EPISTEMIC-THEORETICAL BASES CONVERGING WITH THE TERRITORIAL APPROACH

PRESSUPOSTOS EPISTÊMICO-TEÓRICOS CONVERGENTES COM A ABORDAGEM TERRITORIAL[1]

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Abstract

The following text, presented here as an essay, uses a literature review to identify epistemic-theoretical bases converging with the territorial approach. Referring to the territorial approach is to conceive the territory as a fundamental reference when proposing the socio-economic, cultural and environmental analysis of a given spatial area. Territory is conceived as a social construction resulting from the accumulations inherited from either a distant or a more recent past, and which is expressed contemporaneously in social, economic, natural, cultural, institutional, human and intellectual dimensions, thus constituting the territorial heritage. We understand that from the epistemological field it is possible to know which guidelines will lead to the unveiling of the object of study, by placing it in a given paradigmatic perspective. Therefore, this text is focused on four epistemic fields: systems theory, complexity theory, historical-dialectical materialism and the epistemological perspective sustained by decentralization and decoloniality, plus the indication of theoretical assumptions, both to be considered in the territorial analysis. The aim is to identify the epistemic-theoretical assumptions that guide the development of methodological procedures, which in turn enable the recognition and analysis of socio-economic-cultural and environmental contexts so as to prospect innovative and sustainable alternatives for territorial development.

Keywords: Territorial approach. Epistemic-theoretical bases. Territorial heritage. Territorial development.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as condições concretas e contextuais que levam os agricultores familiares a investirem nos processos informais do agronegócio. Uma das alternativas

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que vem sendo utilizada ao longo da história é o processamento de matérias-primas (principalmente alimentos), a partir do know-how passado de geração em geração entre os agricultores familiares. Para que esta pesquisa fosse conduzida empiricamente, foi utilizado o território de Santa Cruz do Sul. Esta pesquisa teve como método os pressupostos teóricos enraizados nas bases do materialismo histórico dialético. Assim, aponta conflitos e contradições nas atividades informais de processamento de alimentos como relevante referencial sociocultural e econômico para o território. Além disso, analisa os requisitos sanitários e as tradições de produção, processamento, consumo e comercialização de alimentos. Foi possível verificar que a informalidade do agronegócio familiar não é simplesmente uma situação transitória - o que proporciona sustentabilidade, autonomia e viabilidade é o sistema de produção e beneficiamento de matérias-primas e comercialização diversificada, que inclui estratégias de produção e reprodução das famílias. No contexto desta pesquisa, a informalidade se apresenta como resistência. Manifesta-se como fator de reflexão em relação às transformações ocasionadas pelos mecanismos globais de dominação.

Palavras-chave: Agronegócio familiar informal. Agricultura familiar. Feiras rurais. Leis do agronegócio.

Introduction

The identification of epistemic-theoretical bases converging with the territorial approach is a challenge still to be faced. This text takes on such a challenge[5], that is to identify the epistemic-theoretical bases that lead to appropriate methodological procedures for the recognition and analysis of socio-economic-cultural, and environmental contexts (territorial clippings), taking the territorial heritage as reference.

Alluding to the territorial approach is to conceive the territory as a fundamental reference. The debate about territory and territorial approach has been recurrent in recent decades, often with different understandings, to the point of becoming almost a fad. For this reason, many authors have produced reflections which contribute to advance and elucidate such debate[6].

De Raffestin (1993) deduces its relational dimension. The author understands territory as a spatial manifestation of power, grounded in social relations determined by actions, and concrete (energy) and symbolic (information) structures. Consequently, territory results from relations among actors, with emphasis in their relational integration. The idea of territory is especially important for the understanding of contemporary dynamics. It allows us to look relationally at domains in which dichotomous readings have usually prevailed: nature society, economy, politics and society, rural and urban, local and extra local (FAVARETO, 2020).

In the same line of thought, Schneider and Tartaruga (2004) affirm that territory needs to be understood from the recognition of power relations projected in the space between the different actors. As a result, territorial development processes refer to power relations, when it comes to the capacity of actors to take decisions and transform/restructure the space, impregnating new uses over the territory (RAMBO; FILIPPI, 2012).

Coulert and Pecqueur (1994, p. 470) reaffirmed about territory that "[...] the historical and cultural conditions and socioeconomic characteristics of the various regions play an important role, their diversity largely explaining the differences in development trajectories [...]". No longer just a support, space becomes a territory, a meeting point for development actors, and a meeting place between forms of market and social regulation. In this sense, territories "[...] are private spaces that enable a mediation between the individual and the outside" (PECQUEUR, 1992, p. 84).

Despite their particularities and specificities, territories are part of a spatial totality[7]. The totality needs to be seen not simply through the part-whole and whole-part relationship, but as a hologram in which each part or every point contains the totality, and vice versa, not admitting a

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[5] We are grateful to professors Dr. Arilson Favareto (UFABC) and Dr. Sérgio Schneider (UFRGS), for the pertinent comments and suggestions, which were useful to qualify the approach of the text. However, we the authors assume full responsibility for the final version of the article.

[6] Two publications are recommended to deepen the concept of territory, in addition to those mentioned here: Fuini (2017); Saquet (2007).

[7] Dallabrida (2020a) proposes "to signify territories", as a strategy of differentiation and reaffirmation of territorial identity by considering their specificities.

mutilating thought based on reductionism not capable of ordering the information and knowledge of a dynamic world. In short, the territorial approach considers territory as: (i) part of the spatial totality where diversity, relationality and interaction between actors is expressed; (ii) the interdependence between material and immaterial dimensions; (iii) and locus of manifestation of localised productive systems, of mediation and interdependence between society and nature (LIMA, 2010).

From the beginning of the debate on the topic to its application in public policies in Brazil (in the first decade of the 21st century), the territorial approach was intended to contribute to overcoming the sectoral focus of economic activities and the spatial dichotomy between rural versus urban, being replaced by the diversity of actions, strategies and trajectories that actors adopt, aiming at their social and economic reproduction (SCHNEIDER, 2009). Despite some advances, the evaluations carried out have shown different setbacks and gaps[8].

According to Schneider and Tartaruga (2004), the reaffirmation of the territorial approach results firstly from the abundance of literature to interpret the context from societal transformations of the late 20th and early 21st centuries due to the Fordism crisis, and the process of restructuring capitalism, moving to what Piore and Sabel (1984) called "flexible accumulation". This structure allowed the decentralization of industrial plants to not so dynamic areas, the flexibility of the production process, the outsourcing of services and a greater adaptability to market fluctuations. In these strategies, as stated by Büttenbender (2008), they were constituting productive clusters, productive arrangements and local or regional productive systems. As a result, there was a growing understanding that industrial growth processes which showed the best indicators would be the ones based on specific territorial dynamics.

"The second reason that favoured the interest for the territorial approach is related to the political and institutional aspects that derive, basically, from the crisis of the state and the increasing loss of its regulatory power [...]" (SCHNEIDER; TARTARUGA, 2004, p. 108). The new microelectronic and telematics-based technologies (telecommunications and information technology) contributed decisively to the consolidation of the globalization process that characterizes contemporary society and economy. As a result, the state began to suffer successive changes in its functions and duties, by ceasing to be an inducer of development to become a regulator, changing its centralizing character and allowing the participation of the various instances and organizations of civil society (SCHNEIDER; TARTARUGA, 2004).

The emergence of the territorial approach, in third place, is related to the crisis of the agrarian paradigm and the sectoral and productive approaches in agriculture. The sectoral approach to rural development predominant since the post-war period, focused on agricultural modernisation as a transformation engine in the rural sphere (BERDEGUÉ; FAVARETO, 2020). In this sense, Veiga (2002) pinpoints three main tendencies which led to this speech renewal: (i) the diversification of rural economy and the falling share of agriculture in the gross domestic product; (ii) the insufficiency of strategies based on sectoral specialisation and new challenges based on intersectoral articulations and links; (iii) criticism of centralised planning of public policies, both from an economic perspective and from the logic of building more democratic societies[9].

The diffusion of the territorial approach in Brazil and in South America had an important contribution from the European Leader Association for Rural Development (LEADER) program from the European Union, which influenced the orientation of programs and public policies with a focus on the territorial approach.

Abramovay (2010) recalls that the territorial approach to the development process gained momentum from the early 1980s. Based on the neo-Marshallian literature, which identified the direct links between social actors as one of the reasons for the formation of localised productive systems in Italian regions, such studies were of the utmost importance for the understanding of Brazilian experiences[10].

Indicatively, the principles of totality, diversity, specificity, pluralism, relationality, integration, systemic interdependence, autonomy of action and mediation between the constituent parts have a close relationship with the epistemic basis which supports territorial approach. These principles are proposed and discussed by epistemological currents developed in recent decades from

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[8] For a contemporary assessment of this debate, we suggest Berdegué and Favareto (2020).
[9] Some publications are references in the introduction and deepening of the debate on rural territorial development in Brazil and Latin America. For example: Abramovay, 1999; Wanderley, 2000; Veiga, 2002; Schneider, 2004; Favareto (2007; 2010).
[10] On the experiences of diffuse industrialisation in Brazil, we suggest a publication: Raud (1999).

the questioning of the Cartesian paradigm and from the attempt to overcome a centrally Europeanist vision, such as the New Systems Theory, the Complexity Theory, the Historical-Dialectical Materialism and the epistemological perspective based on Decoloniality and Decentralization, and its relationship with the territorial approach.

Before getting into the core content of this article, two entries must be added for the record. The first one from Favareto (2020), which after recognizing territory as a synthesis category useful for the analysis of contemporary phenomena, warned that speaking in territories implies looking at four orders of interdependencies: (i) interdependencies between local and extra-local. Although the idea of territory emphasizes endogenous aspects, it would be a mistake to analyse it in an autarchic way, making it necessary to consider a mutual determination between the local and the extra-local, even admitting that the local social fabric can reorient, reject, or simply absorb such external forces: (ii) interdependencies between society and nature[11], as territories are units formed by social systems and natural systems without which there is no economic activity and no human life; (iii) interdependencies between dimensions of reality (society and nature, economic and social dimensions, political and cultural dimensions). Though according to the author, this leads to the need to unveil which of these dimensions presides over the shaping of the dynamics of the territories, since the different territorial actors dispute the control of their resources. It then refers to the question of power, requiring the need to recognise the mode of domination, that is, to recognise how certain social groups mobilise the material and non-material resources of the territory in order to justify and sustain domination.

A second question, raised by Schneider and Tartaruga (2004), deals with the instrumental or analytical use of the territory. According to the authors, territorial approaches to development are generally presented as non-theoretical, as they are almost exclusively tied to the instrumental and practical focus. Analytical focus, on the other hand, requires epistemic-theoretical referential to be established. This is why, in an attempt to overcome this gap, we propose to take the territory and its heritage as a reference in the analysis and proposition of innovative and sustainable development strategies for municipalities, regions or territories. We intend to do so, sustained by an epistemic-theoretical framework that is convergent with the territorial approach, as previously mentioned.

This text proposes to reflect on these and other issues and may contribute to overcoming the theoretical challenge of identifying epistemic-theoretical bases which converge with territorial approach. The motivation for this herculean attempt stems from another challenge. The reference is a research project proposed by a group of intellectuals from Brazil, Latin America and Europe, whose main goal is to elaborate studies, propose and validate methodological reference in order to contribute to the elaboration of territorial diagnostics. Such elaboration will allow the prospecting of innovative and sustainable development alternatives, being territorial heritage the reference[12]. Therefore, this text will serve as a guiding theoretical and epistemological support in the proposition of the methodological framework.

Territorial heritage is here conceived as the set of assets and resources (material and immaterial), which have been accumulated throughout history in a given territory, resulting from historical processes of socio-economic and cultural construction and reconstruction, in the relationship with the environmental surroundings. It includes elements inherited from the distant past and others that are constantly superimposed on the territory (DALLABRIDA, 2020d, p. 12).

This text is characterized as a theoretical essay with references from the contemporary literature and from classic publications. In addition to this introduction, the text is structured in two more parts - epistemological assumptions and theoretical assumptions - besides the final considerations.

Epistemological bases

Epistemology: etymology and its main purposes

A first question is pertinent: what is epistemology? Lima (2010, p. 117) summarises in this way: "From the Greek *episteme* (knowledge, science) + *logos* (speech, theory, treatise, the study of) we have the etymology of the word epistemology, consisting of the theory or treatise on science or

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[11] In the concept of territorial development here assumed, environmental sustainability is considered an indispensable condition.

[12] This is the case of the Research Project already mentioned, proposed in the second half of 2020, therefore, still in its initial phase.

theory of knowledge". According to the author, one can also refer to epistemology as the branch of Philosophy that studies scientific research and its by-product, scientific knowledge.

According to Japiassu (1981, p. 58), the role of epistemology is "[...] to study the genesis and structure of scientific knowledge with an interdisciplinary bias, once science is observed from the perspective of several disciplines". For the author, epistemology deals with studies and reflections about scientific methods, carrying out a "[...] critical study of the principles, hypotheses and results of the different sciences" (p. 24). Therefore, it is in the epistemological field where the guidelines to guide the unveiling of the object of study are understood, by placing it within a given paradigmatic perspective (LIMA, 2010).

Bachelard (1990) proposed the construction of a historical-critical epistemology, which studies science in its process of growth and development, that is, its history and how it should be carried out. The author's point of view converges to the assumption that progress is the mobilizing, dynamic element of scientific culture; it is this element that "the history of the sciences" must describe in order to judge and value it, by eliminating any and all margin of return to misconceptions. So, it must "[...] formulate a recurring story, which is clarified by the purpose of the present, and which starts from the certainties of the present by discovering in the past, the progressive formations of the truth." (p. 205-207). In this sense, the proposition of the Bachelardian epistemology aims at the production of scientific knowledge, covering all its aspects: logical, ideological, ontological and historical (LIMA, 2010).

Proposing territorial heritage as a reference is to propose studies focused on the territorial approach to development. The theoretical reference is based on the four epistemic fields mentioned below.

General Systems Theory to New Systems Theory

Originally, a system is a set of interacting elements. Nevertheless, Bauer (2009) gives us a more detailed view of it: (i) a system is an organized and complex whole; (ii) system is a set of interdependent elements, whose final result is superior to the sum of results that these very elements would have if they operated in isolation; and (iii) system is any set of parts brought together, characterised by relations between parts and by the behaviour of the whole (BAUER, 2009).

Regarding the system, Lucas Jr. (1987, p. 18) defines it as a set of organised, interdependent and integrated components and variables. A system has objectives and goals, and these goals are sometimes difficult to identify. According to the author, the environment or surroundings is external to the system and encompasses everything that is outside it. To some extent, the environment also determines the purposes of the system - that is why the system and its surroundings are interrelated and interdependent.

It can be inferred from the author's argument that, when considering territory as a system, it should not be forgotten that not everything can be controlled from the territory – except for its assets or resources, which are represented in this text by territorial heritage. We assume the definition of resource and assets proposed by Benko and Pecqueur (2001, p. 41). "An asset is understood to be the factors in 'activity', while resources are the factors to be revealed, exploited or organized. Unlike assets, resources thus constitute a reserve, a latent potential".

The Systems Theory emerged in social and organisational studies with the aim of overcoming the reductionism and mechanicism which permeated classical functionalism (SANTOS; PELOSI; OLIVEIRA, 2012). The Systems Theory presents a more complex analysis of the social reality, though. It points to a reorientation of the observer's vision for the diversity, the interrelationships and the adaptation mechanisms that occur in the system and between it and the environment. Besides that, the Systems Theory apparently solved the problem of reductionism by incorporating holism as a new principle (MORIN, 2005a).

French philosopher Gusdorf (1953) was one of the first scholars to systematise a proposal for interdisciplinary work. This author's work was disseminated in Brazil by Japiassu (1976; 1981), who considered interdisciplinarity a process by which there is mutual interactivity, and all the disciplines that participate in the process must influence each other, and vice versa. There is a theoretical approach between the discussion on interdisciplinarity and systems thinking. Basic discussions which provided the systematization of systems thinking were described by Capra (1996) throughout history. According to the author, the first foundation of systems thinking is the shift from the parts to the whole. Thus, living systems are constituted totalities whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller parts, so that their fundamental properties are properties of the whole, which none

of the parts possesses. Although mechanistic thinking has been resistant, it is the holistic view built up over the centuries that has stood out and like so it should remain, once its foundations are appropriate to all types of systems.

The main criticisms about the Systems Theory refer to the attempt to explain social facts through natural sciences concepts and their tendency to disregard the specific socio-anthropological and cultural aspects of the actors and of specific social formations. In the first case, while functionalism draws on mathematics and physics to formulate its theories about the universe, systemism draws on the biological sciences, and therefore does not overcome the tendency that conditions social sciences to the rationality of natural sciences, in which the role of culture and emancipated intentionality on reality is not taken into account (SANTOS; PELOSI; OLIVEIRA, 2012). In the second case, we realized systemic theories privilege dominant structural logics, for they find it difficult to deal with the contradictory, procedural, dynamic and specific dimensions that come from diverse logics, beyond dominant structural logics (LONG, 2007; OLIVIER DE SARDAN, 2007; LAGO and ROTTA, 2018).

Bechmann and Ster (2001) refer to Niklas Luhmann's contribution, by stating that such author seeks to overcome the tendency to use the rationality of natural sciences for the analysis of social sciences, by proposing a concept of a system formed in a strictly relational way. According to Luhmann, a system means a series of interrelated events or operations. "In the case of living beings, for example, these are physiological processes; in the case of psychic systems, processes are ideas; and in terms of social relations, they are communications" (BECHMANN; STER, 2001, p. 190). Systems are formed and assert their identity by distinguishing among themselves and the environment in which events and operations take place. It is not a spatial constitutive border, but an operational one, once it guarantees identity/differentiation and enables the relationship to happen.

However, criticism to the Systems Theory does not annul its explanatory capacity; it only alerts about its inadmissible absolutization. Some advances have been pointed out by scholars of the subject, as in the Theory of Complex Thinking discussed below.

On the other hand, Luhmann (1997, p. 1144) states that "The paradox is the orthodoxy of our time". According to the author, communication and therefore society (in particular the modern, functionally differentiated society) are essentially built on paradoxes. For the author, the paradoxes in our functional systems do not lead to a blockage in their operations. Those paradoxes are the condition for creative development (MOELLER, 2015).

Schad et al. (2015) defined paradoxes as persistent contradictions between interdependent elements. According to this understanding, a paradox contains three ingredients: tension, interdependence and persistence. First off, a paradox involves tension, a contradiction between two elements. Second, unlike what happens in a dilemma, the contradiction between the two elements is interdependent. That is, a decision on one matter has implications for a matter situated at an opposite pole. In other words, tension has a dimension of interdependence. Both poles form a duality. Finally, the contradiction persists over time. It is not eliminated; it is not temporary. Paradoxes can be generative or degenerative. If the relationship between tension is used as a source of synergy, the paradox can become an open window on new possibilities. But paradoxes can generate confusion and paralysis. They then become a source of debilitating choices.

Contradictions are part of the contemporary context, and there is a growing acceptance that paradoxes are not anomalies to be avoided or eliminated, but rather consequences of the organisational process itself. Contradictions are not interruptions to the organisational order, but part of that order (CUNHA; REGO; SOUSA, 2016).

On the issue of paradoxes and the resulting paradoxical complexity, Moeller (2015) summarises:

As contingent social constructions, media, such as power (political), truth (academic) and laws (legal), are paradoxically constituted, which gives them flexibility and productivity, especially in relation to their evolution or developments in time. Power is considered authority, but its continuous reversal constitutes the *autopoiesis* of politics. The truth is considered durable, but its continuous modification constitutes the *autopoiesis* of the academic system. The laws are considered mandatory, but their continuous review constitutes the *autopoiesis* of the legal system. Paradoxes inherent to the media can be developed, which brings about social evolution (MOELLER, 2015, p. 174).

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Luhmann's theory is fundamentally paradoxical, not only because it is part of what it describes (and therefore changes its object while describing it), but also because it emerges as a social or communicative operation founded on paradoxical modes of observation (MOELLER, 2015, p. 178).

Summarising, according to Luhmann's theoretical perspective, the self-construction of society as a complex system of communication functions is based on the development of paradoxes, which are in turn founded on the paradox of observation. Thus, social construction does not operate by eliminating paradoxes, but through them (MOELLER, 2015).

It is possible to relate the meaning of territory and its form of expression, the territorial heritage, with the idea of a system. The territory could then be considered as an organised whole, composed of interdependent and integrated components (social, economic, cultural, natural, institutional, human and intellectual dimensions). Despite the interdependence and integration of its components, it is part of a larger whole, the environment or external environment, thus being able to interfere in the territorial context. However, the resources of the territory (territorial patrimony), "[...] are the means available to the system to carry out the necessary activities to achieve its objectives. Unlike the environment, the resources are within the system and under its control " (LUCAS JR., 1987, p. 18).

Therefore, limits and possibilities of collective action can be perceived in the territorial dynamics. Either when referring to territorial heritage or when proposing territorial prospects, possibilities are being mentioned as alternatives to overcome limitations. In the same way, the ideas of connection, diversity, interaction, and paradoxes, dialogue with the possibility of thinking about the future of territories or regions, considering the territorial perspective.

The Complexity Theory

For Morin (1996), the greatest purpose of complexity is "[...] to account for the articulations shattered by the cuts between disciplines, between categories and between types of knowledge", tending towards multidimensional knowledge, that is, to study and respect several dimensions of a phenomenon, since man is a biological-sociocultural being and that social phenomena arise and come from the economic, psychological, cultural context, among others. Consequently, complex thinking in its multidimensionality, "[...] carries within it a principle of incompleteness and uncertainty" (p. 177).

From the work of Morin (1996), one can state that complex thinking is a more refined elaboration of the systems theory, which started by breaking the mechanistic paradigm and the clash between reductionism and expansionism (or holism), in which one tries to see the world in terms of an order or a background - in which all things find their place or meaning. From the systems theory model emerges the paradigm of Complex Thought Theory. These two epistemic orientations are not only delimited by a historical compendium, but first and foremost, by a hermeneutic: the understanding of reality from its various interrelated dimensions.

Morin (2007, p. 13) refers to complexity, as a fabric of heterogeneous constituents inseparably associated, invoking "[...] the paradox of the one and the multiple". Complexity is effectively the fabric of events, actions, interactions, retroactions, determinations and accidents that constitute the phenomenal universe... Thus, the reproduction of species is itself influenced by society, which through its culture establishes the rules of life in common (SANTOS; PELOSI; OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 64).

In these terms, following Edgar Morin's epistemic perspective, as Lima (2010) reaffirms, the objective of knowledge is not to provide an absolute and complete answer in itself as a final word, but rather open the dialogue and not enclose it, as there is no radical epistemological cut, just as there is no pure science, no final truth about any object and no pure logic. Thrift (1999) considers complexity theory as a scientific amalgam, a rhetorical hybrid, also stating further that the main reason for its popularity lies in its anti-reductionist character.

Morin (2005a) proposes the recognition of circularity in the simultaneous explanations of the whole by the parts and of the parts by the whole, i.e., both explanations are complementary and none of them is able to annul the antagonistic and competing characteristics of the other. Three circularities are proposed by the author, who builds a complex vision of reality: (i) The circularity of the whole versus the parts, "[...] the simplified view would say: the part is in the whole; the whole is within the part that is within the whole!" (MORIN, 2007, p. 88); this is also true for the society that, since our childhood, has been imprinted as a whole in our mind, through language, culture, beliefs

and knowledge, resulting in the individual being in the society, which is in the individual (SANTOS; PELOSI; OLIVEIRA, 2012); (ii) circularity unity versus diversity, implies that the whole exists as a single global unit, but the parts have dual identities, preserving their own identities, not reducible to the whole and also constituting a common identity; thus, at the same time that diversity builds unity, unity builds diversity (MORIN, 2007; SANTOS; PELOSI; OLIVEIRA, 2012); (iii) the circularity of order versus disorder, which expresses the essence of the sense of complexity, takes place between the instances of order and disorder. "What I say about order and disorder can be conceived in dialogical terms" (MORIN, 2007, p. 74). Between individuals and society, which complement each other, there are also antagonisms, which come from the opposition between egocentrism and sociocentrism (BAUER, 2009).

Santos, Pelosi and Oliveira (2012) emphasize that Morin brings out the emergence of the subject and, consequently, of the autonomy. World and subject are placed in a situation of reciprocity and inseparability. Then arises the concept of dependent autonomy: there is no society without individuals, while at the same time there are no properly human individuals endowed with spirit, language and culture without society. While the individual receives influences from his cultural environment, he is also endowed with innate autonomy, which inhibits total cultural and social determinism.

For Morin (2005b) the complex society is the one that most favours individual autonomies: "High complexity is linked to the development of communications, economic exchanges and ideas, the game of antagonisms between interests, passions and opinions" (MORIN, 2005b, p. 274). The greater the pluralisms in the economic, political and cultural field, the greater the possibilities for freedom and individual and the least the chance is of our life being programmed in relation to genes, society and culture. "Social complexity limits the exploitation and subjugation of the individual to the apparatus of the state and social norms, by allowing physical, mental and spiritual autonomy" (SANTOS; PELOSI; OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 65).

Like the systems theory, the complexity theory is not exempt from criticism. Andrade (2007, p. 167) states that it is "[...] marked by a strong metaphysical appeal, when it intends to establish a priori and unprecedented knowledge supported supposedly on an empirical data or more precisely on the complexity of the real". Sousa Santos (2007) also raises some questions by stating that the theory focuses on defending the principle of equality, but could not recognize the differences (which is opposed to reality itself). In this sense, the author sees in the complexity theory another way of understanding the world in political and epistemological terms. It is not a matter of adhering to relativism but rather of a coexistence between movements which, although distinct, share fundamental points, especially in emancipatory ideals and in the defence of counter-hegemonic proposals, which may signal important advances.

One way of establishing a relationship between the concept of complexity and the territorial context, is to associate them with some principles: (i) anti-reductionism; (ii) pluralism; (iii) multidimensionality; (iv) incompleteness and uncertainty. According to the Morinian conception, the understanding of reality from its various interrelated dimensions is an attempt to overcome the "broken pieces" proposed by disciplinary or sectoral approaches. In other words, it is a question of advancing the understanding of reality from its various interrelated dimensions.

Historical and dialectical materialism

The dialectic that appears in Marx's thought emerges as an attempt to overcome dichotomy, as the separation between subject and object. While dialectics emerged in the history of human thought long before Marx, approximations had been already found among philosophers in ancient Greece.

It is due to Hegel, the German philosopher who lived from 1770 to 1831, that dialectics regained its place as a philosophical concern and an important object of study in Philosophy. Hegel dealt with the elaboration of dialectics as a method, advocating the principle of contradiction, totality and historicity (NOVELLI; PIRES, 1996). Although it is with Karl Marx, a German philosopher and political activist who lived from 1818 to 1883, that dialectics is presented as a historical materialist method, which underpins the Marxist thought, and can be understood as an epistemological path which grounds knowledge for the interpretation of historical and social reality (PIRES, 1997).

For the Marxist thought, it is important to discover the phenomena laws whose investigation is concerned. Furthermore, to capture in detail the articulations from the problems, to analyse the

evolutions and to trace the connections about the phenomena that involve such problems (PIRES, 1997). For the author, this was only possible by reinterpreting Hegel's dialectical thought.

Formal logic fails to explain the contradictions and holds onto thought, by preventing the necessary movement for the understanding of things. If the world is dialectical (it moves and it is contradictory) it is necessary a Method, a theory of interpretation, that can serve as an instrument for its understanding, and this logical instrument can be the dialectical method as thought by Marx...

With this concern, Marx came up with the material character (men organise themselves in society for the production and reproduction of life) and the historical character (how they have been organising themselves through their history) (PIRES, 1997, p. 86).

With the crisis of the real socialism as a political, economic and social system, the dialectical historical materialist method (MHD) has been widely questioned as a theoretical reference for understanding reality. Yet according to Sousa Santos (1996), it is worth noting that the Marxist interpretations of the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of modern capitalist society continue being consistent and original interpretations, surviving the current capitalist stage, thereby giving the method relevance and pertinence, even if it needs to be constantly contextualised (SOUSA SANTOS, 1996).

Still regarding the MHD method, Alves (2010, p. 4) states:

Although naturalistic and empirical, Marx's method is not positivist, but realist. Its epistemological dialectics also lead him to a specific ontological dialectics (a set of laws or principles governing a sector or the totality of reality) and a conditional relational dialectics (the movement of history).

Pires (1997) argues that it is necessary to understand the MHD method in order to be instrumental in the process of understanding reality. He justifies his defence by stating that such method is characterized "[...] by the movement of thought through the historical materiality of men's life in society, that is, it is a matter of discovering (through the movement of thought) the fundamental laws to define the organisational form of men throughout the history of humanity" (p. 87).

The principle of contradiction present in this logic indicates that, in order to think about reality, it is possible to accept contradiction, walk through it and grasp what is essential to it. In this logical path, moving the thought means reflecting on reality starting from the empirical (the given reality, the apparent real, the object as it appears at first sight) and through abstractions (thought, reflections, and theory elaborations), come to the concrete: more elaborate understanding of what is essential in the object, object synthesis of multiple determinations, and concrete thought. Thus, the difference between the empirical (apparent real) and the concrete (thought real) are the abstractions (reflections) of thought that make the observed reality more complete (PIRES, 1997, p. 87).

The historical and dialectical materialistic thinking can be understood as an epistemological path that underlies knowledge for the interpretation of historical and social reality, in the effort to capture in detail the articulations of problems, in order to analyse the evolutions and trace connections about their phenomena. Therefore, from allusions to the historical and dialectical materialist method, it is possible to deduce important contributions to guide territorial studies. In particular, the importance of the principle of contradiction, totality and historicity is highlighted in the process of understanding and analysing complex realities, as in the case of socio-economic, historical and cultural contexts, in spatial sections represented by municipalities, regions or territories.

The epistemological perspective based on decentralisation and decoloniality and its relation with the territorial approach

The revision of modern epistemologies results in a theoretical challenge for the intelligibility of the world in its hybridity, as well as an ethical and political challenge, insofar as it makes explicit the exclusion and the silencing of subjects led to dehumanisation, once they have their knowledge and cosmovision denied as legitimate explanations and guides of conduct (MIGLIEVICH-RIBEIRO, 2014). When dialoguing with the need to review epistemologies, the discussion on decoloniality as a theoretical, ethical, and political movement, questions the pretensions of objectivity of what is called scientific knowledge of the last centuries, especially in the social sciences field.

What was conventionally called decoloniality or post-colonialism, in the form of a set of theoretical contributions derived mainly from literary and cultural studies[13], also understood as a method of "deconstruction of essentialisms" deals therefore with the proposal of "[...] a critical epistemology to the dominant conceptions of modernity" (COSTA, 2006, p. 83-84).

Sousa Santos (2009) postulates the exercise of decentralization as a prerequisite to capture the totality of what is happening in the contemporary world. In this regard, the author developed what is called "*South Epistemologies*". It is therefore a matter of proposing, from the diversity of the world, an epistemological pluralism that recognises the existence of multiple visions which contribute to the broadening of the horizons of mundanity, from social practices and experiences and alternative policies. The expression "South Epistemologies" is for the author a metaphor for the suffering, the exclusion and the silencing of peoples and cultures that have been dominated throughout history by capitalism and colonialism. Colonialism constitutes the ground zero from which contemporary conceptions of modernity are constructed, being important for both what they say and what they silence (SOUZA SANTOS, 2009).

Coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the world pattern of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as the cornerstone of what is called power pattern, and operates in each of the material and subjective planes, spheres and dimensions of everyday social existence and social scale. It originates and is globalised from America (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 342).

Dussel (2000) has the same line of thought. For him, modernity is a myth that hides coloniality, because: (i) modern civilization of an Eurocentric character is described as developed and superior; (ii) superiority indicates that the poorest, most primitive, or barbaric people are the ones who need to be "developed" and that the path to be followed is the one taken by the European countries; (iv) since the "barbarian" is opposed to this kind of civilising process, violence is justified, if necessary, to destroy the obstacles to this modernisation. The author also refers to the Eurocentric development pattern, as unilinear and European, which even unconsciously determines the "developmentalist fallacy".

Notwithstanding, the process of decolonialization should not be confused with the rejection of human creation by the global North and associated with what would be genuinely created in the South. It needs to be understood much more as contributions by authors from the centres as well as from the peripheries of the knowledge geopolitics production, which questions ethnocentric universalism, theoretical Eurocentrism, methodological nationalism, epistemological positivism, and scientific neoliberalism which are part of the social sciences mainstream. Thus, decolonializing theory - especially political theory - is one of the steps towards decolonializing power itself (BALLESTRIN, 2013).

In the field of Geography, Milton Santos raised questions in the 1970s and 1980s converging with what is known today as epistemological perspectives based on decentralization and decoloniality. By bringing together the "South Epistemologies", from Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and the work of Milton Santos, Dantas (2014) highlights that the latter has, as one of its main concerns, the proposition of an adequate geographical epistemology for the analysis of the "South".

The book whose original version is from 1987, entitled *O espaço do cidadão* (Portuguese for "The Citizen's Space"), suggests what he called the "civic-territorial model" to refer to the conversion of abstract citizenship into concrete citizenship, through preparation, management and spatial planning aimed at the equitable redistribution of social resources and the allocation of goods and services to all its inhabitants. This proposition is supported by the criticism that the author makes to the fact that, when development plans or strategies for regions or territories are considered, the most dynamic sectors of the economy are taken as reference, forgetting that the manufacturing, distribution circuits and consumption are quite differentiated, especially if we consider the peripheral urban areas.

To better characterize this question that Santos (2008) proposed in another publication that, in the urban economy of poor countries, two sectors should be considered: (i) the upper circuit, directly associated with the corporate sectors of economic reproduction technologically modern; (ii) the lower circuit, associated with the forms of social reproduction of the poorest populations, usually dependent on labour rather than on capital

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[13] Another understanding referred to the term is as a historical period after the decolonization processes of the so-called "third world", referring to the independence, liberation and emancipation of societies exploited by imperialism and neo-colonialism, especially in the Asian and African continents. This understanding will not be explored here, as highlighted by Mignolo (2010).

Santos (2008) considered that the use of the expression "informal sector", used to refer to the socioeconomic activities of the so-called lower circuit, was irrational in the Weberian sense of the term, in which only the "formal" organization would be rational an ethnocentric perspective, which does not even consider the conditions of work, consumption, credit and infrastructure of poor economies in underdeveloped countries. As an alternative to this ethnocentric understanding, Milton Santos understood the set of artisanal manufacturing activities, small businesses and services, and non-modern transportation, as an economic system with very particular characteristics, whose dynamisms and mechanisms of operation are often out of the scope of development policies (LEITE; TRINDADE JÚNIOR, 2020).

It can be observed, therefore, that the contemporary contributions on decoloniality or post-colonialism provide questions more related to socio-political-cultural issues, while the contribution of Geography complements this debate with socio-economic questions focused on territorial planning and management. In other words, both contributions are complementary and indispensable to support regional or territorial studies which are guided by the territorial perspective.

In summary, those brief reflections suggest that thinking about development (local, regional, territorial) with territorial heritage as a reference implies that investigations made should equally contemplate the "barbarians" of contemporaneity, that is, the segments still excluded from the benefits deriving from the current technological evolution. It also implies considering into the planning the lower circuit of the urban and regional economy, in short, converging on what Milton Santos calls the "civic-territorial model", everything supported by a decentralized and decolonial epistemological framework. This is, in theory, an attempt to prioritise epistemological conceptions that avoid the exclusion and the silencing of subjects with their knowledge and cosmovision, often denied as legitimate explanations and guidelines for conduct, whether by minorities or marginalised and/or dispossessed groups.

Finally, the expression "barbarians", which historical origin refers to peoples or individuals who did not submit to the precepts of Western civilisation, can contemporarily be referred to those who are excluded from modern society for a number of reasons: ethical-cultural, socioeconomic, behavioural, or yet, for not adapting to technological modernity demands. This implies that thinking about development from a territorial perspective also represents an attempt to overcome what is called developmentalist fallacy, by meeting plural desires and territories' interests.

Theoretical bases to be considered in territorial analysis: a propositional indication

As transcribed in Plato's work "The Republic", *episteme* is conceived as a knowledge of the reality of things, full of certainty, while its opposite *doxa* is reaffirmed as simple opinion, subject to its falsification. An assumption is understood as something which can be assumed in advance based on hypotheses, evidence or convictions. Meanwhile, an epistemic presupposition refers to an organised set of knowledge that anticipates and guides our interpretation and/or understanding of a given reality. Any given theoretical conception is based on an epistemic assumption. On the other hand, theoretical conceptions guide our reality study practices by indicating the most appropriate methodological procedures for doing so.

Regarding methodological procedures, we will return to the subject at another moment. This part of the text points out the central theoretical categories that dialogue with epistemic assumptions which converge with territorial approach.

The present propositional indication is guided by previous theoretical reflections, synthesized in three publications (DALLABRIDA, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). A first reflection comes from the article *Signifying Territories as a Strategy of Differentiation: Theoretical and Methodological Contributions* (DALLABRIDA, 2020a), in which it is pointed out that "signifying territories" mean the act of attributing a conventionalized mark to distinguish them as specific spatial clusters, including their people, historical traditions, forms of survival and/or their differentiated products, as a strategy to reaffirm the territory's specificities and its identity. It is based on the premise that the possibilities of expanding the competitiveness of territories and regions may or may not increase, depending on the capacity of socio-territorial organization, the quality and specific characteristics from products they offer to the market. As a central conclusion, the article states that the meaning of territories implies reaffirming the value of the territorial dimension in development processes (DALLABRIDA, 2020a).

A second reflection is seen in the article *Territorial Heritage: Theoretical Approaches and Methodological Indications for Territorial Studies*, in which it is reviewed the theoretical bases that

originate the approach on territorial heritage. In the article, territorial heritage is conceived as the set of assets and resources (material and immaterial) which were accumulated throughout history in a given territory, resulting from historical processes of socioeconomic and cultural construction and reconstruction, in relation to the environmental surroundings. It includes elements either inherited from the distant past or which are constantly superimposed on the territory. Territorial heritage is considered a reference and a starting point in the processes of intervention and territorial analysis, especially when it comes to demands related to planning and management (DALLABRIDA, 2020b)[14].

Finally, a third reflection contemplated in the article *Territory and Territorial Governance, Heritage and Territorial Development: Structure, Process, Form and Function in the Territorial Dynamics of Development* proposes relating categories of geographical analysis, structure, process, form and function to the territorial dynamics of development as proposed by the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos. The text starts with a theoretical discussion to elaborate a synthesised geographical interpretation of territorial processes, and it ends with methodological indications supporting territorial heritage and its components as a starting point and guideline in the elaboration of localized development strategies. The central objective is to propose a reference for thinking about new possibilities in the dynamics of localised development, with the activation of territorial heritage as central strategy (DALLABRIDA, 2020c).

Figure 1 reproduces the different interrelationships between the four central theoretical categories (territory, territorial governance, territorial heritage, territorial development), considering processes of territorial development.

Figure 1: A geographical interpretation of the territorial development process
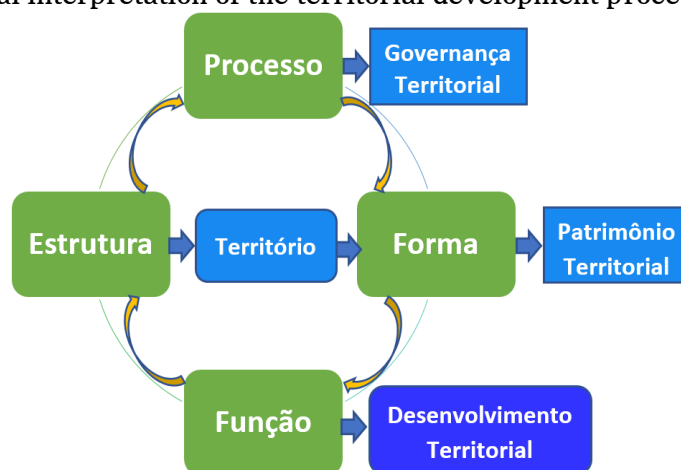
Source: Dallabrida (2020c, p. 71)

The four theoretical categories as explanations of the processes of territorial development can be understood like so:

- a- Starting category: the **territory**, a socio-territorial **structure** in which its parts interrelate, constituting the natural world, the organisations and production;
- b- Intermediation category: the form taken on temporally and historically by a structure, resulting from socio-environmental relations through "horizontal societal conversations", that is, **territorial governance** practices (DALLABRIDA, 2007, 2015; FARINÓS, 2015), a **process** in which different interests/intentions are confronted, in order to build convergences regarding the territorially desired future;
- c- Resulting category: every structure temporally and historically built takes on a **form**, in this case, represented by the **territorial heritage**;
- d- Category of functionality: from the confrontation between different projects of the future, spatial configurations result, administratively demarcated (municipalities, regions, countries) or by relations of identity, anchoring and belonging to a place (territories), as a **function** of the form; such spatial configurations transit between the utopia desired by the

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[14] On territorial heritage, two reference publications are: Magnaghi (2015); Poli (2015).

people involved in processes of collective action in municipalities, regions, countries or territories, and the possible reality; what is argued is what we call **territorial development**, is part of the desired utopia and its momentary concreteness, representing the possible reality; as the agents of such processes do not always have the same power of persuasion or decision, the desired future does not necessarily meet the interests of the whole, sometimes, not even of the majority, so that the desired "development" remains much more in the condition of utopia than of reality (DALLABRIDA, 2020c).

Two complementary questions to understand the indicative proposition expressed here. The first one, regarding the spatial configurations as a function of form, it is worth paying attention to the contribution of Pecqueur (1992), when he states that the notion of territory presents a double dimension: (i) of given territory, territorial clippings administratively demarcated (municipalities, regions, countries); (ii) built-territories, territorial sections demarcated by social actors who enjoy geographical proximity, through relationships of identity, anchoring and belonging to a place (territories), thus seeking to solve shared socio-productive problems. These are the spatial configurations resulted from the territorial dynamics of development [15].

The second question is the necessity to remember that territory is a paradoxical whole, permeated by contradictions between interdependent elements. Contradictions are part of the contemporary context, they are not anomalies to be avoided or eliminated, but rather a result of the organizational process itself. In other words, they are not interruptions to the organisational order, but part of that very order. Thus, a decision on one matter has implications for a matter situated at an opposite pole. These two poles form a duality. However, if the relationship between the tension is used as a source of synergy, the paradox can become an open window to new possibilities. This source of synergy is possible to be generated and enhanced through a collective, democratic, shared and horizontal action among different territorial actors. Social relations of an identity and territorial nature generate this synergy, allowing it to subsist and multiply.

Boisier (1999) refers to this synergy as synergistic capital. The author proposes to rely on the concept of territorial capital (or territorial heritage) to enhance and articulate new forms of capital, almost all of which are intangible, in order to place the territory on the "virtuous path of development". These are cognitive, symbolic, cultural, social, civic and other issues, which seem to be closely linked to a contemporary conception of development, in which the construction of infrastructure and other material actions, even if valuable, do not necessarily lead to development.

Final considerations

This article proposes the identification of the epistemic-theoretical bases convergent with the territorial approach. Referring to the territorial approach is to conceive the territory as a fundamental reference in the processes of intervention, planning or territorial management. In summary, we want to emphasize here that, the territorial approach to development (i) serves a central purpose, which is to be an alternative to analyses of spatial clippings, whether rural or urban, centred on disciplinary and/or sectoral procedures (ii) as a condition for carrying out studies that assume the socioeconomic, cultural and environmental reality in an integrated manner, recognizing its complexity.

It is reaffirmed in the course of the article that territorial approach considers territory as part of the spatial totality, in which diversity, relationality and interaction between actors are expressed, the interdependence between both material and immaterial dimensions and the locus of manifestation of territorial productive systems, of mediation and interdependence between human beings and other species of life.

Regarding the epistemic-theoretical basis sustaining territorial approach, it stands out the need to contemplate the principles of totality, diversity, specificity, pluralism, relationality, integration, systemic interdependence, autonomy of action and mediation between the constituent parts. The conclusion out of the text is that the main epistemological currents based on such principles are the new systems theory, the complexity theory, the historical and dialectical materialism and the epistemological perspective based on decentralisation and decoloniality, as we understand these approaches are closely related to territorial approach, once they share a common

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[15] Büttenbender and Sausen (2020) substantiate the articulatory and convergent strategy, decisive in the combination of three arrangements, by offering an illustrative construct that underpins this approach.

purpose of overcoming approaches centred on claims to the objectivity of scientific knowledge, with a view to deconstructing Eurocentric essentialisms.

The main motivation to propose the elucidation of the epistemic-theoretical bases convergent with the territorial approach is due to the initiative of carrying out a research project involving a group of Brazilian, Latin American and European intellectuals, whose central objective is to elaborate studies, propose and validate a methodological framework in order to contribute to the implementation of territorial diagnoses that allow the prospection of innovative and sustainable alternatives for development, with the territorial heritage as reference. Even though initially this text intends to serve as a theoretical-epistemological support, to guide the execution of this project, it can also serve as a reference to other studies focused on the territorial perspective.

The intention is not to allude to the epistemic-theoretical bases referred to here as the only ones converging with the territorial approach. However, they ought to be the most suitable, considering the epistemic-theoretical base referred to.

The challenge in the sequel is to indicate methodological assumptions convergent with the study of territorial reality, which allow the fulfilment of the territorial analysis. These assumptions will serve as a basis for the structuring of a methodological framework, to be validated in the sequence, by its application[16]. The intended methodological framework needs to serve a central purpose, that is, to be an alternative to overcoming traditional techniques and procedures, centred on disciplinary and / or sectoral approaches, as an essential condition for carrying out studies that fully assume the territorial perspective. However, considering that each challenge must be faced at a time, the intended objective shall be reached in its own pace, at another moment.

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[16] Esse será outro desafio a ser pensado na sequência. Tais pressupostos serão apresentados em texto que está no prelo: Dallabrida et al. (2021).

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