

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This article analyzes entrepreneurship in historical perspective in order to understand the relation between this social phenomenon and the ideas that prevailed in each time from the consolidation of modern capitalism in the nineteenth century, with emphasis on the context of postmodernity, in which the concept of entrepreneurship assumes connotations that show its centrality. To support the analysis, it was used the exploratory bibliographic research methodology, with a qualitative approach. The theoretical contribution was provided by reference works of historiography and sources specialized in entrepreneurship. The historical approach adopted allowed to confirm that the privileged locus of entrepreneurship in contemporary society was inherited from the process of flexible accumulation that coined modern capitalism. It was concluded that the configuration and atmosphere of contemporary capitalism favors the dissemination of the entrepreneurial behavior as far as they value the protagonism and the autonomous action, elements related to the notion of subjectivity that establishes the postmodern perception.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is an undeniable important phenomenon in contemporary society, due to its global dimension and also the great impact it has on people's live and businesses, as well as the huge relevance it has acquired in the current organization of the conomy.

The present article aims to analyze entrepreneurship in historical perspective, in order to identify the elements that converged to different concepts in each time and conjuncture. It is a question of demonstrating how polysemy of the word have followed the historical and social transformations that have happened since the beginning of modern capitalism until the current scenario of technological complexity of postmodern society.

In this perspective, we sought to understand particularly the proeminence and the dissemination of the word entrepreneurship today and its connection with the the precepts of postmodern society.

Besides evidencing the unequivocal centrality of entrepreneurship in the contemporary scenario, it is understood that the analysis presented enriches the reflections and discussions about the topic by proposing a historical appreciation to reconstitute the concept path as well as understands the transformations that outline the present context.

1.1 Objective

The approach adopted for the development of the analysis had the objective to favor the understanding of the relation between entrepreneurship and the predominant ideas in the different historical periods.

Therefore, we sought to outline a framework that highlighted the main characteristics of each era, from the consolidation of modern capitalism in the nineteenth century with special attention to the socioeconomic context of postmodernity in which the change of

the working paradigm and the sophistication of technological base gave to the entrepreneurship concept connotations that show its centrality.

1.2 Methodology

To give support to the analysis, an exploratory bibliographic research with a qualitative approach was used, based on historiographical works of reference that have regarded the socio-economic transformations of western world. In addition, specialized literature resources were considered to provide a map of commonly used entrepreneurship definitions, a neologism gradually integrated to Portuguese language and largely used in contemporary academic and business areas – but also in the media and colloquial context in recent years.

On the other hand, the word “empreendedor” (*entrepreneur*) derives from the verb “empreender” (*to undertake*) which was first seen in Portuguese in the fifteenth century and comes from the Latin term *imprehendere*. According to an etymological research made by Cunha (1986), the term “empreendedor” (*entrepreneur*) would have emerged as a noun in the sixteenth century. But Houaiss (2009), mentions the initial dating of the verb “empreender” (*to undertake*) in 1619, in the Latin format *imprehendo* or *impraehendo*, with the meaning of “trying to perform a task”.

Stettiner (2013) emphasizes that, in Portuguese language dictionaries, the word entrepreneur has different meanings according the French word *entrepreneur*, usually pointed out as the origin of the term, because is not necessarily connected to the entrepreneur, the person who starts a business , but to the idea of undertaking, whose definition might mean to perform, to take a risk, to work out, to outline, to experience or to put something into practice. This semantic variation of the term is summarized in the word entrepreneurship, which “is related to professionals who are able to bring about changes in the environment where they live as a consequence of their personal efforts” (STETTINER, 2013, p. 18-19).

Recently, in the same direction, Sebrae (2017) has embraced, as an institutional view, the following definition: “Entrepreneurship is the skill for designing, building, managing and developing projects and businesses, both in the social and business environment”.

The word entrepreneurship also has a close relationship with the idea of innovation, a widely disseminated approach. However, such an association is not a contemporary formulation, but it already has great relevance in Schumpeter's writings, *Theory of economic development*, from the beginning of the twentieth century, in which the definition of entrepreneur is: "the one that destroys the existing economic order by introducing new products and services, by the creation of new forms of organization or by the exploitation of new resources" (SCHUMPETER, 1934, p. 86).

Finally, and more closely, the connection between the terms was also highlighted by Peter Drucker, who emphasizes this interdependence by stating that:

Innovation is the specific tool of entrepreneurs, the means by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or a different service. It is capable of being presented as a discipline, capable of being learned, capable of being practiced. Entrepreneurs need to search purposefully for the sources of innovation, the changes and their symptoms that indicate opportunities for successful innovation. And they need to know and to apply the principles of successful innovation (DRUCKER, 1985, p. 20).

1.3.2 Conceptual design

Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism, classic of Max Weber's economic sociology, was the first study to demonstrate, at the beginning of the twentieth century, how entrepreneurship and, specially, the entrepreneur's performance, are mainly important in the consolidation of capitalism.

From a dissonant and broad perspective, Weber goes beyond the conventional notion of economic accumulation as the former cause of capitalism and assigns its emergence to a particular kind of mentality, to the inclination of a special group.

The question of the motive forces in the expansion of modern capitalism is not in the first instance a question of the origin of the capital sums which were available for capitalistic uses, but, above all, of the development of the spirit of capitalism (WEBER, 2005, p. 31).

This mindset and this group that build up the “spirit of capitalism” find their largest expression in the entrepreneur’s figure, to whom Weber (2005, p. 31) assigns “an extraordinarily strong character” and “well-defined and highly developed ethical qualities”.

He defines entrepreneurs as "grown men in the hard school of life, calculating and risking at the same time, and above all they are sober and trustworthy, insightful and totally devoted to their business" and asserts that:

Nothing else could have given him the strength to overcome the innumerable obstacles, above all the infinitely more intensive work which is demanded of the modern entrepreneur. But these are ethical qualities of quite a different sort from those adapted to the traditionalism of the past (WEBER, 2005, p. 31).

This set of individual qualities would be the entrepreneur’s defining traits from the bourgeoisie and they would match with the values cultivated by the Protestantism of the period:

With the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God’s grace and being visibly blessed by Him, the bourgeois business man, as long as he remained within the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so (WEBER, 2005, p. 120).

Into this issue, it is important to explain that the qualities listed are indeed idealized because they represent an ideal type of socially constructed and historically situated individual. Therefore, the existence of an entrepreneur as described by Weber is only possible in modern capitalism, since, as Martes (2018, p. 258) observes:

This unique man is, according to Weber, a *social type*. And, so, it would be deceitful to conclude that, in reference to the issue entrepreneur, Weber privileges the individual to the detriment of the socio-economic context or of the institutions. The entrepreneur is the fruit of a specific

society: the modern capitalist. However, the capitalism over which Weber goes, is the one of the end of the XIX Century, the one which brings the mark of resistance of the mainly agrarian traditional institutions against the macanization, the industrialization, and that for its magnitude and opposition, have contributed to transform, some times, the entrepreneur into a heroe.

Underlying this understanding it is found the concept of entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon, which relies the definition of social fact assumed by Durkheim (1982, p. 56-57):

A social fact is identifiable through the power of external coercion which it exerts or is capable of exerting upon individuals [...] it exists independently of the particular forms that it may assume in the process of spreading itself within the group. (DURKHEIM, 1982, p. 56-57).

Weber (2005, p. 31) also points out the relationship between entrepreneurship and innovation by recognized that the entrepreneur is the "first innovator" of early capitalism, a relation equally evidenced by Durkheim (1982, p. 51-52).

As an industrialist nothing prevents me from working with the processes and methods of the previous century, but if I do I will most certainly ruin myself. Even when in fact I can struggle free from these rules and successfully break them, it is never without being forced to fight against them. Even if in the end they are overcome, they make their constraining power sufficiently felt in the resistance that they afford. There is no innovator, even a fortunate one, whose ventures do not encounter opposition of this kind.

Similarly, the link between entrepreneurship and innovation is also highlighted in Schumpeter's work, in which the entrepreneur is identified as a type of special person who is capable of making new combinations:

In the first place it is a question of a type of conduct and of a type of person in so far as this conduct is accessible in a very unequal measure and to relatively few people, so that it constitutes their outstanding characteristic. [...] Secondly, the type of conduct in question not only differs from the other in its object, "innovation" being peculiar to it, but also in that it presupposes aptitudes differing in kind and not only in degree from those of mere rational economic behavior (SCHUMPETER, 1934, p. 81, footnote²).

In the author's view, the entrepreneur is an essential actor in promoting economic development specially because he introduces innovation:

Development in our sense is a distinct phenomenon, entirely foreign to what may be observed in the circular flow or in the tendency towards equilibrium. It is spontaneous and discontinuous change in the channels of the flow, disturbance of equilibrium, which forever alters and displaces the equilibrium state previously existing. (SCHUMPETER, 1934, p. 64)

According to Schumpeter (1934), the entrepreneur is the one who is capable of making new combinations in productive ways in order to promote economic development. He highlights individual qualities in the following passage:

[...] in economic life action must be taken without working out all the details of what is to be done. Here the success of everything depends upon intuition, the capacity of seeing things in a way which afterwards proves to be true, even though it cannot be established at the moment, and of grasping the essential fact, discarding the unessential, even though one can give no account of the principles by which this is done. (SCHUMPETER, 1934, p. 84)

Taking what Martes (2010) points out, the Schumpeterian entrepreneur is a specific type of agent who overcomes obstacles and any resistance to impose new production patterns. Just like Weber, Schumpeter conceives the entrepreneur is not only a single isolated individual, but a social being from the typical modern capitalism.

In a recent text, Chiavenato (2007, p. 3) presents the entrepreneur as "the person who starts and/or operates a business to carry out an idea or personal project, taking risks and responsibilities and continuously innovating".

The author considers recent studies and proposes a very broad definition, which includes not only the founders of companies, but also the members of the second or third generation of family businesses and the new owners of existing companies:

The entrepreneur is not only the founder of new enterprises or the builder of new businesses. He is the energy of economy, the resource lever, the talent boost, the dynamics of ideas. Even more, he is the one that sniffs out opportunities, and he needs to be fast, seizing fortuitous opportunities, before other adventurers do (CHIAVENATO, 2007, p. 3).

Finally, Chiavenato (2007) refers to Weber's and Schumpeter's ideas and identifies the "entrepreneurial spirit" in all people willing to take risks, continually innovate and recognizes the social dimension of entrepreneurship:

Entrepreneurs are popular heroes of the business world. They provide jobs, introduce innovations and encourage economic growth. They are not simply providers of goods or services, but sources of energy that take risks in a changing economy, transformation, and growth. Thousands of people, from young people to adults and from all walks of life, continually open up new businesses on their own and add the dynamic leadership that leads to economic development and the progress of nations (CHIAVENATO, 2007, p. 4).

2. Contextualization

2.1 Entrepreneurship in historical perspective

The understanding of entrepreneurship in historical perspective requires the spot analysis of the main characteristics of each stage of capitalism since its consolidation in the nineteenth century.

It is assumed that the historical processes restrict and condition to the ways man acts in society. Therefore, the understanding of entrepreneurship as a kind of social phenomenon historically built depends on the identification of certain phases of capitalism as well as the consecutive transformation it has passed by through time up to its current format.

2.2 Brief journey of modern capitalism

Conceptually, capitalism is defined as an economic system based on the legitimacy of private property as well as in the unrestricted freedom of trade and industry, considering profit its main goal (HOUAISS, 2009).

In a modern format, capitalism emerged and consolidated itself in Europe between 1848 and the early 1870s, period marked by the European liberal revolutions and by an exceptional economic expansion in which “a significant minority of ‘developed’ countries became industrial economies” (HOBSEBAM, 1995a, p. 44).

Based on the economic liberalism, that focus on individual initiative, the industrialization process started in Europe is rapidly advancing and spreading to other regions, outlining a course that, according to Hobsbawm (1995a, p. 48), in a few years would lead to the creation of “single expanded world”. The author states that:

Never has been a more overwhelming consensus among economists or indeed among intelligent politicians and administrators about the recipe for economic growth: economic liberalism. The remaining institutional barriers to the free movement of the factors of production, to free enterprise and to anything which could conceivably hamper its profitable operation, fell before a world-wide onslaught (HOBSEBAM, 1995a, p. 50).

The fast and remarkable spread of the capitalist economy was considered by Hobsbawm (1995a, p. 48) “the most important expression” of the modern period and shows great confidence of its protagonists in the liberal principles that support it:

Never was economic euphoria among businessmen higher than in the early 1870s (HOBSEBAM, 1995a, p. 61).

Capitalism now had the entire world at its disposal, and the expansion of both international trade and international investment measures the zest with which it proceeded to capture it. (HOBSEBAM, 1995a, p. 49)

The historian Nicolau Sevcenko (2001b) explains that the modern capitalism was built and consolidated according to liberal ideology:

In the context of liberal thinking, the sense of the primacy of the individual and individualism prevails as a free agent on whose initiative depends the dynamics of the system. Therefore, the whole system is structured in such a way as to leave the way open for individual initiatives.

At the same time, Weber (2005, p. 23) recognizes the “capitalism spirit”, understood as “a defined standard of life”, a rational behavior based on the idea of vocation, which encouraged its emergence and empowered the entrepreneurial action:

[...] we provisionally use the expression spirit of (modern) capitalism to describe that attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically in the manner which we have illustrated by the example of Benjamin Franklin. This, however, is justified by the historical fact that attitude of mind has on the one hand found its most suitable expression in capitalistic enterprise, while on the other the enterprise has derived its most suitable motive force from the spirit of capitalism. (WEBER, 2005, p. 27-28)

From this angle, it is possible to mention that the construction of capitalism arises from a certain rationality which is not only about profit, but the accumulation: "the profit is always renewed through permanent, capitalist and rational enterprise" (WEBER, 2005, p. 7).

This rationality, inspired by the protestant ethic, constitutes the essence, the *ethos* of modern capitalism, and acted as a decisive element for its consolidation by making possible "the rational development of private initiative with fixed capital and certain calculations" (WEBER, 2005, p. 7) typical of this modality.

In Weberian idea, modern capitalism constitutes an ideal type, a concept constructed from the simplification and generalization of reality, "an abstraction that allows to characterize the historical periods and the great social arrangements" (DUROSKI, ROUSSE, 2005, p. 491). The same may be applied to the entrepreneur:

The ideal type of the capitalistic entrepreneur [...] avoids ostentation and unnecessary expenditure, as well as conscious enjoyment of his power [...] And the joy and pride of having given employment to numerous people, of having had a part in the economic progress of his home town in the sense referring to figures of population and volume of trade which capitalism associated with the word, all these things obviously are part of the specific and undoubtedly idealistic satisfactions in life to modern men of business (WEBER, 2005, p. 33-37).

Considering this, the classical entrepreneur is, by definition, "the fruit of a specific society: the modern capitalist" (MARTES, 2010, p.5).

In Weber's words (2005, p. 28):

At the beginning of modern times it was by no means the capitalistic entrepreneurs of the commercial aristocracy, who were either the sole or the predominant bearers of the attitude we have here called the spirit of capitalism.²³ It was much more the rising strata of the lower industrial middle classes [bourgeoisie], [...], who often rose from very modest circumstances. (WEBER, 2005, p. 28)

Thus, at this historical moment, a "specifically bourgeois economic ethic" emerges (WEBER, 2005, p. 120) as one of the constitutive elements not only of modern capitalism, but also of all modern culture, which supports and defines the entrepreneur of the time period:

The bourgeois businessman, as long as he remained within the bonds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so. (WEBER, 2005, p. 120)

Based on this understanding, the notion of entrepreneurship that would be historically consecrated and still finds reminiscence in the social imaginary, particularly in the figure of the entrepreneur, is inseparable from the historical context and the elements that framed and formed modern capitalism:

For the global triumph of capitalism is the major theme of history on the decades after 1848. It was the triumph of a society which believed that economic growth rested on competitive private enterprise, on success in buying everything in the cheapest Market (including labour) and selling in the dearest. An economy so based, and therefore resting naturally on the sound foundations of a bourgeoisie composed of those whom energy, merit and intelligence had raised to their position and kept there (HOBBSAWM, 1995a, p. 13)

Hobsbawm (1995a, p. 17) sums up that, in its origin, capitalism can be understood as "a historically specific form of bourgeois society in its liberal version". This perception has already given signals of the dynamic character of this economic system, which would change over the time in terms of complexity and configuration, although it could maintain its original essence and foundations in different versions.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in spite of the "ideas and beliefs that seemed to legitimize and ratify it: in reason, science, progress" (Hobsbawm, 1995a, p. 12-13), liberal modern capitalism acquires quite different profiles, with restrictions on free

initiative, big state intervention and formation of industrial corporations through cartels, trusts and monopolies.

Hobsbawm (1995a) explains that the post-liberal capitalism of this period presents four significant changes: development of a new technological base (electricity, iron, petroleum, chemical industry); creation of the market economy, with mass production and consumption and emphasis on durable goods; geopolitical change, marked by the competition between nations, and subjugation of the peripheral countries and economic protectionism due to the growing strengthening of the states.

This set of transformations consolidates imperialism as a political practice and forms the ideal environment for monopolistic capitalism of the early twentieth century, in which the role and profile of the entrepreneur are also modified.

Schumpeter (1934) understands and translates the core of this new context by defining the entrepreneur as the one who promotes development precisely by introducing changes in production patterns. As Harvey notes (1992, p. 17):

The entrepreneur, in Schumpeter's view a heroic figure, was the creative destroyer *par excellence* because the entrepreneur was prepared to push the consequences of technical and social innovation to vital extremes. And it was only through such creative heroism that human progress could be assured.

In the following years, during the two world wars, a huge global economic crisis shook even the strongest capitalist countries. However, capitalism "was a permanent and continuous revolutionary force" (HOBBSAWM, 1995b, p. 23) and from 1945 to 1973, the world would see a new great expansion known as "The Golden Age of Capitalism".

[...] In the course of the 1950's many people, especially in the increasingly prosperous 'developed' countries, became aware that times were indeed strikingly improved, especially if their memories reached back to the years before the Second World War. [...] Yet it was not until the great boom was over, in the disturbed seventies, waiting for the traumatic eighties, [...] the world of developed capitalismo, had passed through an altogether exceptional phase in its history; perhaps a unique

one. [...] The gold glowed more brightly against the dull or dark background of the subsequent decades. (HOBBSAWM, 1995b, p. 257-258)

This movement must be understood as something related to the capitalist dynamics, whereas the different phases of the development of capitalism are associated "to the way this unstable system has generated regular crises, which so far have restructured the system itself" (HOBBSAWM, 1997/1998, p. 76).

In this sense, at the end of the twentieth century, capitalism in force was significantly different from the one designed by Weber because its background was a globalized world, no longer an Eurocentric world which witnessed the disintegration of previously established patterns, which leads Hobsbawm (1995b, p. 11) a states: "However, there can be no serious doubt that in the lates 1980s and early 1990s an era in the world history ended and a new one began."

2.3 Transition to contemporary capitalism

In one of the works that best describes the organization and the logic of contemporary society, Castells (1999, p. 21) reports that the end of the second millennium constitutes a *sui generis* historical period, a "rare range of history" in which a conjunction of historical events of unquestionable importance and an unprecedented increase in technology radically alter the world scene.

At the moment, when "the social changes are as hard as the technological and economical transformations", the capitalism system passes by a substantial restructuring process, mainly by a "flexibility of management" (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 22) that inaugurates the contemporary form of capitalism, also named flexible or late capitalism.

According to Harvey (1992, p. 117), the capitalism transformation by the end of twentieth century may be seen in "great number of radical changing traits in the work

process, consumption habits, geographical and geopolitical configurations, powers and state practices”, events that, at the same time, promoted the change in the capitalist regime of accumulation that describes the current modality.

This change, named flexible accumulation, while keeps the essential elements of capitalism, deeply modifies the society structure and organization of the productive system, because:

[...] It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation. (HARVEY, 1992b, p. 147)

Flexibilization neither disrupts capitalism nor modifies its basic rules of operation, which continue to perform to guarantee the system as a whole, although it gives capitalism new forms:

[...] most interesting about the current situation is the way which capitalism is becoming ever more tightly organized *through* dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible responses in labour markets, labour processes, and consumers markets, all accompanied by hefty doses of institutional, product, and technological innovation. (HARVEY, 1992, p. 159)

This permanent reorganization, initially restrict to production, has influenced other society areas and has started to affect behavior and social relationships, also configuring a transformation of culture, personified now in postmodernism: the "cultural logic" that underlies contemporary capitalism. (JAMESON, 1984 apud HARVEY, 1992, p. 65).

The concept of entrepreneur, as the product of this historical moment, is not apart from these changes. It undergoes through some redefinitions that show the new *status* of entrepreneurship in postmodern capitalist society.

2.4 Entrepreneurship in postmodernity

A proper understanding of entrepreneurship, as a social phenomenon, demands an identification of its relationship with other elements of the complex historic view of this time, usually called post modernity. These elements go far beyond technological innovation and comprehend economic and cultural globalization, the changing of productive system and all the modifications that fulfilled knowledge fields and human action, specially the work trends.

In this context, marked by the speed, simultaneity and magnitude of the transformations, the entrepreneurship construct acquires meaningful importance and assumes the character of ideology¹: it becomes itself the new *ethos* of capitalism.

In the new scenario, entrepreneurship becomes the ideology of the new spirit of capitalism, [...] the set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that contribute to justify and sustain this order, legitimizing the modes of action and the dispositions consistent with it (BOLTASNKI; CHIAPELLO, 2009, p. 42).

As a new *ethos*, entrepreneurship summarizes a set of values that influence the postmodern world view and communicates with the new social and economic relationships of contemporary capitalismo, which:

[...] is sustained by the dissemination of a system of beliefs, values and habits consistent with the organizational patterns imposed by flexible production and the need to create new social arrangements outside of wage relationships. The ideal of a labor society is giving way to the ideal of a society shaped by the ethos of entrepreneurship (COLBARI, 2007, p. 76).

¹ The term ideology has been used here as a system of ideas supported by a social group, which reflects, rationalizes, and defends one's own interests and institutional commitments, whether moral, religious, political or economic (HOUAISS, 1999).

Indeed, according to the postmodern jargon, the word entrepreneurship involves new and large possibilities of understanding which may include not only a proper professional worker who is praised for his “autonomy” in the corporate world but also the self-employed ones, consultants and micro and small company owners, variations that reflect the logic that privileges the flexible links and favors the new productive arrangements.

Considering its versatility and high level of representativeness, the word entrepreneurship has been systematically spread and, in a few decades, the contemporary notion of entrepreneur’s is already part of common sense.

Now, motivated by a “much more competitive” individualism (HARVEY, 1992), the culture of entrepreneurship becomes a trend in flexible capitalism and breaks its frames to several other areas as far as:

[...] characterizes not only business action, but realms of life as diverse as urban governance, the growth of informal sector production, labour market organization, research and development, and it has even reached into the nether corners of academic, literary, and artistic life (HARVEY, 1992, p. 171).

So, entrepreneurship is not anymore, the intrinsic quality of the rare and heroic figure of the modern capitalista, coming from a specific social category, but a pattern to be followed, a “cultural phenomenon” (DOLABELA, 1999, p. 28), which is ubiquitous in contemporary man life, including private life.

Foucault (2010, p. 224) points out that contemporary capitalism continuously demands everyone to become entrepreneur, so contemporary entrepreneur is, above all, an “entrepreneur of himself”.

The universality assigned to the notion of entrepreneur, as well as the possibility of becoming a precept, can influence individual thinking and action in a context of institutional fragility, work deregulation and an over-emphasis of personal subjectivity, in which people are responsible for their self-development, they have to provide what

The universality assigned to the notion of the entrepreneur, as well as the possibility of becoming a precept, can influence individual thinking and action in a context of institutional fragility, work deregulation and an over-emphasis of personal subjectivity, in which people are responsible for their self-development, have to provide what they need and should self-regulate, reflecting the well spread notion of “employability”².

In this perspective, the entrepreneur, is no longer someone special, with particular qualities, but someone who shows motivation and ability to learn and interact with continuous context changes, fit himself in different scenarios and face permanent difficulties and risks. These characteristics are essential demands to deal with contemporary life.

This aspect has confirmed the current order and has promoted the transformation of entrepreneurship into a mass phenomenon, supported by the new notion of entrepreneur that, according López-Ruiz (2007), emerges totally in agreement with the historical transformation that led to a present form of capitalism.

In Dornelas' (2008) view, this same concept takes on very positive outlines:

Entrepreneurs are independent and build their own destiny. [...] They want to be independent rather than employees; they want to create something new and determine their own steps, open their own paths, be their own boss and generate jobs. [...] they use their intellectual capital to create value for society, generating jobs, boosting the economy and innovating, always using their creativity in search of solutions to improve people's lives (DORNELAS, 2008, p. 24).

For the writer, it is such an emblematic phenomenon of contemporary capitalism that could be called "the entrepreneurship era", as "it is the entrepreneurs who are eliminating the trade and cultural barriers, shortening distances, globalizing the world and reviewing economic concepts, creating new labor relations and new jobs, breaking paradigms and generating wealth for society" (DORNELAS, 2008, p. 7).

² The concept of employability emerged as a tool to relativize the employment crisis, considering the inability of the productive sector to incorporate or maintain the same number of workers. It is a response to mass unemployment, which attributes to the poor qualification of workers the blame for not meeting the new demands of the labor market (BRASIL, 1997).

This comprehensive definition of entrepreneurship, focused on the individual, also supports the institutional vision of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), a program that monitors the phenomenon at the global level and focuses on behavior and individual characteristics associated to entrepreneurial activities in different countries:

It is understood as entrepreneurship any attempt to create a new enterprise, such as an autonomous activity, a new company or the expansion of an existing enterprise. It is important to highlight that the main focus is the entrepreneurial individual, rather than the enterprise itself (GEM, 2014, p. 7).

These views coexist and outline a large number of possibilities of understanding - and defining - entrepreneurship in the current context.

In spite of the contradictions, that express vulnerability of the scenario and of all conceptual categories used in this historical moment, it is identified as a common element the linking of the intensification of entrepreneurship to the breakdown of traditional working relations, meaningful in flexible capitalism. Harvey (1992, p. 149) summarizes:

Despite the contradictions, which express the vulnerability of the scenario and of all the conceptual categories used at the moment, it is possible to identify a common element the linking of entrepreneurship to the collapse of traditional labor relations, which are significant in flexible capitalism.

Whatever the full explanation may be, any account of the transformation of advanced capitalist economies since 1970 has to look carefully at this marked shift in occupational structure.

All of this has put a premium on “smart” and innovative entrepreneurialism, aided and abetted by all of the accoutrements of swift, decisive, and well-informed decision-making (HARVEY, 1992, p. 157).

It is important to register a last definition which seems to express the impact of entrepreneurship in contemporary world:

In short: it is a social force triggered by behaviors, attitudes and values that lead to innovation, change, enhancing the generation of wealth and the transforming action of social and political conditions (COLBARI, 2007, p. 76).

Sevcenko (2001a, p. 17) warns, "the course of innovations cannot be predicted, but the idea that they cannot be understood is not true". Therefore, it would be necessary to question the course of the action that established innovative entrepreneurship and led it to the center of modern world.

Surely, this reflection should be profoundly studied, due to it may be the starting point for future researches, once the present analysis just offers an introductory approach to such meaningful matter.

3. Conclusion

No way of thinking becomes dominant without proposing a conceptual apparatus that mobilizes our sensations and our instincts, our values and our desires, as well as the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit.

David Harvey

The concept of entrepreneurship has changed meaningfully over time. It is linked to different entrepreneurs' views according to different time and contexts. The nature and the extension of these changes have been historically observed and have accompanied the transformation of capitalism, which took on different shapes in each development time and underwent a new design until the end of the twentieth century

In contemporary world, entrepreneurship is in a central position, a privileged *locus*, inherited from the flexible accumulation process that marked current capitalism. The

contemporary atmosphere favors the spread of the entrepreneurial attitude, as far as it values protagonism and autonomous action, elements related to the notion of subjectivity that founds the postmodern perception.

Entrepreneurship is the great ideology of flexible capitalism, perhaps the only one capable of responding to the weaknesses of the new arrangements and the constant changes in the scenarios in which production and labor are inserted in postmodernity, since it brings together an apparatus of notions and values capable of strengthening and directing individual action. That is why entrepreneurship has great adherence in Brazil in all sectors in the most different versions³, and the word was definitely accepted in the everyday vocabulary, which shows how integrated the entrepreneur is in today's society, although this denomination can sometimes disguise a delicate situation in the face of an unstable scenario.

However, common sense only recognizes the positive aspects of entrepreneurship influenced by institutional favorable to the entrepreneurial attitude and by the idealized image of the classic entrepreneur of modern capitalism. For this reason, it is important to better understand the concept and submit it to critical appreciation, to identify possible flaws that usually appear in any universal subject.

In these terms, despite the relevant entrepreneurship role as a process of inclusion and alternative to traditional working relations, it is important to reflect if, in some way, the emphasis on entrepreneurial skills does not hide a precarious and exclusionary setting and intensifies the already excessive individualism of postmodern social relations.

The historical perspective that has guided this analysis allowed us to confirm the centrality of entrepreneurship not only in literature but also in specialized researches that have been monitoring the phenomenon, which is at the same time, a demand, and a consequence of contemporary capitalism. Such duality particularly claims for deeper researches.

Finally, it is reiterated that historical contextualisation is crucial for a consistent understanding of entrepreneurship and the multiplicity of concepts that the phenomenon

³ The survey Entrepreneurship in Brazil: 2015 (GEM, 2015) informs that Brazil reached that year the highest entrepreneurship rate of the historical series. In every ten Brazilians, between 18 and 64 years, almost four have a business or have undertaken some entrepreneurial action to create a business.

contains, synthesized in the multifaceted figure of the contemporary entrepreneur who, better than any other social actor, translates the logic of his time.

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