in this manner, is seen as a species of immediate gratification, giving meaning to the subject's life, as a "type of passport to eternity, consuming frenetically is to have the certainty of a pilgrim on the road to paradise" (ROCHA, 2005, p. 127).

Submerged then in this society of hyperconsumerism, individuals tend not to perceive reality beyond what is directly apparent, and come to make their political choices according to the same logic that they use to acquire products, which culminates in a lack of organized social participation which causes incalculable harm to democracy (BAUMAN, 2001b; TASCHNER, 2010).

In this sense, materialistic and individualistic values become necessary to analyze the perspective of hedonistic consumption. Within the context of this work, isn't it reasonable to assert that the State through public policy and the stimulation of consumption is producing/creating a category of "hedonistic citizens"? In the face of this, what should we make of its co-participation in the production of the public good, of social control, of social inclusion, of the public interest? In light of these reflections, our interest in writing this essay is clearly not to demonize the actions of the Brazilian government, above all the current government, but rather to question how we construct the paths we travel and to invite us to reflect carefully about the bridges between consumption and participatory citizenship.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the discussions presented in this essay, we suggest that producing a hedonistic consumption culture in certain classes of Brazilian society, especially within the context of the "new middle class," can result in an emphasis on individualism to the detriment of collective demands. Or in other words, the public policies implemented during this period may have consequences, even if they are indirect, that lead to the stimulation of citizenship through inclusion by consumption, which is considered a process which creates citizenship which is characterized by inequality, depoliticization and alienation. To say that through consumption, people are included in the participatory citizenship process minimizes the social effects due to social inequality in our country and helps confuse the exercise of participatory citizenship with monetary inclusion in the consumer market. In other words, this would contribute to diminishing the distances between the classes through consumption, or the illusion that consumption will promote some of these people to a higher class, in which they'll be able to enjoy the benefits that economic capital has to offer.

The main challenge that imposes itself in this context is the formation of participatory citizenship that can help diminish social inequality. While subjects are seen as consumers, or even as customers, the public sphere becomes single-minded, mentally impoverished and oppressive, and when principles are based only on monetary exchanges or object-signs, or even the cult of individualism and hedonism, it is difficult to establish a dialogue that seeks to create participatory citizenship. In terms of

this point, it's necessary to come up with practices that will bring public policies closer to human experience, which will provide meaning in which action is not only oriented towards economics.

The study performed by Neri (2008) is just one of a number of studies that legitimizes the performance discourse present in the context of public policy. However, as Bauman (2007) points out, a consumer society trades values for performance, substituting them like merchandise, making them commodities. In this context, phenomena such as superficiality and "now" culture appear as elements that characterize this performance logic, because consumption is based on the values of usage, exchange and also signs. The moment an object becomes obsolete, it becomes disposable. The agents that make up public administration should take care, because given the way in which consumption has taken control of public policy as well as management strategy and tools, over time they will come to be valued for their usage and exchange value. Thus it's possible that we'll have instruments that will never really be used in public management because they're considered obsolete or even disposable. How long will we be able to live with this culture without being affected by this? This is a practical and elementary issue for researchers and professionals in this field to reflect on.

In seeking to understand consumption from an interdisciplinary perspective manifested mainly in a socioeconomic and cultural context, the adopted approach helps articulate issues related to how the formulation and implementation of public policy should be managed in the face of the challenges posed. It should be said that it would be very daring, and perhaps flippant, to state that the social policies of Lula's government led to the situation that we have analyzed in this study, given that its origins predate his government and are more complex. It's also important to state that participatory citizenship as a project of social and political emancipation is much more a political process under construction, based on social movements, rather than a banner carried by the State, no matter which in this capitalist and liberal horizon. Thus, some public policies can even promote economic emancipation and instigate some level of political organization, but taken to their ultimate consequences, this emancipation may lead to the rupture of the current order, which would be a contradiction within the State, as pointed out by Offe (1984).

In this way, returning to Brazil, the place of participatory citizenship in public policy remains in dispute and always has been. And the role of the State, as a structure, is and always will be, under the conditions imposed by the system, which is not the subject of this study, to maintain order. Participatory citizenship in this sense also serves this purpose: to include those excluded by the system and to make inequality less bearable, not in the sense of emancipation, but to avoid ruptures, rebellions and any unbearable questioning of the system. It has been thus ever since social rights began to be constructed in Brazil. And it has continued to be thus under recent governments, even when they have increased access to participatory citizenship for the poor and miserable. According to Singer (2009), Lulism has been successful precisely because it has associated the overcoming of inequality with the maintenance of order. And according to this logic, promoting inclusion via consumption couldn't have come at a better time.

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