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# *Social Provisioning within a Culture-Nature Life Process*

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**ABSTRACT** *Social provisioning is an amalgamation of social processes within a broader culture-nature life process. This article contributes to the literature on developing the concept of ‘social provisioning’ and explores its scope by presenting theoretical and methodological contexts for social provisioning. Then it delineates three categories of processes: biological and geographical processes, processes that are usually analyzed as personal characteristics or social categories (e.g., gender), and processes defined around social activities (e.g., consumption). The system of processes presented allows for diverse entry points to an analysis of social provisioning beyond consumption, production and distribution. Further, the system of processes transcends the culture-economy, nature-economy, nature-culture and micro-macro dualisms in heterodox economic theory.*

**Keywords:** Social Provisioning; Social Process; Heterodox Economic Theory; Culture and Environment; Methodology

**JEL Codes:** B50; B52; B54; Z1

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of ‘social provisioning’ (Gruchy 1987, p. 21) describes a vision of the economy that is broader than markets, and a vision of markets as socially evolving institutions, where the object of study is the ‘ways people organize themselves collectively to get a living’ (Power 2004, p. 6). The economy comprises diverse, continuous and interdependent activities that develop over historical time, in the context of power relations and human agency through collective action, resource creation and diversity in valuation methods. That is, the

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economy is a process that cannot be explained through the operation of a price mechanism.

The concept of social provisioning is rooted in feminist, institutionalist and social economics. Various strands of the literature on social provisioning have broadened the scope of economic analysis in general terms, including the following: the centrality of providing for the needs and well-being of people—taking into account the caring for and unpaid contributions of people, power relations and stratification based on social distinctions such as gender and race, the role of ethical valuation (Nelson 1993; Power 2004), the interconnection of production and the social organization of markets (Dugger 1996), ecological impacts and conditions (Power 2006), government deficits and debt (Todorova 2013), resource creation and modeling the economy as a whole (Jo 2011; Lee 2009, 2011).

The existing literature offers general directions (as well as descriptive applications) of the socioeconomic and ecological dimensions of social provisioning. However, there is still a need to articulate how integrating the natural, social and economic aspects of social provisioning will be accomplished. Analyses utilizing the Social Fabric Matrix (SFM) (Hayden 2011) and the Social Structure of Accumulation (SSA) (O'Hara 2006) make such contributions. However, SFM is best applied to a problem at a point in time, and it is designed to help analyze and formulate adequate policies. On the other hand, SSA is focused on the process of accumulation and on the conditions for capital accumulation and growth. These are only aspects of the broader social provisioning analyses that are further articulated here. The broadest conceptualization is offered by the SFM and its integration with an input–output analysis of production, and SSA as presented by Lee (2011).

This article formulates social provisioning as an amalgamation of social processes within a broader culture-nature life process. Section Two provides an overview of processes within a system of a culture-nature life process, and it gives a theoretical and methodological context for social provisioning. The article then delineates three main categories of processes: (1) biological and geographical processes, in Section Three; (2) processes usually analyzed as personal characteristics or as social categories (e.g., gender), in Section Four; and (3) processes defined around social activities (e.g., consumption), in Section Five. Section Six concludes.

This article is a feminist-institutionalist contribution that draws on Marx's critique of political economy, on developments in heterodox economics and on various disciplines. Its goal is the development of heterodox economic theory.

## 2. Theoretical and Methodological Context of Social Provisioning

The concept of social provisioning is akin to, but not identical to, the concept of 'social reproduction' used in political economy analyses (Bakker 2007). While there are some overlaps, the two concepts are based on different ways of conceptualizing the economy. The emphasis on 'social' is common—including the recognition that the origin of social surplus cannot be attributed to any individual but is socially organized within an interdependent system of production. Further, the

emphasis on process, human relations and their interconnections in society are central to both concepts.

Social reproduction signifies the reproduction of the labor force through subsistence, education, training, biological reproduction and the reproduction and provisioning of care needs (Bakker 2007, p. 541). Those are analyzed from the point of view of the functioning of the economy and, more particularly, in relation to capital accumulation and the development and reproduction of capitalism. However, within a social provisioning analysis of capitalism, human lives and activities need not be conceptualized and theorized only as functional to capital accumulation: the scope of analyzing capitalism is expanded beyond that of capital accumulation. Yet, the social provisioning framework needs to develop and address further the elements of reproduction (especially biological reproduction) that have been underscored by the literature on social reproduction.

Defined as ‘the process and human relations associated with the creation and maintenance of the communities upon which all production and exchange rest’ (Bakker 2003, p. 67), social reproduction is conceived of as being somehow more social than markets. In social provisioning analysis, monetary production and exchange—together with nonmarket activities—are all processes of social provisioning. That is, communities are not conceived outside of, or opposed to, monetary production and exchange, and ‘market provisioning is a subset of social provisioning’ (Jo 2011). Market activities are not ‘asocial’ and analytically opposed to some social sphere; they are socially organized. A different question is to what extent particular forms of exchange and monetary production contribute to or inhibit the life process (O’Hara 1997). That question is also relevant for communities and non-market activities (Todorova, *forthcoming*).

How do we analyze the economy without conceiving of separate social, economic and natural spheres? How do we account for differences in motivations and valuation, while at the same time avoiding the micro-macro dualism that reduces the economy either to the sum of isolated individuals or to an aggregated statistical entity (Jo, *forthcoming*)? I argue that conceptualizing a system of processes addresses those questions.

The notion of ‘process’ has been used in various heterodox analyses to shift the focus from single variables, things, individual behavior, or outcomes to relations (including power), structures and historical developments (Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff 1994; Todorova 2009), and has been proposed as a central concept in social provisioning analysis (Nelson 1993; Power 2004). However, a more comprehensive delineation of actual processes that constitute and embed social provisioning is not available. The present article builds on a particular formulation of a social process, and articulates a system of culture-nature processes that broadly constitutes the life process.

In particular, *social process* encompasses the activities of ‘going concerns’ (such as households), symbols, discourse (including expert discourse, rhetorical constructs, conventional wisdom and signs), rituals and customs, social beliefs, personal attitudes, norms, standards and conventions (including working rules and procedures). Those analytical categories, or elements of a social process, are presented in Todorova (2014).

Studying the context-specific, coevolving content of the categories of social processes allows us to identify specific ‘habits of life and thought’ (e.g., financialization, austerity and racism) that are simultaneously ideas and practices. Habits of life and thought evolve through the agency of going concerns such as the state, business enterprises and households, among others, and represent the evolution of (new) social processes. Habits of life and thought such as racism and sexism are manifest in the evolution of social processes: race and gender in conjunction with other processes such as economic or social class. This evolution is associated with historically specific conventions (e.g., race-, class- and gender-based paid domestic work; segregation; and advertising that promotes sexism) and with particular social beliefs and discourse. Specific arrangements and the content of the elements of social processes, as well as the formation of a going concern define an institution. The business enterprise, the household, the state, global organizations, religion, schooling and research, the foundation, the stock exchange, the military and the media among others are institutions. For example, the institution of the business enterprise is defined by (varieties of) going concerns, symbols, discourse, social beliefs and conventions associated with the practice of business (see Todorova 2014, for an application using consumption).

Processes evolve in ways that may or may not support the life process. A specific context would allow evaluation of how processes develop with respect to supporting the life process. The present article delineates a system of embodied and embedded processes (Table 1),<sup>1</sup> describes the meaning of each process, and directs readers to the relevant literature that prompted the article’s processes formulations.

In a specific study, the content and meaning of processes would vary and, if warranted by evidence and context, the defined processes could also change. The evolutionary processes delineated in Table 1 intersect in various ways and degrees in a specific context. They do not all emerge at one point of time, and do not evolve in the same pace and direction—their evolution is multi-linear and non-teleological. For example, colonization and empire are connected to the emergence of the process ‘race and ethnicity.’ Further, colonization and empire had a bearing on the consumption process, as well as on other processes such as ecosystems (Forstater 2002; McGregor 1995). The implication is that there is no primary process that ought to be used as an entry point in social provisioning analysis. How is one to proceed then? The context will drive the research questions and the inquiry’s starting point. No causal relations are offered here—those could be derived only by studying particular contexts.

This proposed typology of processes provides a way to organize specific observations for the non-dualistic and holistic study of a particular social provisioning issue. Sections Three to Five, which follow, delineate each of the processes and discuss how they are interconnected. Due to space limitations the references offered in support of each process are illustrative rather than comprehensive.

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<sup>1</sup>Table 1 expands upon Todorova (2014).

**Table 1.** Processes: categorization within a system of culture-nature life process

Biological and geographical processes	Processes based on distinct social provisioning activities at the individual level	Processes not based on a distinct social activity	
		Affected by, but not operating through, specific going concerns	Identified with going concerns
Ecosystems and the biosphere	Care	Gender	Citizenship and legal residency (state, international institutions)
Biospheric processes	Labor	Social class	
Production of biomass	Recreation	Race and ethnicity	
Information sourcing	Consumption	Language	
Habitat	Mobility and residence		
Bodies	Communication, expression and persuasion		Economic class (business enterprise, state, international institutions)
Birth	Cultivation and transmission of knowledge, memories, tools		Ownership (business enterprise, state, international institutions, courts, military)
Lactation	Undertaking		
Cognition and emotions	Resource creation and usage		Contracts and justice (courts, state, international institutions)
Development	Machine process		
Spirituality	Supervision, surveillance and direction		Worship (temples, religious establishments)
Sexuality	Threat and punishment		
Illness	Distribution		Kinship (households, tribes)
Impairment	Deprivation		
Aging	Waste		
Death	Exchange, trade, speculation, gift		
Information sourcing	Debt-credit/gift		
Physical space	Violence		
Landscapes			
Localities/places			
Buildings/architecture			
Infrastructure			

### 3. Biological and Geographical Processes

The first set of processes includes biospheric processes, physical living bodies, landscapes and buildings. The analytical conceptualization of bodies (as processes, acts and states) allows for treating birth, lactation, cognition and emotions, development, spirituality, sexuality, illness, impairment, aging and death as being part of economic analysis.

People and the economy are not simply interacting with the environment but are embedded in it. Social provisioning is thus embodied and embedded in nature (Mellor 2006, p. 173). For example, human health is affected by biodiversity, and human activity affects biodiversity (Chivien and Bernstein 2004).

One implication of ‘embodiment’ is that labor power is human life that ought to be sustained. While specifics such as gender, illness, disability and age can be captured by defining ‘labor inputs’ as heterogeneous, it is the embodiment of labor that allows for theoretically connecting the organization of social provisioning to life. The *ahumane* presumptions (that is, presumptions conceived without regard for human life) behind expert language and practices that give rise to habits of life and thought such as ‘flexible labor markets,’ ‘shock therapy,’ ‘structural adjustment,’ and ‘austerity’ are evident only when such an analytical connection is established (Benavides and Delclos 2005; Izyumov 2010; Stuckler and Basu 2013). As the preconceptions in economic analyses directly bear on the results, the *ahumane* presumptions are also *inhumane*. The biological elements of social processes allow theorizing about the irreversible nature of life process (e.g., bodily harm and death).

Ecosystems and the biosphere provide life-support systems through energy transformation, the storage and transfer of minerals in food chains, cycling of nutrients through the biosphere and the mineralization of organic matter in soils and sediments. In addition, ecosystems and the biosphere include various regulatory functions such as soil formation and retention; nutrient-, gas-, water- and climate regulation; waste treatment; water supply; and pollination (De Groot, Wilson, and Boumans 2002). The biospheric processes of ecosystems result in biomass (animals, plants, subsurface minerals)—the ‘neutral stuff’ that through human experience becomes resources (DeGregory 1987). Biodiversity is maintained through habitat that not only is living space, but also provides information storage for the social provisioning process. Such information includes genetic material and has the potential to be medicinal resources, as well as to have aesthetic and cultural value (De Groot, Wilson, and Boumans 2002).

Environment, habitat and landscapes are not just natural backgrounds and spatial patterns, but are part of the social construction of space and place that evolve as a result of resource creation and use, human relations and ecological processes. Buildings and infrastructure are part of, and also change, landscapes, ecosystems and human relations (Hayden 2011, p. 1228). Landscape evolution represents social processes manifested by specific habits of life and thought such as colonization, suburban sprawl and tourism. For example, slavery and soil degradation are interlinked, and suburban sprawl is connected to the creation of toxic dumps in poor neighborhoods (Merchant 2003). Racial- and class-based neighborhood segregation has a landscape dimension—with physical borders (river, rail tracks and walls), terrains, conditions of mobility and environmental pollution. The development of shopping centers is a change in landscape since it is a creation of gender-, race- and class-based space, and it is also a change in political dynamics (Cohen 1996).

Ecosystems and landscapes are connected to cultural memory, historiography and notions of home. On the other hand, the creation of ‘placelessness’ through

standardization of salesmanship and production—reflected in buildings and landscape as well as through mobility (physical and virtual)—complements the neoliberal ideal of flexible labor markets as habit of life and thought and proclamations of the ‘end of history.’ Landscapes have material and conceptual dimensions—referring to the narratives and categorization of areas (Sluyter 2001). The ways that history is built on or erased from localities has consequences for memory, identity and community (Farrar 2011, p. 723; Shackel 2003). The proliferation of suburban sprawl in North America has been paralleled by an expansion in historical preservation, both of which arguably have the effects of insulation from conflicts (Farrar 2011; see also Harvey 1997). Thus, landscapes are political. On the one hand, fragmentation could make people more politically disconnected; on the other hand, a sense of place could be central for invidious distinction, such as in nationalism, class stratification, racism, communitarianism and hierarchical gender division of labor.

#### **4. Conceptualizing ‘the Social’: Beyond Dummy Variables and Categories**

We turn to the second category of processes, which I divide into two groups: (1) processes that are directly associated with specific ‘going concerns,’ and (2) those that cannot be explained by the existence of a going concern. The first type includes citizenship and legal residency, economic class, ownership, contracts and justice, worship and kinship—those are defined by the operation of the state, business enterprise, courts, religious bodies, households and tribes. The second type includes gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and language. Both types of social processes are defined as emerging out of historically unfolding and spatially specific habits of life and thought. They are more than demographic variables and personal or group characteristics (and cannot be represented by dummy variables; see Figart 1997). Further, conceptualizing them as universal and fixed ‘categories’ is also unsatisfactory (Boydson 2008, p. 559). I use the term ‘category’ to refer to the concepts of institution, going concerns, symbols, social activity, etc.—the elements of a social process. This section gives an idea of how heterodox economic theory could treat the social beyond variables and categories.

The processes of gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and language are grouped together for two reasons. First, while affected by going concerns, those processes are not directly governed by them. Further, when treated as variables, these processes may be ascribed with various biological characteristics, whose meanings in turn are socially (re)constructed and could support habits of life in the area of thoughts (i.e., racism, sexism, xenophobia and the hierarchical division of labor). In fact, the concept of ‘social process’ could circumvent problems of social constructivism since it does not insulate the social from nature, yet it allows for an understanding of how interpretations of nature are socially constructed.

While they are analytically distinct, gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and language may intersect in various ways within specific contexts.



Those intersections account for some of the variations in inequalities across contexts. Thus, categorizing people into predetermined groupings of race and ethnicity is connected to changes in the organization of social provisioning, such as evolutions of the labor process and the machine process (see Section Five for a description of ‘machine process’), as well as to gender, sexuality, ownership, citizenship, legal residency and social class (Glenn 2002; Matthaei 1982). Zimmerman (2010, 6f.) explains the connection between transiting from bonded to wage labor (in the contexts of US slavery and German serfdom) and the emergence of racial and ethnic categorizations prompted by anxieties about reliance on free migrant laborers and their productivity and control. Zimmerman argues that the economic political practices of race and hierarchical, differential incorporation make the ‘geopolitics of white imperialism’—the exclusionary logic of race—profitable. Together with the economic (inclusion) and the geopolitical (exclusion) logics of race, Zimmerman (2010, p. 8) identifies a kinship logic, which involves regulation of sexuality and of resistance through sexuality (such as the formation of monogamous patriarchal domesticity among slaves), which either supports or undermines the economic and geopolitical logics of race.

Approaching race and ethnicity as a social process prompts us to explore not only the social construction of racial and ethnic categories, but also their dimensions of oppression and agency as well as how they are connected to various habits of life and thought and institutions. Thus, while the creation of racial and ethnic categories has been driven by state and empire, as well being affected by business enterprise, a race and ethnicity process unfolds outside of the activities of those going concerns, as socially constructed norms and categories permeate multiple facets of life. Similarly, the language process is not defined by institutions; nonetheless, it is affected by the agency of going concerns that seek to shape perceptions of reality (Lakoff 2004). For example, the language of labor flexibility emerges out of the power positions of corporations, elite experts and international organizations (Fairclough 2002), and it affects the understanding of unemployment and wages (Galbraith 2008). Furthermore, international organizations, business enterprise and the state influence language practices through communication, education and expert-discourse requirements, as well as the dissemination and assessment of scholarship in English (Phillipson 2001).

The processes of citizenship and legal residency, economic class, ownership, contracts and justice, worship and kinship develop through specific institutional settings that vary in form through time and space—e.g., state, business enterprise, courts, religious authorities and households. Thus, the *ownership* and *contracts and justice* categories are defined by the state, business enterprises, international institutions and the courts; they define the realm of exchange and commodities (Hall 2009; Robertson 2008; Veblen 1923). *Citizenship and legal residency* is a process defined by the state in its various forms, involving *habits of life and thought* such as borders, passports and other methods of control that are imposed by state and international organizations. Conventions of citizenship such as voting rights, entitlements to benefits and legal access to employment are sanctioned by the state in its various forms in connection to labor, care,

gender, race and ethnicity, and sexuality processes, as well as to particular business practices, household relations, social beliefs, attitudes and conventions of superiority and community (Glenn 2002; Rose 2000).

*Worship* is not entirely governed centrally by canons of religious authority as it is based on spirituality. The process relates to the evolution of the social provisioning process, taking different forms in relation to how social provisioning is organized (Henaff 2010).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *kinship* is structured around various forms of tribal, familial and household institutions, but may also be sanctioned by state, religious and research institutions (Hewitson 2013), and may evolve together with the processes of ownership, economic class, gender, spaces, ecosystems and the machine process (Yanagisako and Collier 1987).

The *economic class process* under capitalism is underlined by the specific working rules of the state, business enterprise, courts and international organizations. Marx's 'economic compulsion' to sell labor power in order to live provides us with the most basic categorization of economic class.<sup>3</sup> Social provisioning under capitalism cannot be theorized without using the categories of workers, capitalists and rentiers. The recognition of those economic classes does not deny the development of other social processes. Rather than dismissing economic class for fear of universalizing, one ought to make an analytical distinction between economic and social class to account for diversity of relations and agency (Bowles 2013; Wolff and Zacharias 2013).

All of the outlined processes are intertwined with social provisioning. The following section explains social provisioning as an amalgamation of social processes delineated on the bases of social provisioning activities.

## 5. Processes Based on Social Provisioning Activities

This section describes social processes based on identifiable social activities. A 'social process' encompasses social activities and institutional arrangements such as conventions, symbols, discourse and social beliefs, among other categories. Social activities only guide the delineation of the social provisioning processes.

Thus, analyzing *care* as a social process involves not only the study of activities of caring within and beyond households, but also the study of the institutional arrangements of caring and habits of life and thought such as the gender division of labor, the welfare state, domestic service and migrant care workers—in connection with other social provisioning processes such as labor; the cultivation and transmission of knowledge, tools and memories; mobility and residence; and surveillance, supervision and direction—in connection to gender, race, citizenship and legal residence as processes (Rose 2000; Zelizer 2010). Care and labor processes are intrinsically connected. First, care involves labor power and time; second,

<sup>2</sup>Henaff (2010, pp. 187, 226) discusses the emergence of debt (as opposed to gift) as worshipping of gods becomes invisible, and debt's connection to sacrifice, which arguably emerges in society with economies that generate surplus.

<sup>3</sup>Similarly, Veblen distinguished between the 'kept classes' and the 'common man'—'common' in the respect that they are not vested with a right to 'get something for nothing'—what Veblen ([1919] 2005, p. 162) calls 'free income.'

paid work involves care, which is most apparent concerning paid care work (England, Folbre, and Leana 2012; Gibson-Graham 2006; Himmelweit 1999).

The *labor process* encompasses people's bodies, experiences, learning, energy and time spent producing the social surplus. Labor power is itself 'produced' as human life, and is maintained and recuperates through care and recreation activities. Biological 'reproduction' is an element of ecosystems and bodies, and enters the processes of labor and care. Paid and unpaid labor are similar in that both produce output; use resources; involve energy, time and learning; and in the context of a capitalist economy involve money necessary to obtain inputs; yet paid and unpaid labor differ in their institutional arrangements. Compulsion and oppression may manifest in both: e.g., slavery, hierarchical division of labor, compulsion to sell one's labor power. Further, the fact that economic compulsion to sell one's labor power is central to capitalist relations does not negate the social and psychological aspects of paid employment. First, labor can be 'intimate'—such as paid care in intimate settings, paid care outside of intimate settings, unpaid care in intimate settings, and unpaid care outside intimate settings (Zelizer 2010). Second, within capitalism, having a job is part of individuals' identities, commitments and social beliefs; and it places individuals in social networks. Similarly, labor cannot be separated from those who perform it, and cannot be separated from the laborers' biological, psychological and social needs. The labor process is also most visibly interconnected with the machine process; recreation; knowledge; gender; race and ethnicity; citizenship and legal residency; the directing, supervising and disciplining; and violence processes.

*Recreation* is a social process that involves leisure, recuperation, healing and artistic and spiritual expression. This process is intertwined with labor, consumption, communication and expression, the processes of the body, and—generally—ecosystems.

It is important to analytically distinguish recreation from labor and consumption for two reasons. First, people cannot be defined solely as laborers or consumers, as they have other aspirations in addition to obtaining money, goods and services. Second, activities that contribute to the recreation of the human mind and body need not be categorized and analyzed as consumption activities.

Regarding *undertaking* as a social process—rather than focusing solely on investment, I formulate the process of undertaking that encompasses *entrepreneurship* and *investment* when motivated by making money, as well as any other initiative that results in mobilizing resources and beginning a new activity and direction, such as building and participating in social movements. This includes *mobilization*: the creation and activation of commitment, organization of social activities, and cultivation of networks and communities. The formulation of undertaking as a social process circumvents describing all human initiative as entrepreneurship and applying pecuniary valuation to all activities, and it proposes participation as an analytical element of social provisioning (Gibson-Graham 2006; O'Hara 1997).

The *mobility and residence process* encompasses not only transportation systems and habitation, but also information and communication systems, and patterns of financial liquidity. In this sense, mobility has spatial, informational and financial dimensions. Rising household debt and precarious employment are as much parts of the process as are transportation and housing. Within capitalism,

liquidity permits action and, thus, is central for agency. However, moving is different from mobility and may signify precariousness—employment insecurity and livelihood insecurity, displacement and in fact a loss of mobility. Evolution of the mobility and residence process is expressed by habits of life and thought such as the following: precariousness, migrant care work and suburban sprawl. This process is connected to the evolution of other processes such as labor, care, debt-credit, threat and punishment, and consumption (Cohen 2008; LeBaron 2010; Russel 2000; Zelizer 2010).

The *consumption process* refers not only to the acts of consumption but also to the methods and institutional arrangements that are part of consumption activities. For example, individualized packaging is a convention emerging from the activities and goals of the business enterprise. Examples of habits of life and thought that mark evolutionary changes in the consumption process include the following: conspicuous consumption, consumption standardization, growth of needs, fashion and tourism. These also signify an evolution of other social provisioning processes. For example, consumption standardization is a manifestation of the machine process, but could also be a starting point of investigating changes in the labor, care, waste, and mobility and residence processes. Similarly, tourism could be the starting point of analyzing the evolution of consumption, recreation, labor, care, waste, and mobility and residence processes (Fine 2002; Swaney and Olson 1992; Todorova 2014).

The *communication, expression and persuasion process* refers to artistic and spiritual expression, folklore, and the use of languages—not only as tools of description, but as ways to create meanings, conceptualize realities, frame problems and establish human relations. This includes political and expert discourse, the emergence of conventional ‘wisdom’ (Burgin 2012; Lakoff 2004) and advertising. Under capitalism, much of creative activity is directed toward salesmanship to further acquisition (Dewey [1922] 1988, p. 146; Veblen 1923). The offered framework allows for analyzing the communication of ideas and artistic expression as integral to the material world.

The *cultivation and transmission of knowledge, memories and tools process* includes the creating, collecting, storing, interpreting of, and access to data; and the data’s availability for future use (see Allen 2008). Under capitalism, the process also encompasses the creation of commodities based on data. This social process is connected to methods of communication and expression, concepts, labor and care (Dewey [1922] 1988; Veblen [1914] 1964). In an embodied approach to social provisioning, there is no boundary between ideas and material reality, hence knowledge is inseparable from tools and is intertwined with the labor and care processes. These are the bases of *resource creation and usage*. Resources ‘become’ through socially generated knowledge—and in that sense they are not natural factors of production waiting to be allocated, but are created factors instead. This resource creation and usage process involves inquiry; experiments; and the application of cultivation, excavation, harnessing, usage and learning methods—none of which are opposed to ceremonial valuation. Thus, resources are endogenously determined through agency within a value structure (DeGregory 1987; Junker 1967; Lee 2009) and in turn affect social processes. This recognition of an open system of resource creation does not negate the

effects of resource development and use. In this vision of resources, social valuation is part of the analysis of resource creation and usage, and the focus of inquiry shifts from the allocation of given resources to the conditions of resources creation, to their composition and to conflict in distribution.

The *machine process* is based on and depends on resources. The scope of the machine process is larger than the machine itself, and it encompasses production, as well as inquiry, workmanship, invention, design, application, maintenance and replacement of tools and appliances of production (Veblen [1904] 2005). The machine process results in standardization and mass production combined with greater workforce flexibility (Pietrykowski 1999). The greater the division of labor, the greater is the interconnectedness in the machine process, the greater is the standardization of tools and units of measurement, and the smaller is the agency of the laborer in the production process. Agency in that context deals with decision making about workmanship, the understanding of and the ability to affect the whole production process, as well as tool-sharing. The machine process also permeates domestic production—through task scheduling, standardized inputs, disposable consumables and more specialized appliances (Fox 1990). Further, the influence of the machine process is evident in the treatment of bodies—through bodybuilding, monitoring, medication, transplants and weight-loss regimens.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, conventions such as mechanical testing, grading, academic unit and faculty assessments, and online teaching are examples of the imprints the machine process makes on the cultivation and transmission of tools and knowledge (see Pietrykowski 2001). The ends-in-view are speed, instituted (self) control, automation and the generation of countable outcomes—with sought-after standardization.<sup>5</sup>

The delineation of *surveillance, supervision and direction* as a social process that is part of social provisioning is beneficial for enabling discussion of conflict and agency in the development of institutions. A major aspect of agency in the social provisioning process involves the ability to direct social activities and the production of a social surplus distribution—through investment, production, salesmanship and infrastructure decisions. Parenting is also part of this process. On the other hand, the predisposition of Veblen's ([1914] 1964) 'parental bent' is also manifested by institutions such as business enterprise and the state to further pecuniary concerns. Conventions of supervision, surveillance and direction are most notoriously present in conjunction with the development of threat and punishment, labor, care, consumption and knowledge processes (Kaplan 2006; Parenti 2000). Various dimensions and degrees of the supervision, surveillance and direction process are exemplified by habits of life and thought such as the following: humanitarian and expert assistance; worker surveillance, policing, self-surveil-

<sup>4</sup>Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish* is insightful on this generalization of disciplining mechanisms in the capitalist economy. We should also note Veblen's ([1904] 2005, p. 309) point that there is resistance to the discipline of the machine process governing all aspects of human life, perhaps because of the persistence of the instincts of workmanship and idle curiosity in his analyses.

<sup>5</sup>Those conventions are also manifestations of the *supervision, surveillance and direction*; the *threat and punishment*; and the *deprivation* processes discussed below. And they can be defined as elements of a habit of life and thought—*education as business enterprise* (see Veblen, 1918).

lance<sup>6</sup> and ‘gated consumption’ (see Todorova 2014); conventions such as gated communities, districting, passports and IDs; biometrics, security checks, assessment exercises and performance scorecards; symbols such as shop guards, surveillance cameras, neighborhood watch and border walls; social activities such as work retreats and neighborhood association meetings; and discourses such as those about productivity, efficiency, development, customer service and safety.

*Threat and punishment* is a social process that results in ‘disciplining’ but also in ‘resisting’ (e.g., through unionization, strikes, riots and protests). Within social provisioning under capitalism, a major threat to an individual is the inability to sell one’s labor. The normal operation of the capitalist economy at levels of income below full employment is pointedly noted by the various versions of the monetary theory of production as being a major threat in social provisioning under capitalism (Kalecki [1943] 1990; Keynes [1933] 1973; Wray 2008). This threat is rooted in economic class relations and is what makes the capitalist, rentier and leisure, and political-professional elite a ruling class. The punishment system is in synergy with this macroeconomic threat. In the context of the neoliberal, global flexible labor, the prison system extends to the working class—through immigration detention centers (De Giorgi 2007) and punitive welfare regimes (Rose 2000)—reproducing class, gender and race hierarchies (LeBaron and Roberts 2013). As Parenti (2000) notes, the expansion of the penal system has the effect of demobilizing the undertaking efforts through social breakdown, fear and draining of human energy. Another aspect of this process is the threat of crime, diseases and destitution, all connected to the fragmentation of social interaction, immobility, parochialism and institutionalized attempts to direct, restrict and criminalize certain populations’ mobility and lives (Federici 2004; Polanyi [1944] 1957; Sassen 2013).

*Deprivation* is a social process resulting from institutional arrangements and agency that restrict resources and ‘redistribute’ by means of ‘free income’ (the creation and capitalization of intangible assets). For example, in the context of capitalism, Veblen’s ([1904] 2005, 1923) ‘sabotage of production’ or ‘conscientious withdrawal from efficiency’ is a habit of life and thought that emerges out of pecuniary valuation and business concern, leading to unemployment. The recognition of this process enables the seeking of other explanations and solutions for poverty and unemployment beyond those offered at the individual choices (Galbraith 2008; Rose 2000; Wray 2008).

*Waste* as a process describes the effects of deprivation in terms of loss of human potential applied in the instrumental valuation of institutions. Within social provisioning under capitalism, the process of waste also includes ‘expenditure that does not serve human life or human well-being on the whole . . . and occurs on the ground of an invidious pecuniary comparison’ (Veblen [1899] 1994, pp. 60–61). Since those expenditures are also incomes that represent ‘vested interests,’ the generation of waste is desired at the individual level (Todorova 2013, 1186).

<sup>6</sup>Self-surveillance is performed through social media, self-profiling, reality shows, and—as Galbraith (2008) describes—through ‘self-censorship’ of expression in the process of seeking reputability (e.g., in expert discourse).

For example, ecosystem regulation functions—such as the ability of forests and wetlands to store and recycle certain amounts of wastes from human activities through dilution, assimilation and chemical recomposition (e.g., filtering of dust particles and water purification) (De Groot, Wilson, and Boumans 2002)—may be inhibited by pecuniary valuation (Nadal 2011; Power 2006).

The *distribution process* of the social surplus is prescribed by ownership regimes and society's use of tools, skills, labor and knowledge is always communally generated. Under capitalism, incomes are claims on the social surplus and are distributed based on pecuniary valuation. The importance of prices for distribution is not in forming a 'price mechanism,' but is in their role of signifying claims on the social surplus. Private ownership facilitates the creation of assets that secure individualized, class-based claims on social product and capital accumulation, and that represent income flows that give rise to exchange, trade and speculation. Enclosures, extraction and marketization of relations and matter give rise to claims on the social product, nature, knowledge and industrial arts of the community by creating commodities and 'vested interests,' salesmanship, output restriction and seizure of resources (Marx [1867] 1975; Nadal 2011; Polanyi [1944] 1957; Robertson 2008; Veblen 1923).

The *exchange, trade and speculation process* involves price administration, contracts execution, and a quest for liquidity. These are the monetary counterparts of the *gift*. A 'gift' is a statement of recognition as fellow humans, acceptance as possible partners and—once a relationship has been established—a wish to remain bonded in the future; it is not simply giving something to somebody for the purpose of consumption (Henaff 2010, p. 132). To 'gift' is to recognize and honor the other party, creating a reciprocal obligation. Henaff calls this a 'free obligation' as it involves the choice to engage or disengage and not to return what was given—a 'debt' of reply, dependence and gratitude. These symbolic, rather than legal, obligations are central for creating social bonds, and their purpose is to continue the relationship, not to conclude it (Henaff 2010, p. 207). On the other hand, the repayment of debt is the end of a debtor–creditor relationship.<sup>7</sup> A gift could also signify and confirm hierarchical relationships, particularly when there is inability to reciprocate (as in the case of charity—another habit of life and thought). A gift under such circumstances of inequality confirms and perpetuates the prevailing hierarchy as the recipients are under situations of 'enduring inferiority'. 'Reciprocal recognition then turns into recognition of unequal statutory positions' (Henaff 2010, 210).

The *debt-credit* social process includes but is not limited to the development of monetary debt instruments and finance. Financialization is a habit and thought representing an evolution of the debt-credit process in conjunction with the evolution of economic class, social class, labor, production, innovation, race and consumption processes (Boyer 2013; Brown 2008; Cohen 2008). Money itself is a social relationship between debtors and creditors, and it signifies hierarchical arrangements in social provisioning (Bell and Henry 2001; Ingham

<sup>7</sup>The calls for paying down government debt and balanced budgets can be interpreted as a desire to dissolve social bonds and to redefine public obligations and gift relations as exchange.

1996; Tymoigne and Wray 2006). The debt-credit process also encompasses non-monetary debt obligations and the development of accounting systems. Debt denominated in a money of account is a specific social arrangement of accounting for indebtedness.

*Violence* is the last social provisioning process to consider. Instead of focusing on individual acts of violence, the formulation of the *violence process* allows us to see connections between changes in provisioning and particular manifestations of violence. For example, enclosures that result in the institutionalization of wage labor as habit of life and thought, and the ongoing creation of fictitious commodities, represent violent reorganizations of social provisioning. Such reorganizations result in displacement, deprivations and rebellions, and they are accompanied by acts of force such as poor laws, imprisonment, slavery, rape, expulsions and war (Federici 2004; Marx [1867] 1975; Polanyi [1944] 1957; Sassen 2013).

The processes delineated in this section are based on social provisioning activities. As discussed, social provisioning processes should be considered in the context of the biological and geographical processes and the other social processes discussed above, allowing a truly embedded and embodied analysis of social provisioning.

## 6. Conclusions

In his essay ‘Why Is Economics Not an Evolutionary Science?’ Veblen (1898) argued for a notion of the economy as a life process. Relying on different streams of heterodox economics and on various disciplines, the current article proposes a way to theorize about the scope of economic analysis where social provisioning is not only the central organizing concept in heterodox economic theory, but is also articulated as a part of the life process. This article specifies a coherent language to connect the ‘economic,’ ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ in heterodox economic theory and to enable discussion of structures and agency in the framework of social provisioning.

The delineated processes offer diverse entry points for approaching social provisioning—beyond consumption, production, exchange and distribution. There is no presumption about primary processes. While capital accumulation, for example, is integrated into the various processes of social provisioning analysis, it is neither the end point, nor necessarily the starting or central point of analysis. The proposed framework opens the analytical boundaries defined by market exchange and capital accumulation, and it allows the transcending of dualisms such as market-nonmarket; society-economy; nature-culture; reproduction-production that are often presupposed in both mainstream and heterodox theories.

The proposed system of processes is a way of looking at multiple facets of ‘the social’ (‘intersectionality’). Since process is about change and variability, the approach offered goes beyond focusing on individual differences or on social categories that tend to be taken as universal and predetermined. This also shifts the focus of analysis to the multidimensionality of humans and social activities, and to their embeddedness and embodiment.



Conceptualizing the scope of heterodox economic theory through processes also transcends the question of micro versus macro foundations in heterodox economics, enables connecting contributions within heterodox micro- and macroeconomics and provides alternatives to the analytical centrality of a price mechanism and exchange.

The proposed processes categorization is not a rigid taxonomy. The goal is a framework that would assist the exploration of all aspects of social provisioning, in specific cultural-natural contexts, without relying on the conception of separate spheres of life. The hope is to facilitate the design of specific studies of social provisioning for the purpose of furthering the development of heterodox economic theory outside flawed notions of the price mechanism and exchange, while at the same time developing a way to pursue intersectional agency–structure analysis of ‘the social,’ and transcending hierarchical and oppressive analytical dualisms of culture–nature, mind–body and society–economy.

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