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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT - DOES THE REGION MATTER?¹

DESENVOLVIMENTO REGIONAL – A REGIÃO IMPORTA?²

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Abstract

The territorial dimension of development processes has been recognized by researchers from different areas of knowledge. In discussions on regional development, the relevance of the territory stands out even more, given the multi-scale character that permeates the theme. The purpose of this article is to discuss the meaning of the regional (particular) dimension, understood as a mediation between the global (universal) and the local (singular), in studies on development from an interpretive and descriptive approach, supported by bibliographical sources. Territory is understood as a contradictory totality, marked by conflicts and tensions, in which particular socio-spatial arrangements shape regions. The dimension of particularity, which manifests itself in the territory through the region, originates from socio-spatial formations, which express political, economic, social, cultural and environmental characteristics that are also particular, configured over time, in the various portions of the earth's surface.

Keywords: Territory. Socio-spatial Formation. Particularity. Region.

Resumo

A dimensão territorial dos processos de desenvolvimento vem sendo reconhecida por pesquisadores de diversas áreas do conhecimento. Nas discussões sobre desenvolvimento regional a relevância do território destaca-se ainda mais, tendo em vista o caráter multiescalar que permeia o tema. O propósito deste artigo é problematizar o significado da dimensão do regional (particular), entendido como mediação entre o global (universal) e o local (singular), nos estudos sobre o desenvolvimento a partir de uma abordagem interpretativa e descritiva, amparada em fontes bibliográficas. Entende-se o território como uma totalidade contraditória, marcada por conflitos e tensões, em que arranjos sócio espaciais particulares dão forma a regiões. A dimensão da particularidade, que se manifesta no território por meio da região, se origina de formações socioespaciais, que expressam características políticas, econômicas, sociais, culturais e ambientais também particulares, configuradas ao longo do tempo, nas diversas porções da superfície terrestre.

Palavras-chave: Território. Formação Sócio Espacial. Particularidade. Região.

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Introduction

Graduate Programs in Regional Development, in addition to being privileged spaces for the construction of theoretical/methodological references for this field of knowledge, are committed to deepening and qualifying this debate, which is of unique importance in the discussion of strategies aimed at promoting territorial development based on equity and solidarity.

The territorial dimension of development processes has been acknowledged by researchers from various fields of knowledge. In discussions on regional development, the relevance of the territory stands out even more, given the multi-scale aspect that permeates the theme. Acknowledging the territorial dimension of development processes requires understanding the territorial arrangements resulting from the interaction between different scales: from the singular (local) to the universal (global), mediated by the particular (regional).

From abstract and generalizing models of interpretation, there is a progression towards understanding the meaning of particular territorial arrangements, which make up the diversity that exists in the territory. The dimension of particularity, which manifests itself in the territory through the region, originates from socio-spatial formations, which express political, economic, social, cultural and environmental characteristics that are also particular, configured over time, in the various portions of the Earth's surface.

Therefore, understanding the regional dimension of development requires a deeper theoretical/methodological reflection on the meaning of the movement between the singular, the particular and the universal and the repercussions resulting from this movement in the configuration of the territory.

It is understood that the territory presents itself as a contradictory totality, marked by conflicts and tension, in which particular socio-spatial arrangements give form to regions.

Taking into account the current domestic sociopolitical and economic context, debating the regionalization of the territory means highlighting the process of formation thereof, which is marked by different backgrounds and characterized by "unity in diversity", in which the State is responsible for managing the contradictions that take shape in it.

In view of the foregoing, the intention herein is to scrutinize the meaning of the regional (particular), in terms of its dimension, understood as mediation between the global (universal) and the local (singular), in studies on development, from an interpretative and descriptive approach supported by bibliographic sources.

In addition to this introduction, this article consists of two parts: the first addresses the meaning of region, seeking to explain the origin of the concept and its history; the second part seeks to contextualize the meaning of the regional dimension of development in the perspective of a critical analysis.

The meaning of Region

The origin of the meaning of the concept of region necessarily refers to a political premise, of control and management of a territory, which dates back to the Classical Antiquity, expressed in the relation between centralization, administrative uniformity and spatial, physical, cultural and economic diversity and politics, over which this centralized power must be exerted. The period of formation of the modern states saw the rebirth of discussions on concepts of region, nation, territorial communities, spatial differences, etc. It was also in this period that a specifically geographical disciplinary field began to take shape, including exactly this type of issue and concepts. (GOMES, 2000).

The word region comes from the Latin word "regere", which is made up of the root "reg", which originated other words, such as regent, regency, rule, etc. "Regione", at the time of the Roman Empire, was the name used to designate areas that, although they had local administration, were subject to the

general and hegemonic rules of the magistracies based in Rome. (GOMES, 2000, p. 50).

It is possible to observe that the understanding of region and regionalization had multiple references. First, regionalization was connected with territorial and political administration. Then, the natural criterion became the most relevant one, understood as being “more scientific” for regionalization. With the understanding that nature is not the only determinant in regional conformation, proposals were formulated based on other criteria, especially the economic one. (LENCIONI, 1999).

At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, two major interpretations of the object of study of geography stood out. The first, by French geographer Vidal de La Blache, established that geography should analyze and understand the uniqueness of places, i.e., understand the unique rather than requiring a concept that defines it. He was responsible for a vast body of work, consisting of regional monographs, which highlighted the unique character of each region. Therefore, he ended up compromising the scientific status of the discipline at the time, providing the impetus to a new dichotomy between general geography and regional geography.

The impasse between science focused on general studies (nomothetic science) and science focused on particular studies (ideographic science) was the object of reflection by Alfred Hettner, a German geographer who stated that the essence would be in the study of the differentiation of areas on the Earth’s surface, therefore stating the chorological aspect of the geographical discipline, i.e., the regional study. (LENCIONI, 1999).

Although La Blache and Hettner asserted the regional study, their concepts of region were diametrically opposed. For La Blache, a region is self-evident and stands as an object of study a priori, in which space is considered a mosaic of determined regions, and it is up to researchers to reveal and describe them. In contrast, Hettner understood regions as a product of the interrelationships of phenomena that the researcher selects, with the region being shaped at the end of the investigation process. (LENCIONI, 1999).

However, the so-called regional geography that was disseminated (especially in school textbooks in Brazil) was that of La Blache, which is understood as the study of terrain, climate, vegetation, hydrography, settlements, agriculture, industry, transport, etc. of a certain area, causing the students to imply that, in fact, the Brazilian territory was composed of a “mosaic of unique, autarchic regions”, in which one was not related to the other.

The harshest criticism of this concept of region was expressed by Yves Lacoste in the 1970s, who defined it as a concept that hinders the understanding of the dynamics of the territory, expressed in differential spatiality.

This procedure of regional geography consists of verifying as evidence the existence, in a country, of a certain number of regions and describing them, one after another, or analyzing only one of them in terms of terrain, climate, vegetation, population, cities, agriculture, industry. [...] This procedure permeates, today, the whole discourse on society, all economic, social and political reflection [...] it is one of the main obstacles that prevent us from addressing the problems of differential spatiality, since it is admitted, without question, that there is only one way to divide space. (LACOSTE, 1988, p. 61).

The way of subdividing space, a priori, into a certain number of regions, of which solely the existence must be verified, hides all other spatial forms. This leads to the legitimization of the “region-personality” as a collective organism or the minimization of the “region-historical character”, serving as a basis for political discourse.

While it would be politically healthier and more effective to consider the region as a spatial form of political organization, [...] geographers believe in the idea that the region is an almost eternal piece of information, a product of geology and history. Geographers, somehow, ended up naturalizing the idea of region. [...] They use the idea of region, which is fundamentally political, to designate all kinds of spatial groups, whether

topographical, geological, climatic, botanical, demographic, economic or cultural. (LACOSTE, 1988, p. 66)

This form of regionalization and perception of space, according to Lacoste, becomes an obstacle to knowledge as an instrument of action, for if the spatial conditions are provided, there is not much to do. The phenomena that can be isolated by thought are not spatially ordered into large compartments — on the contrary, they are superimposed in a very complex way, which is something the author understands as differential spatiality. Therefore, it is important to consider the multiple intersections between the precise configurations of the phenomena in order to act strategically, making it easier to avoid those aspects that may constitute obstacles to the action that is intended to be carried out. (ETGES; FEGGER, 2013).

Still in the mid-20th century, the criticism of traditional geography gave rise to a movement to renew the discipline, through the so-called Pragmatic or Theoretical Geography and Critical or Radical Geography.

With a neopositivist character, aimed at formulating generalizable explanatory models of reality, Pragmatic Geography emphasized spatial relations and the use of statistical methods, which led to the decline in the importance of regional studies. A character of classification and grouping is given to region, supported by sophisticated statistical laboratory techniques and by a language grounded in great theories and, therefore, distant from fieldwork.

In this context, a possibility emerges in terms of classifying regions as homogeneous, functional or polarized, understood as units crystallized in time and space.

The critical perspective brought great contributions to Geography, burying the idea of neutrality of science and introducing new categories for regional study.

The regional dimension of development

With the emergence of Marxism- and phenomenology-based critical currents, from the 1970s onwards, new concepts of regional geography appear, such as the one that understands the region as part of a totality:

The difference now resided in the fact that the totality was no longer seen either as organic or logical totality, nor as harmonious totality. It was seen as historical totality. It was visible that it did not constitute some harmonious totality because the concern, at that moment, in denouncing the injustices and social inequalities of capitalism, revealed the limits of understanding the world as a non-harmonious whole. (LENCIONI, 1999, p. 196)

In this theoretical/methodological perspective, the understanding of the phenomena in their processuality and totality as a summary of multiple determinations, instituted in the historical course, and which are formed and transformed on the basis of the contradictions created in the relation between man and nature, stands out. (PASQUALINI; MARTINS, 2015).

Lukács (1967) proposes that, for an authentic and true approach and understanding of reality, the nexuses between the singular, particular and universal dimensions of phenomena must be made explicit, aiming at understanding the phenomena beyond their immediate appearance, towards concrete essentiality.

In this context, Kosik (1976) states that the essence of the phenomenon is not explicitly stated in its sensitive manifestation and does not reveal itself immediately — rather, it arises through the unveiling of its mediations and its fundamental internal contradictions.

In dialectical logic, mediation is not thought of as a product or result, nor as a sum, homogenization or balance. Mediation must be thought of as a process, which uses difference, heterogeneity and imbalance as reference. (ALMEIDA, 2001).

The mediation category is essential for establishing the connections between the different aspects that characterize reality. The totality exists in and through the mediations, through which the specific parts (partial totality) are related, in a series of reciprocal determinations that are constantly changing. (MASSOM, 2012).

To understand the region as part of some social totality, it is essential to study its inception, movement and contradictions. This means that the process of regionalization of the territory cannot be dealt with in isolation from other social manifestations. Its understanding, in a given historical period, requires an understanding of the development of that time as a whole.

The contribution of Milton Santos (1977) to the Marxist geographical analysis or to the spatial dialectics appears with the concept of socio-spatial formation, adapted from the socioeconomic formation category. (BESSA, 2010)

According to Sereni (1974, apud SANTOS, 1977), the economic-social formation expresses the unity and the totality of the different spheres — economic, social, political, cultural — of the life of a society; hence the unity of the continuity and discontinuity of its historical development.

It is not society in general which the concept refers to, but a given society, defined historical types of society. This means that there is no society in general, but that a society always exists under a certain historical fabric. Each society wears the clothes of its time. (SANTOS, 1977)

That concept is crucial for geographic analysis and, similarly, for the understanding of spatial differentiation processes, especially at particular scales. (CORRÊA, 1997).

Social formation is a spatial/temporal particularity of a given mode of production; that is, it is a particular and relational combination of a temporal order and a spatial order of a given dominant mode of production.

This concept expresses that a society only becomes concrete by means of the space it produces and that this space only becomes intelligible through that society, being, consequently, an instance and a constitutive piece of information thereof. “The modes of production write History in time, social formations write it in space”, as stated by Santos (1977, p. 87).

According to Correa (1997), the differentiation of areas, resulting from both natural and social processes, constitutes the basis for the possibility of a dialogue about region. But the differentiation of areas is not associated with the idea of singularity (which we understand to be linked to the concept of place); instead, it is linked to the idea of singularity, i.e., a mediation between the universal (general processes arising from globalization) and the singular (the maximum specification of the universal). Quoting Lukács (1967), he states that particularity, in relation to the singular, represents relative universality and, in relation to the universal, relative singularity, and concludes that the particularity is translated, in the spatial plan, in the region.

Both (universal and singular logics) begin to reflect particular combinations that when become concrete, they do so in a different way, creating and sustaining diversities. This is how universal forces face the resistance of socio-spatial formation. This is the dialectics in question, which is built through the confrontation and combination between these reasons, in which the universalizing action passes through the uncontested mediation of socio-spatial formations.

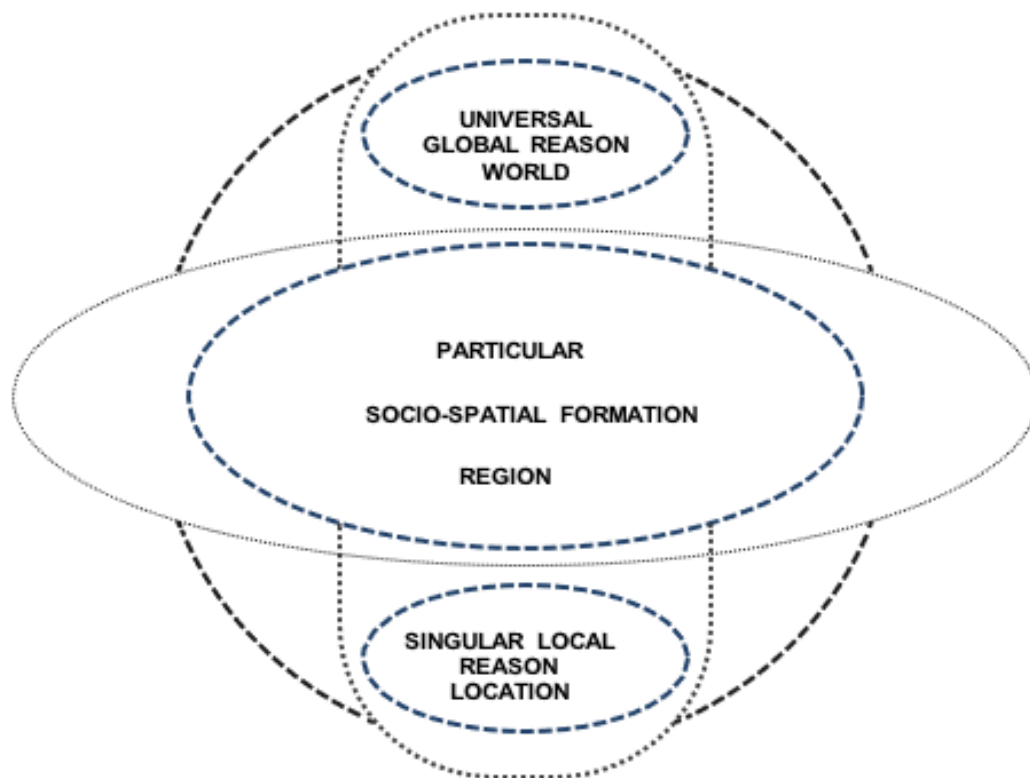
This is dialectics characterized by continuities, discontinuities and ruptures, since the contact between universal logics and singular logics (sometimes convergent, sometimes divergent — or due to the co-presence of both processes) produces particularities, whose combinations are equally unique.

In specific historical/geographical conditions, the tendency towards homogenization is always affected by the opposite mediation of socio-spatial formation. This mediation imposes heterogeneity. Thus, the universalization of processes is inversely accompanied by singularization and particularization, implying differentiation. (BESSA, 2010)

According to Santos (1977), in times of globalization, with a production method that tends to be unique, the geographic space would be homogenized or standardized through the action of some technical uniqueness, situated in the universal context. However, this does not happen, as the action of this production method, which tends to be unique, goes through the mediation of spatial formations, which are situated in the particularity sphere. Socio-spatial formations, as stages of a historical process, refer to the differential evolution of societies, i.e., they express spatial differentiation and, therefore, are fundamental information to explain why countries and regions differ from one another.

Oliveira (2019) confirms the relevance of socio-spatial formation as an important notion to think about the region, and even to interpret it as a socio-spatial formation, given the fact that both carry out some kind of mediation between general processes and specific, singular processes, interpreted in the spatial sphere as particularization of multiple vectors and arrangements; a process that, as part of the dialectical movement, may also lead some counter-reasoning in relation to the hegemonic action of perverse globalization, as addressed by Santos (2000).

Image 1: The dialectical movement from universal to singular and its “field of mediations”



Source: Oliveira; Trindade Jr.; Leite, 2018. Adapted by the author.

Limonad (2015), when asking the question “regionalize it for what? For whom?” states that regionalization may support a theoretical reflection or meet the needs imposed by a sectoral policy, a planning practice or by proposals for regional development. Regionalization possibilities for one territory, a social space, may vary depending on the purpose they are intended to serve.

Therefore, it is possible to say that the region is the result of the historical construction of that complex coherence, built from the dialectic articulation (confrontation) of different social processes, which tends to provide particular characteristics to a certain social space and to express the different interests of the agents and social parties involved. (Limonad, 2015, p. 57)

The region is built, therefore, from the action of different agents in multiple articulated scales that somehow have repercussion in historically and geographically located socio-spatial practices and processes, which leads Silveira (1999) to emphasize that what is local and what is global is affirmed and denied dialectically in the region. (Limonad, 2015, 60)

Final Thoughts

Through the theoretical basis and the information collected and systematized, a theoretical/critical analysis was carried out, based on qualitative information, so that a concise description could be made of the multiple relations, mediations and (synchronous and diachronic) contradictions existing between the parts that constitute the process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of the analyzed concepts.

It is essential to understand that promoting regional development means, above all, acknowledging regional diversity as potential for development, and not the opposite.

It is concluded that a given region is part of some social totality; for this reason, it is important to study its inception, movement and contradictions. This means that the process of regionalization of the territory cannot be dealt with in isolation from other social manifestations. Its understanding, in a given historical period, requires an understanding of the development of that time as a whole.

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