

The erosion of sociability: rescuing collaboration

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the structural erosion of human sociability driven by severe socio-economic inequality, rapid urbanization, and the profit-driven attention economy. The author argues that modern capitalism, characterized by extreme wealth concentration and the fragmentation of traditional family structures, fundamentally isolates individuals and dismantles community conviviality. The pervasive influence of surveillance capitalism and monopolistic digital algorithms further degrades the social fabric, substituting meaningful physical interaction with screen-based isolation. However, the paper posits that this social fracture is not an inevitable trajectory. By reclaiming the digital revolution from corporate monopolies, societies can harness connectivity to foster grassroots collaboration. Highlighting the potential of local platform cooperatives and digital sovereignty initiatives, the study concludes that community-led technological infrastructures can successfully restore sociability, democratize knowledge, and shift the global paradigm from rent-seeking to sustainable, collective well-being.

KEYWORDS: sociability, social inequality, surveillance capitalism, platform cooperatives, digital sovereignty, community cohesion

I look at all the lonely people...
Beatles, 1966

Some things go much beyond Latin-America, they concern us as humans. We certainly do need overall social analysis, but how we feel in this society, as individuals, as families, as neighborhoods, or communities, is also essential to our wellbeing. This goes much beyond economics and class-struggles. It involves people sitting in buses or the underground, long hours to schools or jobs, a low-headed landscape of individuals glued

to their smartphones. The better-offs are not always better: kilometers of cars, each with an individual impatient and irritated with the traffic. How slow can it get, considering that they bought the car with impressive numbers on what speed it can reach in seconds. In São Paulo, the average daily loss of time in transportation is reaching 3 hours, over 5 for poorer people living in peripheries. You could be studying, doing something useful, spending time with you family. Well, GDP goes up, so we have more cars, and more wasted time. The average speed for automobiles in São Paulo is down to 14 kilometers per hour, and more cars are coming. More GDP.

This is of course just one aspect of our social reorganization. We are born with roughly 33 thousand days ahead of us, it is our most precious capital, the time of our lives. What do we do with it? Running after more money? Research on how our quality of life is correlated with our financial prosperity is interesting: if you are very poor, every extra hundred dollars a month makes a huge difference, feeding your kids better, improving your home and so forth. Money at the bottom—the bottom here is roughly two-thirds of the population, with huge differences according to countries—is radically more useful and more productive than money at the top. Once you reach what Tom Malleson calls “a comfortable and flourishing life,” happiness will depend not on more money, but on family life, friends, cultural environment, the feeling you are doing something useful, what we can call a socially rich life. The rest, spending your life accumulating more money, more millions, nowadays even more billions, is not about having a rich life, it is about ego. So many people can only manage to feel going up if they can push other people down, or look at them from above. In fact, where are we going up to? Our time-capital is ticking.

I am Brazilian, I live in São Paulo, but I spent many years in different African countries, Asia, Latin and Central America, as well as rich countries of what we presently call the Global North. In Africa, in particular, I have lived in communities with real houses, large families, lots of kids running around, grand-parents, some crazy aunt, little privacy, but shouting and laughs. This has given place to an individualized way-of-life, apartments, TVs, smartphones, laptops, perhaps a treadmill, an eventual companion. Marriages in Brazil now last an average of 14 years, not near this “till death do us part.” Is social tissue breaking down? What is happening is not just negative, getting out of poverty is a huge progress, and women who were once (and frequently still) tied to strict maternal identity and household management are finding new spaces to flourish. Beyond the good-or-bad approach, it seems useful to have an overview on how sociability is changing. Diversified trends, but powerful. This certainly concerns all of us in Latin-America, but it goes much beyond. Looking at everyday life is essential. We are after all a social animal.

THE CURSE OF INEQUALITY

A key issue of sociability is inequality. Forbes brings us a basic figure: 3028 adults, in

2024, have a total wealth of \$16tn, three times as much as the bottom-half of humanity. UBS, in the Global Wealth Report 2025, shows that the wealth of the bottom 41% of adults have only \$2.7tn, 0.6% of total. The top 1.6% the world adults at the top of the wealth pyramid own \$226tn. This is the size of the absurdity. You cannot have a society living in peace, and ensure our resources are oriented to what we need, when profit maximization at the top rules. Most people have trouble visualizing big numbers, let alone trillions. But it is not out of reach of reason: present day inequality is a structural social disease, deeply affecting social conviviality.

It is not a necessity, a natural trend. World GDP, what we produced in goods and services during 2025, is around \$115 trillion, in nominal dollar value. This alone means that what we produce in the world is equivalent to \$5 thousand per month per four-member family. Actually, this is the nominal figure, but a US-dollar purchases much more in so many countries than in the US. In purchasing power parity dollars (PPP), what we produce is equivalent to \$200 tn, equivalent to \$8 thousand per month per four-member family. This is largely enough to ensure this “comfortable and flourishing life” for everyone. Our challenge is not economic, in the sense of lacking resources: it is a question of social and political organization. We can call it the governance challenge. Latin America is particularly unequal, but it concerns all of us, and the roots of this absurdity are in the global governance system.

Taking the Brazilian example, our GDP in purchasing power parity is \$4.7tn, near the world average of \$8 thousand dollars per month per four-member family. Many countries are at a much lower level, but the essential fact is that for the first time in human history what we produce overall is more than sufficient for our needs. Of course we must adapt what we produce (more production adequate to basic needs at the bottom), for whom (redistribution of purchasing power to the bottom three-quarters of humanity) and at what cost for the environment. It is the triple bottom-line: economically viable, but also socially fair and environmentally sustainable.

We have it all written down, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), even detailed in 169 items. The corporations are fully aware, and claim they follow the ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) equivalent goals. Is anything happening? We had a full confrontation of interests at the COP-30 in Belém in November 2025. No break-through has been reached, we continue the discussions, even as the inequality dramas and ecological disasters accelerate. Slow-motion catastrophe, it has been called. This is what is happening, while we have all the necessary financial resources, technologies, the what-to-do, and all the statistics on the unfolding drama. The key issue is not in the dramas, but in our incapacity to face them. Straight-faced American rulers are even keen on deepening them.

Inequality is the key issue for Latin-America. It does generate some forms of rich sociability in poor urban communities, we do have sambas, and cumbias, and carnivals,

but the overall poverty and discrimination makes conviviality difficult and the tensions permanent. We create different economic, social and cultural worlds within our countries, and within our cities, with permanent and growing conflicts. Violence is frequently taking over. The poor are not just poor anymore, they are anxious and frustrated. They presently are informed people who know they could have a decent health support, and better schools for their kids. And they frequently tend to vote for whoever brings stronger hate speech, speaking to their frustrations. The migrants expelled from the US generate new pressures, and also hit so many families that depended on money transfers. Overall, the social fracture generated by wealth and income inequality, both within and between countries, is not just unfair, it is explosive. Economic inequality also means social fractures.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES: GROWING UP

In my childhood in São Paulo, Brazil, I remember my mother would get hoarse to get us out of the street for lunch. The world was ours to explore, and to identify what you had to run after or run away from. Jonathan Haidt (2024) mentions in *The Anxious Generation*: how the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness the social fragility of overprotected kids refuging themselves in their smartphones, with little free roaming or social interaction learning. In poorer regions, digital exclusion leads to gangs and street violence. But it is not only a problem for kids. Social life has been impoverished, and deeply changed, for everyone. Not having a smartphone nowadays leads to digital exclusion and more violence. Overall, for the young, more time is spent on screens than in class.

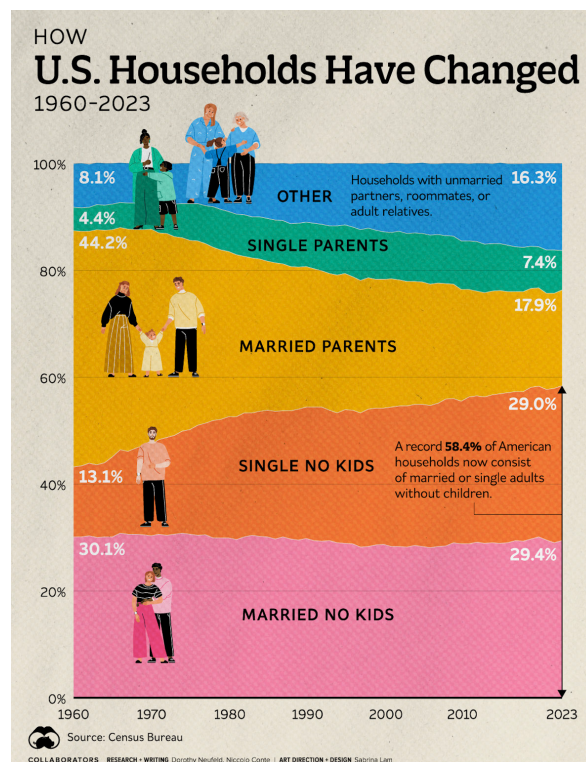
In football matches, we see thousands of people screaming and chanting, pushing themselves around, an explosion of conviviality, the happiness found in yelling recommendations for the referee's mother. On TV, where the match is watched by kids who can hear the crowd chanting aggressive or foul songs in the background, the TV commentator paraphrases them for the sake of their innocence. Well, the explosion in the stadium is liberating, but just a couple of hours every few weeks. As a kid, we did not watch matches, we played them. And shouted and cursed healthily. Is this just nostalgia for the past? We do have a loss of conviviality, and virtual conviviality is just not the same thing.

Here we also see how inequality hits early life. The eastern poor part of São Paulo is called a *periferia*, but with 4 million inhabitants, it is bigger than many countries, and lacks all basic infrastructure for conviviality, just crowded housing, and some improvised football in the streets. And gangs, of course. In Brazil the police killed an average 17 persons a day in 2023. We do not have legal death penalty. Millions of kids go hungry every day, couldn't we at least get them food? How absurd this system can get? It goes beyond political convictions, it is about human decency. Brazilian daily per capita grain production is equivalent to four kilos, but it is in the hands of the global commodity traders. It goes

to exports: Profit maximization is much stronger than basic needs of the population. You want peaceful neighborhoods and conviviality?

THE EROSION OF FAMILY LIFE

Another central transformation is the family structure. It certainly differs according to country or community, but overall, this key element of social organization has changed. I take here the American example in the figure below: between 1960 and 2023, what was the American way-of-life paragon, a couple with kids (if possible, with a TV, car, lawn, and barbecue) was reduced from 44.2% of households to 17.9%. Politicians still keep referring to families as the sacred fundament of society, and so do the church pastors, but they had better have a second look. In fact, people living alone accounted for 13.1% of households in 1960, whereas presently it rose to 29.0%. This is a deep fracture of society. If we add married couples with no kids, this means “58.4% of American households now consist of married or single adults without children,” as commented in the graph. We also have unmarried partners and single parents. The key issue is not only the loss of the streets and community conviviality, and the obsession with smartphones, but also the isolated household.



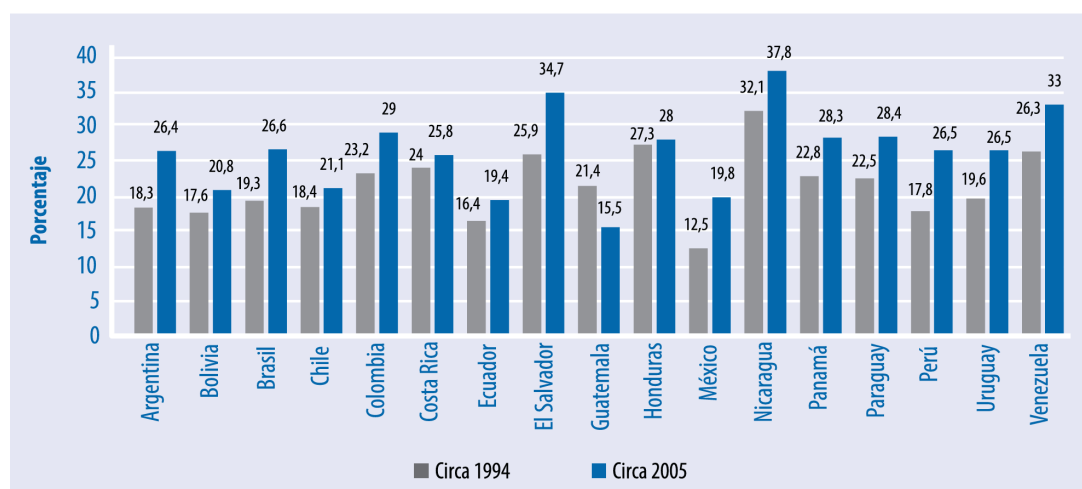
Source: Visual Capitalist, U.S. Households (2024).

This figure shows the U.S., but in Latin-America we are catching up fast, and it is useful to have this reference. In Brazil, according to the 2022 Census, about 13.6 million live alone, representing 19% of households. The proportion is growing fast, with unipersonal

households jumping from 12.2% in 2012 to 18.6% in 2024. Ageing and the rate of separations both play an important role. In 2022, 11 million women raise their children alone, already called feminine monoparentality, with almost half the mothers raising their children without the father, and facing challenges both financial and emotional. According to the 2022 census, 5.6 million persons over 60 live alone, and with longer time of life it causes troubling situations, poverty, loneliness and abandonment.

The trend is powerful, and concerns many different countries, as seen in *The Economist* (2026). It is also impressive that richer countries have more people living alone. We are building richer elites, in terms of money, but not richer societies, in terms of conviviality and cultural enrichment.

The new generations are particularly vulnerable to this change in family structure. The figure below presents data up to 2005, but the trend becomes obvious. In Brazil the percentage of children 0 to 14 of age living with mothers only in urban spaces rose from 19,3% to 26,6% during the 1995 to 2005 period. The trend is strong in practically all Latin-American countries.



Source: Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014, PNUD, Seguridad Ciudadana con Rostro Humano <http://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/img/IDH/IDH-AL%20Informe%20completo.pdf> p.24

According to *The Economist* (2026), “people across the rich world increasingly live, and eat, alone. The share of single households worldwide is expected to increase from 28% in 2018 to 35% by 2050, the UN reckons. As a result, more people now eat and unwind in front of screens.”

If we take in account the level of urbanization (87% in Brazil), the space divide between rich and poor districts, the erosion of family life, the absence of basic conviviality infrastructure in the poorer parts, the lack of resources, both monetary and of social services, this is simply untenable. Considering the global production capacity, and the overall

generated waste, it is plain stupid. Systemic incompetence.

THE INTERGENERATION FRACTURES

From another point of view, the intergeneration collaborative link is broken. In traditional families, for thousands of years, having children meant that when the parents were older and no longer fit for work, the kids turned adults would take care of them, while breeding new kids. Thus, the balance between the productive adult age and both the dependent children and elders was ensured in a solidarity intergeneration chain. What happens when we have the childless adult majority we saw above?

In the Nordic countries, through the support of public social policies, decent nursing homes, and free health care for the aging population, what the families used to provide is now guaranteed on a wider scale. In the small nuclear family apartments, there is no room for grandparents, but at least there is public support. In countries like the U.S., but particularly in Brazil, for old people, there is dwindling family support and little social policy. And private nursing homes are dramatically overpriced and ill managed. The anxiety about our future as older people is already felt in the middle-age time of life. Do we need this? Nursing homes have become an industry, a new mode of exploitation, as we have seen with so many scandals. They make good financial investments, but putting older people in a kind of waiting-room, with some periodic visits from family, is troubling at the least. Conviviality? Conviviality is essential.

WORKING SPACE CONVIVIALITY

There are more trends of social-links erosion. The working space was an essential area of conviviality. We have all seen the traditional rice fields in Asia, with lines of women chanting while jointly taking care of the sprouts. In the industrial environment, large groups of workers felt they had common challenges, organized in unions, felt bound in similar struggles, and had lots of contacts. In the present environment dominated by technology and algorithms, what was the working-class spirit of solidarity has lost much of its strength; it's everyone out there for themselves. It is different in so many work environments, of course, but overall, the feeling that you are collaborating for something useful, building a future for yourself but also contributing to a common collaborative task, have lost much strength. The social fragmentation of the workspace, particularly with isolated work on computers, is deepening. The rotten competition-based working environment in so many corporations that adopted the Jack Welch system is characteristic (Gelles, 2022).

The Uber times are not socially enriching. If food is no better, whether for the “motoboy” or those waiting for a pizza to be delivered instead of going out to eat with friends. With the spreading feeling of loneliness or isolation in different households, cities, or work-

ing environments, many people seek refuge in the multiple local churches where—as opposed to the traditional catholic quiet spiritual concentration in big buildings—they can dance, sing, shout, be told how they should lead their lives, how they will become rich if God helps them, and meanwhile, they contribute financially to the life of so many pastors. Rather than a question of divinity, it is about human warmth. They can feel they belong to a social group, that there is some meaning after all. But it certainly is far from a community solidary feeling of building our future together, rather a temporary dressing. It navigates so well on the general stress, that we presently have billionaire pastors. God can be generous.

URBAN CONVIVIALITY

An important factor is that urban organization is much more centered on traffic fluidity than on generating spaces of conviviality. A city like Toronto presents lots of green public spaces, with bowl games for the elderly and school swimming pools open to the community. I have seen painted child-footprints on the sidewalks in Italian towns, protected spaces for kids to walk safely, getting a feeling it is their city, that they are at home in the public spaces as well. In Lausanne, the mayor trained students to take care of the elderly in their neighborhood, with a small salary and in their free time, instead of relying on more nursing homes. It contributes to local solidarity and friendships between generations.

In Brazil, Celio Turino organized a *pontos de cultura* [culture points] network, with public support for youths who wanted to create artistic activities. Thousands sprung up, and online interaction helped stimulate creativity instead of relying on passive online global social media. In an experience in the São Paulo neighborhood called Casa Verde (with 86,000 residents) we created a local collaborative platform that stimulates online interactions within the community, small businesses, and cultural activities. Instead of global manipulation, we can control the new technologies at the bottom. Platform cooperatives are surging in so many countries. The examples abound, people are discovering that instead of fighting for “likes” in the global social media, you can create local collaborative networks that reinforce community interaction. Community-based organizations have a huge space to flourish (Scholz, 2023).

The situations in this fragmented environment are extremely diversified; for example, gated communities are being multiplied, isolated luxury spaces with strict rules and absurd feelings of belonging to elites. In poor districts, the situations are radically different, and inequality has become an essential cause of economic and cultural divide, rife with tensions and violence. Studies on Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, by Bruno Manso—*A Fé e o Fuzil* [Faith and Guns]—show how in the absence of healthy conviviality, and the necessary infrastructures, a destructive environment has surged, joining illegal militias, the police, drug trafficking gangs, neo-Pentecostal churches, and populist politics, to form

an oppressive social environment (Manso, 2020).

THE ATTENTION INDUSTRY

The erosion of the traditional family life has obvious impacts on the new generation: lonely children, absent working parents, never having free and safe roaming space, individual choices, permanently being told what to do and how to behave, whether in school or the different supplements in specialized lessons, or early-time analysts. In the remaining free time, they are glued to their smartphone, trying to get as many “likes” as possible, anxious about negative responses or criticism. And they get all the pornography they like: the smartphone is not a physical neighborhood. Haidt (2024), as seen, writes extensively on how this has created the Anxious Generation. For kids, it is not grandpa’s lap and curious questioning about the past anymore.

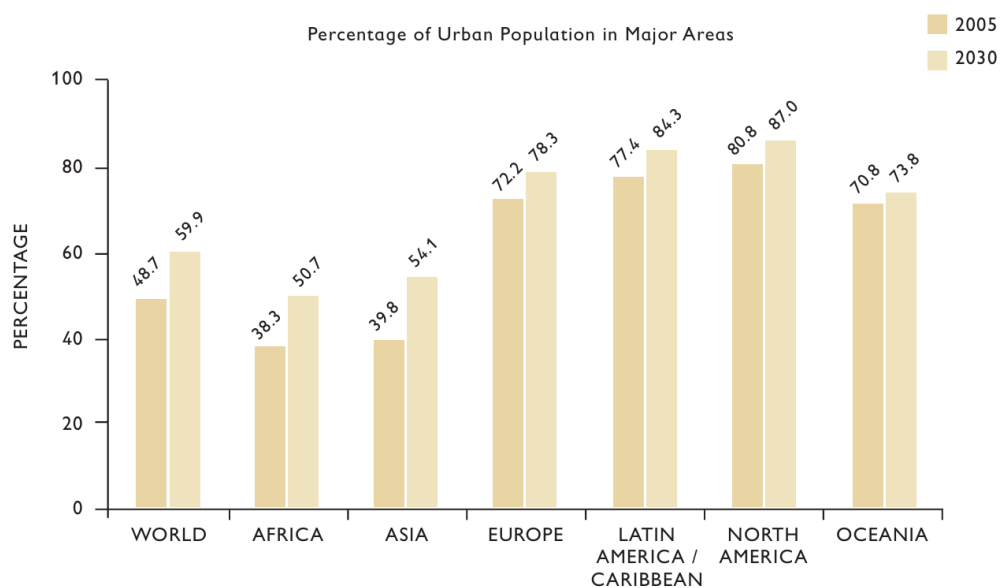
Max Fisher (2023), in *The Chaos Machine*, explains how there is no free roaming on the internet; it is based on attention-maximizing algorithms. Skipping through the TV movie channels, practically all of them alert me to content: sex, drugs, violence. It draws more attention, so this is what Hollywood feeds us, with sex, fights and screeching cars. It is the attention-industry, its costs are in the viewing maximization and the prices we pay when shopping. Over 10% of what we pay goes to the marketing business: we pay them to muddle our free time, and they repeat they are “offering us” the show. The billions social media are making are generated through advertising, over 70% for Google, 98% for Facebook. As the profits made on advertising depends on attention numbers, millions of daily active users (mDAUs), content seeks attention maximizing, whether violence, hate-speech, sex or downright pornography. It also makes us buy rubbish, but it essentially generates loss of time, the time of our lives.

This is for the online world. But the fact is that the digital divide has become a major factor of exclusion, much like illiteracy was some time (and frequently still is). The result is that poorer communities either feel excluded, or have a much-reduced access to full digital inclusion. Cellphone theft has become an industry, furthering fear and insecurity. But the key issue really is content, the invasion of so much rubbish, as well as the isolation of billions glued to their screens. Edward Hopper’s paintings would be just a foreword to what is really happening. We also had *The loneliness of the long-distance runner*, a beautiful 1962 film, peeking into the future. Well, I am 85, it is not just longing for the past, it is a long-term view on the structural changes we face: I was born before TV, when the world was busy in global destruction.

URBAN SPACE AND COMMUNITY REORGANIZATION

This is not about the trends being good or bad, but about understanding the depth of structural change and taking advantage of new opportunities. We are all connected on

the internet, and this new connectivity opens creative collaboration capacities. For women in particular, opportunities have grown much beyond motherhood, and the change in family structure seen above is certainly linked to contraception technology, but also to overall social structure change. Sociability can be rebuilt in new ways, through urban policies, reduction of working hours, and expansion of cultural activities, digital inclusion, among others. It also means that we reorient the overall logic of our economies, from rent maximizing for the top of the social pyramid to collaborative initiatives centered on households, communities, intelligent use of online connectivity, as well as a richer cultural life. This is not just about GDP growth but about quality of life and social well-being.



Source: Handler (2014, p. 12).

Urbanization is a key issue. It is impressive that we are much nearer to one-another, frequently overcrowded, yet much more isolated. The figure above shows Latin-America and the Caribbean with 77.4% of urban population, and a projection of 84.3% in 2030. And the document presents the challenges of the growing aging populations in neighbourhoods (Handler, 2014).

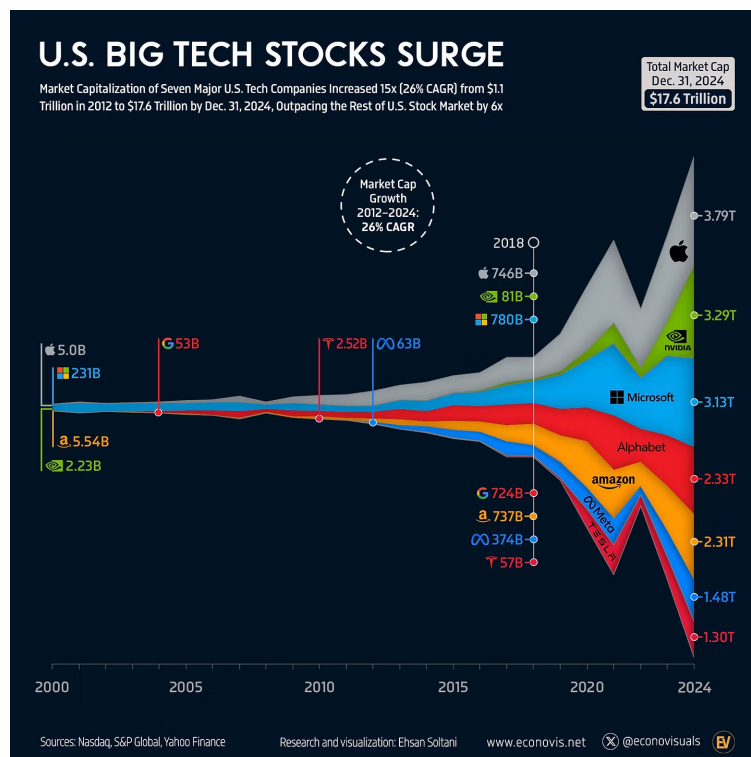
With what we nowadays produce and the technologies we have, it is not a question of not having the means, but a question of social and political reorganization. Repeating that the business of business is business, absolving economic interests from social and environmental consequences, the macho refusal of social welfare as a “nanny state”—all this is just plain stupid.

Enhancing the pleasure of living for everyone, that’s what it is about. The World Happiness Report 2017 comments: “The central paradox of the modern American economy, as identified by Richard Easterlin (1964, 2016), is this: income per person has increased

roughly three times since 1960, but measured happiness has not risen. The situation has gotten worse in recent years: per capita GDP is still rising, but happiness is now actually falling.” (Helliwell et al., 2017, p. 179)

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION: FROM GLOBAL CONTROL TO FREE COLLABORATION

The digital revolution we face is redesigning sociability, and we have this in common with humanity in general. Initially seen as an immense opportunity for free intelligent communication, it has been appropriated by hightech giants with invasive content based on the appropriation of private information and behavioral marketing. It has become a world-scale system, leading to what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) called The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. As we see in the figure below, their value surpasses \$15 trillion, seven times the GDP of Brazil, and accelerating at an impressive pace. But more important, their outreach is global, with restrictions for example in China, but in Latin-America and other parts of the world we have to use them. It is called demand-monopoly, to communicate I have to use what other are using.



Source: Econovis (2025).

With the present AI revolution, cloud-computing and data-centers in the hands of this global corporate world the very concept of sovereignty is being displaced. We can add Palantir as a major link between the information world and the American security and military systems. The 2025 Trump administration decision to reinstall the Monroe Doc-

trine, allowing for direct intervention in Latin-America, shows the dimension of the challenges. At the Brazilian national level, the Brazilian Plan for Artificial Intelligence (2025), designed to have AI serve the common good, seeks to create “an AI ecosystem that will be responsible, inclusive and sustainable, putting human well-being and national development in the center of its priorities—serving as an example for the world.” (CGEE/CCT, 2025, p. 46)

President Lula stressed the necessity to develop and adopt a technology that improves the life of Brazilian citizens, based on ethical and non-discriminatory principles, serving as an example for the world. In his words, “an artificial intelligence to help healthcare, to help taking care of the poor people, to improve decarbonization of planet Earth, and not an artificial intelligence to tell fakenews every day to the ears and eyes of billions and billions of human beings.” (p. 13) This involves “developing new regulatory and organizational models, and establishing strategic international partnerships.” (p. 20) The overall objective is to ensure that the social function of the digital revolution is rescued. Among the opportunities, the development of AI solutions for local problems: the capacity to create solutions adapted to the specific needs of Brazil can generate relevant innovations for other developing countries. In fact, the same technology that has been overwhelmingly used for manipulation can build social inclusion, reduce inequality, and ensure deeper connections between communities. AI considering the original populations is also being built.

Sociability is about much more than breaking the social isolation and fragmentation generated through the attention industry we saw above, it is about rebuilding the social fabric, bringing people together, as were the early dreams of connectivity and free-flows of information. This is not only about Brazil and Latin-America, it is about the whole developing world, and the Brics will certainly have a major role to play. The digital revolution demands new forms of organization, and presents huge opportunities. (Dowbor, 2024)

KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY: MEANS OF PRODUCTION AT OUR FINGERTIPS

Mustafa Suleyman and Michael Bhasker (2023, in *The Coming Wave* (2023)), clearly sums up the immense opportunities that surge with access to knowledge in its diverse dimensions: “The sum of thousands of years of human scholarship and inquiry is available at the touch of a button.” In industrial capitalism, humans controlled the machines. With the digital revolution, humans control the systems that control the machines. Science has become the main production factor. It is online, and once we cover the costs of the innovation, it can be socialized throughout the world with no additional cost, in what Jeremy Rifkin called the Zero Marginal Cost Society (2014). For example, we can ensure online access to so many technologies for the hundreds of millions of family agriculture units throughout the world. (Dowbor, 2024) More machines mean heavy costs, knowledge is

a commons.

But containing knowledge access has become a major tool of value appropriation. “The coming wave will land in a combustible, incompetent, overwrought environment. This makes the challenge of containment—of controlling and directing technologies so they are of net benefit to humanity—even more daunting... A key catalyst of instability and social resentment, inequality has surged across Western nations in recent decades, and nowhere more so than in the United States. Between 1980 and 2021 the share of national income earned by the top 1 percent has almost doubled and now sits just under 50 percent. Wealth is ever more concentrated in a tiny clique.” (Suleyman & Bhasker, 2023)

We can understand the private property of means of production as machines, but holding back access to knowledge and science in general is absurd. Competition was the major organization basis in industrial capitalism, but productivity in the knowledge society is maximized through collaboration. Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom had it right, they called it *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons* (2007). Collaboration generates a different kind of sociability, not the war of all against all we are facing. Control of access to knowledge, through this jungle of patents, copyrights and royalties does not stimulate innovation, it generates unproductive rentierism. Big Pharma behavior is just an example. Collaboration instead of greed during the Covid pandemic could have saved millions of lives.

COLLABORATION PLATFORMS: RESTORATION OF PRODUCTIVE SOCIABILITY

The challenges are massive, but so are the opportunities. Throughout the world, new forms of social organization and collaboration are surging. Trebor Scholtz (2023) brings us an overview on how connectivity is rebuilt through platform cooperatives, with a great number of examples.

The strength of Scholtz’s book is to present how the “sign” of this technological universe can be inverted, from negative to positive, precisely through its appropriation at the base of society. Many cities are generating collaborative networked management systems, appropriating information management (data sovereignty), and putting the system at the service of the community. It generates what the author calls smart cities, based on digital cooperative principles. This leads us to think more broadly about the decision-making process that governs us. “The individual nation-state is too large to ensure meaningful involvement, yet too small to address global issues. In this regard, the Rebel City Alliance emerged as a progressive of cities and municipalities, including Kerala in India, Emilia-Romagna in Italy, the autonomous Basque region and Catalonia in Spain, New York City, and California.” (Scholtz, 2023)

This alliance, according to the author, “aims to expand and strengthen the movement by

fostering networks among its members. These networks facilitate the exchange of data, toolkits, and financial templates that can be used across cities. They also enable municipalities to communicate policy successes across borders, collaborate on technological advancements, and harness the immense potential of their collective efforts. These collaborations have resulted in municipalities implementing policies that give worker-owned businesses preferences in bidding through procurement mandates.” (ibidem) It is actually about “seizing the unique opportunities and challenges of the digital age.” (ibidem)

In fact, this is all about reclaiming the immense potential of the new technologies, that did certainly prove how dangerous they can be—Mustafa Suleyman and his coauthor (2023) abundant in examples—but can be useful in rebuilding our social tissue. It is not the technology that is bad, it is the lack of natural intelligence that threatens us. You cannot regulate AI and global connectivity relying on “free markets” and “the invisible hand”: we need new institutional arrangements.

RESTORATION OF SOCIABILITY IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: A COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

A rich example of the power of collaboration platforms was built in three neighborhoods in São Paulo, involving around 300 thousand inhabitants. Taqui (right here) as it is named, is more than a marketplace; it is a digital social infrastructure that complements the physical infrastructure of the future new Polo, which is designed as a meeting point for training, culture, sport, and leisure activities. The digital platform, designed to strengthen the network and social capital, transforms technology into an active tool for social cohesion and sustainable local development. (Camilher, 2021; Marques, 2025)

By digitalizing commerce and services through a local platform, Taqui builds a more robust and interconnected economic ecosystem, strengthening economic sociability within the territory. Furthermore, the platform will be enhanced with Generative Artificial Intelligence and a local job search system, which aims to find vacancies close to residents’ homes, tackling the chronic problem of long commutes in São Paulo’s periphery. Reducing time spent in transit means increasing time available for community life, family, and leisure, consolidating sociability outside of work.

Economic sustainability in vulnerable territories, such as the peripheries of São Paulo’s North Zone (Casa Verde, Limão, and Cachoeirinha), depends not only on capital injection but fundamentally on the reconstitution and strengthening of the social fabric and the synergy among local actors. This focus on social cohesion or sociability is the catalyst that transforms investments into lasting impact. The Instituto Wizion (Nosso Núcleo) project, demonstrates how technological innovation, embodied by the collaborative Taqui platform, can be the key to restoring this sociability, fostering entrepreneurship and improving quality of life.

The starting point for restoring sociability was organization and communication. Since 2019, Nosso Núcleo has worked to connect local leaders and organizations that previously operated in isolation, striving to build a shared vision for sustainable development. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, community mobilization faced an unprecedented challenge of isolation. It was during this critical moment that Taqui, a partner startup from USP university, played an essential role. By quickly building a virtual room with breakout rooms, a feature unavailable on other commercial platforms at the time, Taqui ensured that leaders could continue meeting and working together remotely and safely, keeping community mobilization alive. The first technological delivery to the territory was, therefore, an instrument for preserving organizational sociability.

ORGANIZING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Throughout Latin-America we have common challenges, such as deep inequality, environmental challenges, the pressure of the Global North to keep us dependent on the commodity economy, high-tech corporations controlling so many areas, the power of asset management finance, growing military pressures, the erosion of sovereignty. The growing inequality and political chaos in the United States is a direct threat on our own democracies. Getting organized, meaning that we root our democracies more solidly in social organization at community level, has become essential.

Sociability is certainly about how we live as individuals, how we relate to the family, to neighbors, but also about how we organize the places we work in, how we manage money (community development banking), how we organize the city space. What I try to bring here, is that our present wealth, instead of serving rentiers, can be used for what we need, and that the new technologies, instead of just manipulating us, can open immense space for us to get organized throughout the different dimensions of social life. And do not worry so much about the loss of jobs to robots: with enhanced productivity, we can reduce working time, working less so that we all work, as the French put it.

Actually, reducing working time can be an essential element. A person living in Cidade Tiradentes, in the periphery of São Paulo, starts the day at 5 in the morning, to be at work in Pinheiros at 8, with hours spent in traffic, and will be back home at 9 PM, to watch some TV rubbish and getting asleep on a couch. In a few hours it is 5 AM again. Family life? In 2026 Brazil is struggling to ensure at least the full two-day weekend, in order to ensure some more personal time, and some conviviality in the neighborhood. Or even reading, or playing with kids. In fact is that the new technologies are bringing enough productivity growth to allow us to rebuild the social tissue by rescuing more control on the time of our lives. Reducing inequality, here again, is essential, poverty leads to so many people accepting a life centered on mere survival. The rich speak of freedom, but they leave people no choice.

It is a sociability that has to be rebuilt, and it can be done. Waiting for billionaires to solve

our problems will not work. Actually, they are the problem. Getting organized from the bottom up, in different spaces, using the wealth we have reached, the technologies we have and overall access to knowledge online, the creative commons, is more than a possibility, it is what we need to build. Digital sovereignty is essential here, and not only in Latin-America. The challenges are global.

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