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## **DIMENSIONS OF THE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH: A CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL**

## **DIMENSÕES DA ABORDAGEM DE DESENVOLVIMENTO TERRITORIAL: UMA PROPOSTA CONCEITUAL**

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### **Abstract**

The academic and technical debate on integrating the territorial aspect in the discussion about new development strategies has recently intensified. However, such reflections have been essentially restricted to academia, and many studies approach territorial development generically, without a theoretical and methodological framework. This study presents a conceptual proposal based on bibliographic research on the main dimensions of the territorial development approach. Six dimensions stood out: notion of territory; social construction; territorial resources and assets; institutional density; territorial coordination; and multi-scalar articulation. Based on these dimensions and on the theoretical background discussed, this study offers a preliminary architecture of the analytical lenses under which the notion of territory has been portrayed in the literature, contributing to applying the territorial development approach in social phenomena analysis. The study may subsidize territorial projects that consider the approach's dimensions, and its relevance lies in the fact that territorial development has gained importance by focusing on reducing inequalities, socioeconomic contrasts, and ethnic and territorial conflicts.

**Keywords:** Territorial Development. Conceptual Dimensions. Territory.

### **Resumo**

Recentemente, intensificou-se o debate acadêmico e técnico sobre a integração do aspecto territorial na discussão sobre novas estratégias de desenvolvimento. No entanto, tais reflexões têm se restringido essencialmente à academia, e muitos estudos abordam o desenvolvimento territorial de forma genérica, sem um referencial teórico-metodológico. Este estudo apresenta uma proposta conceitual baseada em pesquisa bibliográfica sobre as principais dimensões da abordagem do desenvolvimento territorial. Seis dimensões se destacaram: noção de território; construção social;

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recursos e ativos territoriais; densidade institucional; coordenação territorial; e articulação multi-escalar. Com base nessas dimensões e no referencial teórico discutido, este estudo oferece uma arquitetura preliminar das lentes analíticas sob as quais a noção de território tem sido retratada na literatura, contribuindo para a aplicação da abordagem do desenvolvimento territorial na análise dos fenômenos sociais. O estudo pode subsidiar projetos territoriais que considerem as dimensões do enfoque, e sua relevância reside no fato de o desenvolvimento territorial ter ganhado importância com foco na redução das desigualdades, contrastes socioeconômicos e conflitos étnicos e territoriais.

**Palavras-chave:** Desenvolvimento Territorial. Dimensões conceituais. Território.

## Introduction

Territories and regional development have been studied based on different perspectives, and the academic and technical debate on the need to integrate the territorial aspect in discussions about new development strategies has recently intensified. However, such reflections have remained restricted to academia and distant from society as a whole.

A quick evolutionary synthesis of the issue refers primarily to the vision of development essentially linked to economic growth. This perspective has supported several currents of thought, discussing alternatives to expand and diversify production activities, generate work, employment, and income, and finally enable the desired social development.

However, the collapse of the developmentalist model and the state-centered planning established based on this perspective generated negative socio-environmental consequences that strengthened a local approach to development. This approach emerged as an alternative for building a project of society that included mobilization of social actors and participatory decision-making process (ANDION, 2003; CARDOSO et al., 2014).

This tendency to rethink development from a more plural perspective may be faced as an effort to reduce the uncertainties and risks of a process of market globalization that fuels the intensive ecosystems degradation and the increase in social inequalities.

At first, the concept of territorial development in Brazil was practically oblivious to the discussion on the progressive worsening of the planetary socio-environmental crisis. The discussions in the country disregarded the coordinated effort of experimentation focused on eco-development, understood as a participatory planning and management philosophy inspired by the new systemic paradigm (VIEIRA; CAZELLA; CERDAN, 2006).

Therefore, technical literature and governmental discourses on territorial dynamics of development in Brazil still favor approaches that privilege the analysis of economic and political factors, with little or no emphasis on the complexity involved in the environmental aspect (VIEIRA et al., 2010). For Cazella et al. (2019, p.51, our translation), there is a “[...] relative abundance of studies that evoke territorial development but generically and devoid of a theoretical-methodological framework”.

This study is based on bibliographic research and elaborates a conceptual proposal that considers the main dimensions of the territorial approach observed in the literature on territorial development. The intention is to contribute to the field by building a preliminary architecture under which both the notion of territory and its focus on development are present, contributing to theoretically apply the territorial development approach to analyses of social phenomena.

## The territorial development approach: a brief theoretical review

The territorial approach has been one of the main challenges in the debate on development, which exposes the difficulties on harmonizing economic, social, and environmental goals (BONNAL; CAZELLA; DELGADO, 2012).

The term development is not neutral. It reflects divergences and controversies, far from offering a harmonious and inevitable path that a society willing to progress should adopt. According to Wanderley (2014, p. 80, our translation), the notion of development refers to “[...] a vast and

profound field of disputes between conceptions of society, which express conflicting interests of groups and social classes.”

The thought about territorial development dynamics is linked to several socioeconomic, political, and environmental phenomena that have emerged since the 1980s. The challenges faced by the Fordist model of development – based on mass production, maximum productivity, and disqualification, intensification, and homogenization of work (CLARKE, 1991, p. 119), as well as on the Keynesian macroeconomic regulation implemented by the state – favored a new set of theories, which underpinned the territorial development approach (CARRIÈRE; CAZELLA, 2006).

According to Abramovay (2000), the territorial aspect of development has recently and increasingly gained the interest of social scientists. In 1994, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) created a “territorial development division” whose first task was to create a new delimitation of the boundaries between rural and urban areas, and to elaborate indicators to understand the disparities between different territorial situations (CATHERINE; CHRISTOPHE, 1995). The central idea is that the territory is more than a simple physical basis for relations between individuals and companies. It has a social fabric and a complex organization connected through elements beyond its natural attributes and transport and communications costs. In this sense, Abramovay states that:

[...] a territory represents a web of relationships with historical roots, political configurations, and identities that play a little-known economic development role. The economy has paid close attention to the temporal (economic cycles) and sectoral (agro-industrial complexes, for example) aspects of development, but interest in its territorial or spatial dimension is recent (ABRAMOVAY, 2000, p. 6, our translation)

The interest in territorial development as a research topic has intensified in Brazil, especially since the creation of territorial-based public policies, and more recently, the inclusion of the sustainability aspect in the discussion. Such interest has increased not only for theoretical studies but also in practice as a parameter to guide development processes in a more holistic and contextualized way.

Carrière and Cazella (2006) delimited the scope of the territorial development in two ways in order to didactically synthesize the new approach. The first covers recent phenomena of socio-environmental degradation and political transformations that have contributed to strengthening the idea of local actors steering local development based on a logic of endogenous development. The authors mention examples in Brazil that represent a diverse set of local actors’ political and social aspirations, such as the struggle for re-democratization in the face of an authoritarian and centralized state, the dissemination of social and environmental movements, the emergence of civil society organizations, union restructuring, and state decentralization (marked by the numerous attributions passed on to local governments after the 1988 Brazilian Constitution).

The second way of delimiting the territorial development scope refers to clear socioeconomic characteristics, originated in the formation of localized industrial systems. The Italian experience of industrial districts is an example, consisting of networks of SMEs that ended up inspiring research in different countries and contributed to clarifying the importance of the territorial aspects (CARRIÈRE; CAZELLA, 2006). In Brazil, this second way is applied in local production arrangements (LPAs), fostered by public policies in urban and rural areas starting in the 1990s.

In the theoretical field, Pecqueur (2005, p. 12, our translation) defines territorial development as “[...] any process of actors mobilization that leads to elaborating a strategy to adapt to external limits, based on a collective identification with a culture and a territory.” According to Jean (2010), the concept of territorial development does not yet have a doctrinal framework or stabilized theories, and it breaks with a tradition of studies on regional development. For the author, this concept links the notions of development and territory, which are not very intelligible realities. The territory is defined by its organization and how actors coordinate actions rather than by its size.

According to Pecqueur (2005), territorial development presupposes an inventory of local resources capable of transforming negative aspects into new development projects. This implies that symbolic values play a role in interaction with socioeconomic resources, valuing the territories’ cultural or identity aspects. Cazella, Bonnal, and Maluf (2009) suggest that a dynamic of territorial

development cannot be installed without creating or reinforcing networks and forms of cooperation, a process the authors call *institutional capital*.

When addressing the understanding of territorial development, Ruckert and Rambo (2010, p. 4, our translation) understand this approach as dealing with “[...] endogenous and exogenous actions, mechanisms, strategies, and policies, triggered by local/regional actors in interaction with other scales of power and management, reinforcing and constituting territories based on new ways of using them, both politically and economically.” This includes the development of local/regional potential (environmental, human, economic), making the actors more active in intervention and action on their territory, which can trigger development dynamics.

The same authors consider that territorial development dynamics are more likely to emerge, as their actors at various scales (local/regional/national) – civil society organizations, the state, the market – seek collaboration and work to achieve collective territorial innovation and a solid institutional density (RUCKERT; RAMBO, 2010). Thus, territorial development becomes a process that requires political-administrative decentralization and is improved according to the quality and performance of local initiatives. (BONNAL; CAZELLA; DELGADO, 2012) This means that local dynamics cannot occur without local actors having the power and capacity to carry out their initiatives.

This development involves a process of education and preparation that qualifies local know-how using new technologies, requiring the inclusion of information, training, and education programs in local projects (CARRIÈRE; CAZELLA, 2006). This finding reinforces the role and importance of educational institutions in strengthening the social fabric of the territories and the possibility of legitimacy and autonomy necessary to consolidate the dynamics of development from this perspective.

For Andion (2009), the territorial development approach shows that local spaces can have different destinations than those mirrored in global movements. The approach advocates a bottom-up theory of development, in which local communities are mobilized to value their specificities in the face of growing globalism. Thus, the theory focuses on assessing empirical analyses of territorial micro-initiatives rather than macro-theories. These analyses allow the comprehension of both the results and processes of development, i.e., how the actors establish particular responses to reduce exclusion and social inequalities in the environment in which they live (ANDION et al., 2009).

According to Florits (2016), it is possible to synthesize the understanding of the territorial development approach considering that the different trajectories of development projects reflect unique historical experiences of small or large scale. In general, the scale derives from different combinations and the importance of roles assumed and the performance of the state, market, and civil society agents.

Thus, the discussion on the negative socio-environmental consequences, resulting from the exhaustion of the state’s developmental model and centralized planning, strengthens a local approach to development as an alternative for building a society project that mobilizes social actors and allows participation in the decision-making process (CARDOSO et al., 2014). These mobilizations do not only generate coordination and cooperation processes. As Florit (2016) points out, the trajectories of local development are defined in a field of struggles, in which the actors may have different interests and projects to develop in the territories.

The praxis of territorial development occurs in concrete fields of experience, permeated by interactions and power relations. Thus, it can also be said that all development involves a normative perspective (ANDION, 2007), or a “must be,” which refers to the objective possibilities of changing and conceiving better conditions in the place where one lives. In this sense, development researchers and practitioners have to be familiar with the cutting-edge knowledge on the multiplicity of territorial development dimensions and position themselves based on this knowledge, as explored in the section below.

### **Dimensions of the territorial development approach: a conceptual proposal.**

The word territory originates from *territorium*, a derivation from the Latin word *terra* (earth). It designates the space where human beings live, emphasizing the link human/space, referring to a spatial extension delimited by the control of a given human group (RAYNAUT, 2014).

The territory can be understood as a *concept valise* (an umbrella concept), carrying many meanings. Its integration into the field of geography is relatively recent, occurring mainly in the 1970s and 1980s simultaneously with the opening of this field of knowledge towards the other social

sciences. In this sense, the dialogue between geography and anthropology stands out, addressing the relations between the material and the symbolic worlds with sociology, with discussions of urban and rural sociologies, with the economy (based on the observation of the effects of the production and consumption systems location), and with political science (with the discussion of the territorialization of power and public policies, for example) (CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009).

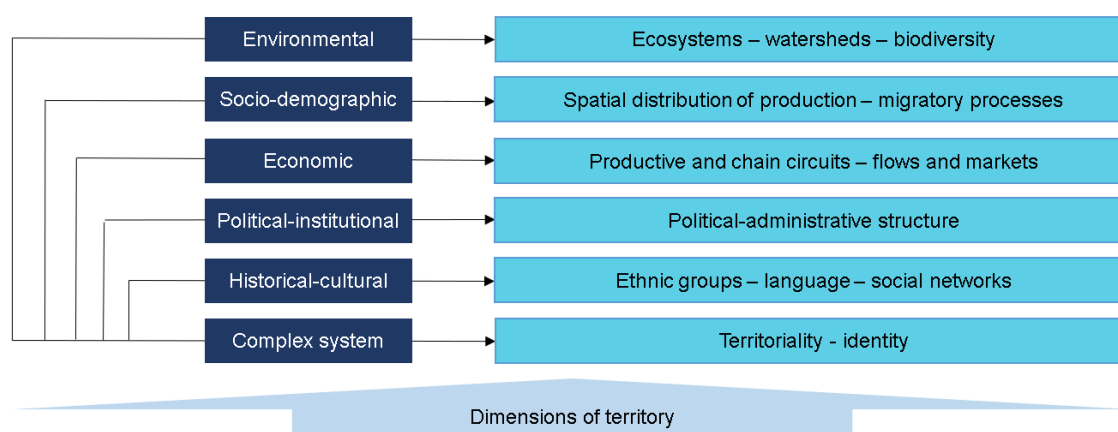
The emphasis on the notion of territory in the current debates on development is particularly interesting since it appears paradoxical. On the one hand, there are the dominant trends of globalization of production processes and markets, consumption patterns, financial systems, and political governance, culminating in a progressive deterritorialization of development. On the other hand, there is a growing emphasis on the territories' identity and diversity, related to (and even feeding) globalization processes (GIANNELLA; CALLOU, 2011).

According to Leineker (2016, p. 43, our translation), the understanding of the territory "is based on space/time relations. When appropriating a space, at a given time, society territorializes it. Thus, the use of territory by man creates space, which is projected through work." The author states:

Territory, therefore, encompasses economic, social, and cultural aspects, which are in constant transformation and construction in the geographical space. The territory can also be considered in its political and administrative aspects when observing the role of organizations. In this case, space can be configured by interest, affinity, or convenience, parallel to the state, which can stay or place itself outside the territoriality configuration of these groups (LEINEKER, 2016, p. 41, our translation).

According to Rodríguez (2005, p. 46, our translation), the territory constitutes a flexible base on which various endogenous and exogenous forces act. Therefore, it is continually subjected to the pressure of changes, conflicts, and power relations that may imply expansion or displacement. The notion of territory makes it possible to visualize and pursue the answers for complex socio-environmental problems "[...] through policies and strategies for the management of economic, cultural, and environmental resources that sustain the integrity of the territory." In addition, these policies and strategies give the territory a multidimensional character. Figure 01 illustrates some characteristics of the main territory dimensions highlighted by the author.

**Figure 1: General scheme of the territorial multidimensionality**



Source: Rodríguez (2005, our translation)

The notion of territory, far beyond the scope of geography, can refer to other aspects of social reality. Such convergences came to enrich the content of the notion and expand its application domain (RAYNAUT, 2014).

Therefore, understanding reality from a territorial perspective means rethinking the dichotomy elaborated, in modernity, between rural and urban areas (and their respective functions). Thus, the territorial vision can guide the construction of a new multifunctional/multicultural notion

of 'rural' and new family farming since it breaks with the dichotomy between urban and rural areas that prevails in traditional development proposals. However, this new delimitation of rural spaces based on territory has the risk of simply representing a perspective of continuity about urban spaces, or even being a delimitation grounded on a purely economic view, "[...] centered on the idea of improving local economies and transforming farmers into entrepreneurs" (ANDION, 2007, p. 93, our translation).

This study gathers a set of dimensions of the territorial development approach resulting from the literature review, avoiding a reductionist perspective. Table 1 shows the six dimensions: (1) notion of territory; (2) social construction; (3) territorial resources and assets; (4) institutional density; (5) territorial coordination; and (6) multi-scalar articulation.

**Table 1:** Dimensions of the territorial development approach

DIMENSIONS	AUTHORS
Notion of Territory	PECQUEUR, 2005; CAZELLA, 2006; ABRAMOVAY, 2010; DALLABRIDA, 2016.
Social Construction	COURLET; PECQUEUR; SOULAGE, 1993; JEAN, 2010, CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009.
Territorial Resources and Assets	CARRIÈRE; CAZELLA, 2006; PECQUEUR, 2005; ANDION, 2009; DALLABRIDA, 2016; CAZELLA et al, 2019.
Institutional density	DALLABRIDA, 2006; CAZELLA, BONNAL, MALUF, 2009; ABRAMOVAY, 2010;
Territorial Coordination	IIZUKA; DIAS; AGUERRE, 2012, ZANI; TENÓRIO, 2011; GÓMEZ, FAVARO, 2012; IIZUKA; DIAS; AGUERRE, 2012, DALLABRIDA, 2016.
Multi-scalar articulation	ANDION, SERVA, LEVESQUE, 2006; RUCKERT; RAMBO, 2010; FLORIT, 2016;

Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2020

These dimensions may be used to support an analytical proposal, addressing an issue pointed out by Cazella et al. (2019, p.51, our translation), i.e., "[...] the relative abundance of studies that evoke territorial development in a generic way and without a theoretical-methodological framework". However, following the bibliographic review conducted in this study, the dimensions listed reflect a preliminary architecture where territory and its focus on development have been discussed and explained.

Regarding the notion of territory, recent studies attribute a double dimension to the concept of territory – given territory and constructed territory. They emphasize the social dimension of the territory, understood as a collective and institutional construction (ABRAMOVAY, 2010; CAZELLA, 2006). Pecqueur (2013) discusses the dimensions of notion of territory and territory as a social construction, highlighting the constitution and use of the territory, including the local actors' activities and the external action of public actors in the debate.

Pecqueur (2005) explains that the territory is the portion of space under observation. In this case, the territory pre-exists, and the analysis focuses on what happens there. Its genesis is not the object of the examination nor the conditions of its constitution. It is usually the institutional territory (region, district, province, for example). On the other hand, the built territory is the result of construction by the actors. The territory is not something given but identified afterward. This means that the constructed territory does not exist everywhere. It is common to find spaces dominated by exogenous location laws that are not territories (PECQUEUR, 2005).

Citing Pecqueur (2005), Cazella, Bonnal, and Maluf (2009) present three basic characteristics of constructed territories: a) they are multiple, able to overlap, and are impermanent; b) most of the time, without clear limits; c) seek to value the potential of latent, virtual or "hidden" resources, understood here as the factors to be explored, organized, or revealed. They are material and immaterial resources, such as know-how, related to local history (CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009).

Within the scope of theorization, defining the limits of a territory is a complex matter. Different dynamics and different territorialities occur in the material and an immaterial sphere in the same geographical space and at local, national, and international levels. In this sense, the official

definition of administrative territories is not always the best option from the point of view of economic and power relations (SANTOS et al., 2018).

The notions of territory, territorial development, and the notion of region are often and colloquially used as synonyms. However, Courlet, Pecqueur, and Soulage (1993) suggest that the territory is more than its geographic or bureaucratic boundaries. It is a result of social construction and forged by the practices of the local actors. According to Jean:

If the notions of territory and territorial development are currently disseminated both in social and scientific discourse, this is probably because these notions evoke, better than the notion of region, the fact that we are dealing with a social construction. [...] This process where actors build the territories they are identified with, through a project these same actors conceived and implemented rather than through an administrative body, represent a concrete reality that increasingly substitutes state regulations to govern the mutation of spaces. (JEAN, 2010, p. 50-52, our translation).

Other non-conservative forms of measurement are included in this process, such as the creation of new forms of economic reciprocity, nourished by the formation of an especially cohesive and cooperative social fabric; the structuring of local productive systems in rural areas, integrated into networks of SMEs that transcend the sphere of purely commercial relations and unveil new types of non-agricultural activity in rural areas; and the search for new institutional arrangements that are authentically decentralized, focused on the effective exercise of territorial governance (VIEIRA et al., 2010).

For Jean (2010), a territory exists when it is named. This is one of the first signs of building a territory or promoting territorial innovation, putting into action a dynamic of social actors who occupy a space. According to the author, "Once identified, a territory becomes a reference and one of the structuring pillars in the formation of individual and social identities" (JEAN, 2010, p. 116, our translation). Therefore, territories are socio-spatial entities (SOUZA, 2007), are related to human activities conducted in a given space, and reflect a political construction procedure.

Resources and assets can be generic and specific. One of the main characteristics that differentiate them is that the former are fully transferable and independent of the aptitude of the place and the people, where and by whom they are produced. On the other hand, specific resources and assets are difficult to transfer, as they result from a negotiation process among actors who have different perceptions of problems and functional skills. They are anchored in their intellectual and social capital in a situated way (PECQUEUR, 2005).

As Dallabrida (2016, p. 188, our translation) specifies, "territorial assets are factors used in the production of goods and services in a given territory. On the other hand, resources are factors to reveal, develop, or organize as real potentials. Thus, the vision of the territory emphasizes how a society uses its resources in its productive organization and, therefore, in the relationship between social and environmental systems (ABRAMOVAY, 2010). When a process of identification and valorization of latent resources takes place, they become territorial assets.

The territory is recognized as the central locus of the dynamics of development, a unit with specific active resources and cannot be transferred from one region to another. These may be material resources, like original know-how, linked in general, to local history. The consequence of this is that this type of resource has no value elsewhere (ANDION, 2009).

Therefore, the territory is not just a geographical or physical reality but a human, social, cultural, and historical reality. This means that the same technical and financial conditions do not generate the same economic effects in terms of development in two different territories, preventing the creation of generic and replicable formulas (CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009). The process of specifying assets can differentiate one territory from the others and opposes the competition based on standardized production. According to Pecqueur (2005, p. 12, our translation), "[...] the dynamics of territorial development aims to reveal new resources, and that is why it constitutes an innovation."

The transformation of resources into specific assets is inseparable from the long history, the accumulated social memory, and a collective and cognitive learning process (acquisition of

knowledge) characteristic of a given territory, and what gives it a unique and non-transferable dynamic (CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009).

As stated by Dallabrida (2016, p. 188 our translation), “strategies for specifying territorial assets can be considered methods of valuing the sustainable advantages of territories, to contribute to the qualification of their development.” This specification process consists of the qualification and differentiation of resources that local actors can reveal based on the processes of solving common or similar problems.

Cazella, Bonnal, and Maluf (2009) say that the maximum point of maturation of a built territory consists of the generation of a “territorial quality income”, capable of surpassing the income obtained through the sale of superior quality products and services. For the authors, the territory itself is the commercialized product. The different local actors – public and private – need to unite their market and non-market actions to create a heterogeneous and coherent offer of territorial attributes.

In this context, the territorial approach requires the institutional analysis around which localized social interaction is organized. Thinking about territorial coordination implies considering the different patterns of active interrelationships of the various actors in society (ABRAMOVAY, 2010), advocating the location and the bottom-up approach, which also requires the participatory character (ECHEVERRI, 2010). However, tackling this problem involves conflicts of perception and interests between social actors at different territorial scales. Conflict is inherent to the practice of social management, especially when the focus is on the territory (ANDION, 2007; ZANI; TENÓRIO, 2011; GÓMEZ; FAVARO, 2012; IIZUKA; DIAS; AGUERRE, 2012).

The notion of territory or territorialization has been used to designate a process of collective and institutional creation. Therefore, the analysis of the institutional density of a given space can better understand the territorial construction processes that mobilize social actors sensitive to identifying and valuing the so-called territorial resources (BENKO; PECQUEUR, 2001).

According to Fernandez (2004, p. 20), the institutional density of a given territory implies the existence and coordination of the following elements: a) a solid formal institutional presence in the territory, represented by private, business, financial, third sector organizations, development agencies, service centers, schools, technological institutes, and universities; b) the development of forms of cooperation between these actors based on their awareness of being part of a territorial dynamic, and the development of a coalition pattern representative of local interests.

For Cazella, Bonnal, and Maluf (2009, p. 38, our translation), the “[...] institutional density” of a space explains the construction and characteristics of a territory. Dallabrida (2006, p. 18) explores the quality of institutional density, arguing that it is necessary to consider two aspects. First, the number of institutional actors directly or indirectly linked to the activities that are part of the value chain. Second, the existence, frequency, scope, and evolution of these actors’ cooperation actions, differentiating them according to their modality, morphology, and the target of the cooperation action.

Two fundamental properties of the territory stand out in this analysis: a) the evolving reality; b) the simultaneous result of the “power games” and the “stable commitments” established between the main social actors. Cunha (2000) believes that the issue of power relations gains relevance since individual and collective actors, public and private, act from cultural, political, and economic inheritances related to a given space and time considered a territory.

Therefore, the territorial approach implies the transition from logics of development and public policies management based on bureaucracy and addressing specific problems to a project-driven logic that values the territory-specific vocations and resources (BEDUSCHI FILHO; ABRAMOVAY, 2004). Development projects must be collective, involving local social forces, in a process that is inseparable from the idea of social management and territorial coordination (IIZUKA; DIAS; AGUERRE, 2012).

It is also important to create public spaces for debate that can work as social arenas in which actors and social organizations, external to the traditional political system, discuss and bring new dialogues between the state and civil society. This requires “[...] a privileged spatial and socio-economic locus to implement processes of decentralization of government activities” (DELGADO; BONNAL; LEITE, 2007, p. 6, our translation).

The institutional apparatuses involved in the dynamics of development are not very common and vary considerably in the territories, making it hard to imagine a general development model.



Furthermore, the institutional analysis of the territory does not hide socio-economic exclusions or social conflicts (CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009).

The territory – constituted as a social space produced and delimited by an environment that establishes how it is organized – is built as a representation. It can be a tool, a resource for economic and social development. In this perspective, the different dimensions of the territory are included in planning processes, and the whole aspects are affected. Simultaneously, the internal specificities and particularities to the delineations of the global society are outlined, which interact in the processes of socio-economic-cultural identity construction that attribute meaning to the place. This systemic and multidimensional view can help incorporate specific resources, allowing the invention of alternatives for territorial competitiveness, understood as a collectively shared advantage (GEHLEN; RIELLA, 2004).

The concept of territory also includes the notion of socio-cultural assets and the need to mobilize resources and skills by attributing social responsibilities through participatory processes. The mobilization of local assets can increase the territory's dynamism, through new modalities of integration and valorization of local resources and products, as components of the collective socio-cultural legacy. For Gehlen and Riella (2004), it is not simply a matter of positively integrating scientific and technical knowledge in cognitive systems and acting in solidarity. It is also the case of establishing a relationship of cooperation and negotiation of the conflict so that norms and codes of conduct are highlighted in the representation system to become part of the social identity.

Andion et al. (2009) state that the territory is not just a place and not every place is a territory. The formation of a territory is not a natural process and requires the organization and cooperation of local actors who seek to mobilize and value territorial resources through specific strategies, both at the organizational and institutional level. According to Sabourin (2009, p. 154, our translation), “[...] the territorial approach must allow the establishment of spaces for dialogue between local organizations, civil society, municipalities, and state services, in order to consider more easily territorial dynamics, priorities, and specificities of the initiatives of local actors.”

In the Brazilian context, the recent adoption of the concept of sustainable territories seems to demonstrate the recognition of the social and ecological debt accumulated by the country over the past century. The 1988 Federal Constitution triggered a significant political-administrative decentralization process based on the intention to expand the political and fiscal autonomy of the municipalities (TURNES, 2018). The three government levels were mobilized in this process, expanding the range of rights and responsibilities of the local governments and organizations. Municipalities, in particular, began to assume new planning and management functions, either through their own initiative or adherence to a program proposed by institutions located in more comprehensive territorial scales (VIEIRA et al., 2010).

These scales are understood as socio-spatial representations of development processes that have dynamics resulting from the action of the various actors in the territory (SILVA; ETGES, 2019). There is no ideal scale for development, as the achievement of this purpose is related to the actors' power in the territory. This occurs at the local and global multiple scales, considering that the dynamics of the territory do not appear as a pyramid fluid in a unidirectional way, but as mosaics in different ways, marked by the interests of different social actors (RAMBO; FILIPPI, 2010).

In adopting this multi-scalar approach, it is important to consider Souza's (2007, p. 103, our translation) argument that, in general, professions concerning space – such as geography – see and analyze societies in a distant way from everyday life, considering “[...] people and groups ‘from afar,’ without entering their homes, without immersing themselves in their daily lives, without feeling the odors of poverty, without hearing the sounds of despair or the screams of liberation.” The author draws attention to almost invisible territories, which he calls “nanoterritories,” which are generally not captured by scalar approaches.

The author also states that, “[...] from this angle it is possible to say that many researchers have neglected (or trivialized) important aspects of the study of space producers, even in cases where they embrace a perspective of social criticism (anti-capitalist and opposition to the state)” (SOUZA, 2007, p. 103, our translation). Therefore, it is essential that those who see development processes from a territorial perspective consider and analyze the multiple scales inserted in the different territories present in a social space.

Finally, the comprehension of the territorial development approach's multiple faces emphasizes that territory is a concept implying several meanings, depending on the perspective

adopted and the issues under discussion. Thus, each intervention can generate its unique notion of territory (CAZELLA; BONNAL; MALUF, 2009).

### Final considerations

This study offered a conceptual proposal, considering the dimensions of the territorial development approach observed in the literature. The proposal intends to offer a synthetic understanding and help researchers perform theoretical analysis based on the adherence and application of this approach to social realities. From the empirical point of view, it can clarify possible strategic guidelines for territorial projects that consider the dimensions observed in the literature and discussed in this study.

In a context of profound structural changes in the political, social, and environmental spheres, the issue of territorial development gains relevance as it focuses on regions with a trajectory of social and economic contrasts and ethnic and territorial conflicts.

The creation of the Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development in 1999, with attributions different from those of the Ministry of Agriculture, gradually led to territorial development in the country, constituting a key moment in the consolidation of this process and the affirmation of the concept within the scope of public policies (WANDERLEY, 2014).

The government of President Lula da Silva (2003 – 2011) resumed and amplified the territorial and participatory approach proposed during the previous administration (Fernando Henrique Cardoso, 1995 – 2003). President Cardoso had implemented programs such as *Comunidade Ativa* (active community), *Comunidade Solidária* (solidarity community), and *Conselhos de Desenvolvimento Rural* (rural development councils). President Lula da Silva established sustainable territorial projects based on interaction mechanisms involving public action and collective action in rural areas through the *Conselhos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável* (sustainable development councils) and *Conselhos de Desenvolvimento Territorial* (territorial development councils).

The programs resulting from this new territorial conception, with a more humane basis for economic development, were based on ethical values of equity, justice, respect for diversity, co-responsibility, and recognition of the multifunctionality of the rural space (SABOURIN, 2009).

Despite this conception, this perspective was never hegemonic, perceived as marginal in the action of governments. Thus, the territorial approach was not incorporated into state policies and did not become a priority in the scope of governmental action, private companies, and civil society organizations, continuing to prevail – in practice – a centralized planning and management style, with a technocratic bias. External institutions, generally lacking a convincing territorial anchorage, continued to concentrate the power to define new territorial development strategies, replicating technical projects of sectoral and fragmented cut, without considering the urgency of a broad societal debate about the country's future (VIEIRA et al., 2010).

The lack of coordination between government and civil society organizations to face the complex challenges created by the asymmetric economic globalization, and the fragmentation and ambiguities of the initiatives undertaken by some ministries and state governments, help to understand the public's distrust regarding the political viability of innovations mobilizing the concepts of territoriality and sustainability (VIEIRA et al., 2020).

In addition, the interruption of the emphasis on territorial development at the federal level – which occurred after the extinction of the Ministry of Agrarian Development in 2016 and of the Territorial Development Secretariat that operated in the same ministry – revealing the ephemeral character of this approach at the government level. Public policies such as the *Programa Territórios da Cidadania* (citizenship territories program), *Programa de Infraestrutura e Serviços nos Territórios Rurais* (a program of infrastructure and services in rural territories), and the *Núcleos de Extensão em Desenvolvimento Territorial* (territorial development extension centers) were interrupted, weakening the territorial development perspective adopted by the federal government until then, as well as impairing a promising strategy, as demonstrated in the academic debate presented here.

Thus, although in the field of public policies the traditional top-down model continues to prevail – in which technocrats legitimized by technical rationality monopolize the definition of public policies – governments must be encouraged to progressively adopt the bottom-up model, based on the intersection of public administration and society in a circular process mediated by reciprocal relations of power and negotiation. Thinking and actually making territorial development happen is,

therefore, about putting into practice collaborative development projects that respond to the needs of local communities, to their expectations, and that are also inscribed in their socio-historical realities, resulting from a collective construction process (JEAN, 2010; IIZUKA; DIAS; AGUERRE, 2012).

Advancing with the territorial perspective also implies profound changes in thinking, designing, and implementing actions for development. Universities and other higher education institutions, with the participation of their networks, can contribute significantly to this process as they have the potential and capacity to open, coordinate, and expand a range of actions and functions that help strengthen the intelligence of territories (FAVARETO; GILNEI; GRISA, 2017, p. 165).

In this sense, higher education institutions in the country can play a decisive role in forming territorial development networks. As Abramovay (2000) argues, this contribution can be in the study of local organizational dynamics and collaborating with professional and class entities in establishing “incubators”, offering advice to development projects, disseminating – together with offering rural extension – information on credit lines accessible to each case.

Moreover, as discussed and implemented by Andion, Alperstedt, and Graeff (2020), it is a matter of investing in strengthening local initiatives and ecosystems of socio-environmental innovation, formed by “invisible networks” that respond to public problems and build territories, whether in urban or rural areas.

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