

CALL FOR PAPERS

CAMBIO

La rivista

Cambio. Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali is a peer-reviewed and open-access electronic journal now in its ninth year.

It aims to promote theoretical and analytical debates at international level arising from contributions focused on processes of change that are affecting present-day individuals and societies at both local and global levels.

CAMBIO's main inspiration is sociological, but it has deliberately chosen to place itself in the open field of the social sciences, convinced that there can be no real depth of specialization without acceptance of the challenge of complexity, a challenge that must be faced in any attempt to interpret, understand, explain or comprehend.

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The Paradigm of Informality in Contemporary Capitalism

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In the Seventies, studies on the informal economy became a recognised but limited area of socio-economic analysis, defined in contraposition to the formal economy almost in a reductive manner. However, the informal economy has become key to understanding specific territories characterised by a low-value added tertiary sector: the "Souths" of the world with working classes living in urban areas, with what remains of peasant household economies; with the most marginal economic sectors such as small retail businesses, construction and self-construction, caregiving services and with manual workers. These studies were really important for reflecting on the autonomous status of the informal economy and for their ability to see "other economies", however they also had the paradoxical effect of downgrading the informal economy from the agenda of major issues relating to the functioning of capitalism. In the mainstream discourse, the informal sector was considered like a temporary strategy within the segments of society that were considered not very dynamic and backward, like a useful way to guarantee the survival of working classes, but unable to create economic value and social transformation. Thus, the role of informality as an irreducible element of the capitalist economy was underestimated.

This framework changed in the Eighties, when the informal sector was placed at the core of the capitalistic dynamics again, initially thanks to the studies on extra work as a form of income integration for the male breadwinner and the analyses on "shadow work" as strategy to by-pass the rigidities of the Fordist labour-market. Subsequent studies on the flexibilization of work and the deregulation in the post-Fordist economy proposed informality as an ambivalent and transversal element again and they allowed to overcome the dichotomous vision between formal and informal economy that had distinguished these studies in previous years.

In the last years this trend has been strengthened with *platform economy studies* that show how the traditional boundaries of work between heteronomy and autonomy, subordination and independence are increasingly fickle, they move more and more towards kinds of promise economy, unpaid work and *travail interstitial*. In contemporary capitalism, informality and the informal sector increasingly become privileged viewpoints:

- On one hand, the embedding of informal into the formal economy through socio-economic and territorial de-regulation dynamics, was able to create new value and profit, incorporating in an ambivalent way the axiological values sphere in the economic one, both for consumers and workers/producers. Regarding the latter, the need for greater autonomy and freedom at work, comes today to terms with a capitalism that was strengthened by giving value to free labour and several kinds of informality: from the classic independent workers to the new atypical employment contracts, up to the platform workers, passing through the rhetoric of the freely chosen cooperation. The critique to subordination has paradoxically paved the way to new practices of exploitation. With regards to consumers, the aspiration to satisfy new needs concerning the production and quality of goods that refer to axiological values such as fairness, authenticity and local production, tends to hybridize with its commercial valorization, blurring the boundary between what is produced merely with a market orientation and what responds to other purposes (we can think of the ambivalences linked to phenomena such as Eataly or the sale of fair trade products within the large-scale retail trade).
- On the other hand, informality, with its ability to reproduce and readjust itself, is a transformative force for capitalism. It is able to open unexpected spaces for de-commodification and reappropriation of ethical meaning, through which paths of individual and collective subjectivation can be built. This happens both when informality is a political strategy, chosen and followed to reaffirm the moral economics against a disembedded economic vision (think for example of movements such as Via Campesina or Genuino Clandestino), and when informality is a daily practice which, with its continuous reproduction, indirectly ends up unhinging the institutional spaces of the self-regulating market, generating other things (e.g. co-production experiences, time banking, community cooperatives) that can give life to circuits of moral economy and reciprocity.

Deadline: **31/03/2021**

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Lately, these dynamics have taken on a new centrality due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, triggering new studies and reflections. Beyond the dramatic effects produced on global public health, the coronavirus brings out the contradictions within the contemporary capitalist system, showing the tension between the reproduction of capital and new types of subjectivation, ending in the rise of some hybridization processes.

Many countries have resorted to the lockdown in order to face the epidemiological crisis. This has led to sudden transformations of work, establishing new priorities and new lifestyles. The experience of confinement has merged with remote working rhetoric, rising processes of digitization of work and opening new questions about the meaning of the informal sector and informalization processes. The massive transformation of houses into workplaces took place without any problematization, assuming that being productive continued to be a necessity.

If working from home is the new mantra around the world, this has often represented a new colonization of spaces of social life. Vulnerable groups have often paid the highest costs. For example, working mothers paid the price for the unprecedented coexistence between the temporality of domestic care and the temporality of work with a reconfiguration of the age-old issue of the "double presence". Young precarious workers were often forced to bring professional life into their bedroom as living in small flats made it difficult to separate personal and working time.

These phenomena have not spared the academic work, whose autonomy and flexibility have been caged within the time-schedule of online platforms. Thus, we witness the capture of the informal, free working time by capitalism, already masterfully highlighted by Anna Tsing at a macro-sociological level, and that here assumes an equally powerful micro-sociological character.

But the pandemic emergency has also highlighted the strategic relevance of specific sectors such as care services, large-scale distribution, home delivery and / or agriculture and other activities based on low productivity and high labour intensity, where the so-called *bad works* are positioned and where the boundary between the formal and informal is loose. These workers suddenly became key workers, but paradoxically this did not result in an improvement in their working conditions or wages, nor a recognition of their rights.

Within this framework, **this call for papers aims to collect theoretical or empirical contributions on the subject of informality** with a multidisciplinary approach that allows to analyse this phenomenon through different but complementary perspectives, such as sociology, philosophy, cultural anthropology, history and economy.

On the theoretical level, we call for contributions that explore the analytical status of the concept of the informal sector and informality, in light of transformations within contemporary capitalism, overcoming some interpretative traps such as the idea of a "double value" of the informal sector (backward and exploitation vs innovation and growth) which forces a dichotomous approach, unable to see the multidimensionality of an ambivalent, redundant and polysemic phenomenon. We welcome reflections on the evolution of this concept in relation to the wide literature of the seventies and eighties, to show breakaways and continuity, still too underestimated. We welcome analyses about the relationship between the informal sector, market and economy, capable to show theoretical advances with respect to the idea of informality as "other market" and/or "other economy".

On the empirical level, we invite authors to reflect on the following questions:

- The ambiguities of the new and old precarious working figures such as self-employed, atypical workers, new service workers in the cooperative sector, platform workers, voluntary workers and free workers. We want to explore that grey area of informality in which the boundary between gratuitousness and marketability becomes uncertain, creating new forms of exploitation, both direct and speculative.
- The role of informality in the reconfiguration of territorial welfare, paying particular attention to employment in the third sector and voluntary work.
- The contradictions linked to "bricolage" between marketing needs and ethical urgencies within the capitalist production and distribution networks. In this space we can see, for example, the regulatory impacts of certifications for quality standards such as PDO or PGI, the conventionalization processes of organic production and, in general, the formalization of consumer networks -and/or agri-food chains- which are born in informal contexts or based on specific ethical conditions and subsequently become market oriented.
- The bottom up initiatives that underlying local economic circuits based on proximity, reciprocity and "moral" economies, for example experiences of self-organization and co-production, time banks, complementary currencies, community cooperatives, ethical supply chains and sustainable production creating an alliance between producers, consumers and workers.
- The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic both in micro terms, i.e. those small informal adjustments that allowed life and work to continue despite the emergency, and in macro terms, i.e. the accelerations towards processes of informalisation of economy and the scenarios that will arise from it.

Articles submitted to Cambio should not have been previously published or accepted to be published in other journals. Manuscripts for the monographic section, have to be sent by

31/03/2021

Please, submit your article directly on our website:

<https://oaj.fupress.net/index.php/cambio>

Decisions on the publication of articles are carried out by the Editorial Board, on the basis of the evaluation collected through a double-blind peer review. Submitted articles should run between 30,000 and 50,000 characters and provided with: a) an **English abstracts**, focused the main points addressed; b) **some keywords** (from 3 to 6) that best represent the content.