

THE PRODUCTION OF A COOPERATIVE SPACE

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The absence of geographic inquiries about the cooperative sector and the influence that cooperative labour has in the production of space is a sufficient cause to address several reflections and methodological proposals that contribute to the increase of this field of research. For that, we pretend to evidence the existence of a wide study field for the geographic science, closely related to territorial, spatial, social and natural implications, derived from the organization of cooperative labour.

As a result of that, space is considered as a historic and social product that is reproduced in the logic of a means of production which is featured, among other things, by the generation of social inequities and territorial imbalances that, at the same time, are materialized in the completely asymmetrical production of geographical space. According to this thesis, widely evidenced by authors like Milton Santos (2008b), David Harvey (2007a), Henri Lefevre (2000a) or Piotr Kropotkin (1978), among others, Geography is required both to confront the established power structures and to propose critical and scientific feedback for the transformation of the total, social and spatial reality. The traditional and useful universal questions of science 'what' 'who' 'when' 'how' 'why' and 'what for' can be interrelated by a dialectical method applied to space and to existing social relations.

The approach of this article not only stresses *what*, *when*, *who* and *where* an object or action in the territory is materialized in an isolated manner, yet and essentially, it highlights *how* and *why*, that is to say, in transferring those issues into a context of social relations that enables a thorough and detailed explanation at its core. This allows to find a better comprehension of each analysis category (object, function, shape, structure, event, etc.), or any other event in its dialectic intertwining with the whole.

Briefly, we suggest addressing a series of issues related to geographic space that human society is challenging in 21st Century. We aim to provide new approaches, on the one hand, for the understanding and explanation of those dynamics that concern to current produced geographic space, and, on the other hand, for the study of those spatial (possible) solutions thereon.

I. THE DIALECTIC OF SPACE

The use in Geography of a materialistic and dialectical method raises an understanding of the reality as an entirety, a dynamic totality, in a constant movement, in a permanent change; a total reality in a constant process of transformation. That is, “a totality that totalizes incessantly, in which particular facts mean nothing (...) unless they are not taken by the current aggregation” (Sartre, 2005: 33). To get a deep knowledge of that entirety does not mean to study the whole as a whole. The totality that is meant is composed of parts internally related by a dialectic causality that, at the same time, become a totality themselves within a larger entirety.

The total reality can be known through the parts and to know the parts it is necessary to know the whole too. The Brazilian geographer Milton Santos highlights in this respect that the parts and the whole are biased truths. Consequently, to reach the total truth it is required to recognise the movement of the parts and the whole together by the aggregation process (Santos, 2009a: 120). The parts, that can be a totality themselves and show a certain autonomy, significantly represent the totality in which they are integrated.

From the movement, from the analysis of the aggregation process which includes the parts' transformation process in relation to the totality, is where the real knowledge of the space could be obtained. At the same time, this conception involves assuming the existence of the space as an objective reality, that is to say, independent from the society's consciousness and the citizens' perception. The scientific defiance lays, precisely, on the definition implemented about those more specific biased totalities and their relationship with the whole reality.

On the basis of a dialectic and materialistic conception of the spatial dynamic subjected to a continuous evolutionary process, the rule of the possible (but not of the probable) about the changing movement of the real totality is assumed. An argument that allows to study those alternative and coexisting projects and proposals, fitted with profound spatial and territorial implications, although they are not dominating.

Thus, the geographic space expresses some determined social relations transcribed into a spatial production process. Those are settled at a continuous transformative movement: the dialectic of space. The geographic space is part of the total reality, as a fully inserted element in the process of aggregation. Hence, the spatial dynamic would be closely linked to the transformation of nature that society conducts, consequently “there is always a *first nature ready to be transformed into a second one*, one depends on the other, because the second nature cannot be executed without the conditions of the first one, and this is always incomplete until the second nature is performed. *This is the beginning of the dialectic of space*” (Santos, 2008c: 214).

From this philosophical conception of reality, the geographic space is not a neutral element that exists independently from the organization of society, space is the result of a productive process that is conducted by human society doing its action on nature. For the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (2000b) space is addressed as one product, a product eminently social, a “*produced social space*” engulfed in its dialectic reality, that is to say, “space cannot be foreseen as something passive, empty, nor without another meaning, as “products”, nothing but to exchange, consume, disappear. As a product, space interferes in

the production, through interaction or feedback: the organisation of the productive labour, transportation, the flow of commodities and energy and the merchandise's distribution networks. At the same time productive and producer, space intervenes in production relations and in productive forces (better or worse organised). This concept cannot remain neither isolated nor static. Space is *dialectized*: product-producer, as a support of the social and economic relations" (Lefebvre, 2000b: foreword XX-XXI).

This dialectic conception of space is specified in the analysis of four particular characteristics in this conference: (i) space as a social and historic production; (ii) labour space and production; (iii) space for the reproduction of capital; and (iv) space of the mutual aid and cooperative labour.

II. SPACE AND TERRITORY (TERRITORIES): TERRITORIALITIES IN THE GEOGRAPHIC SPACE

Furthermore, it is appropriate to analyse the conceptualization of the territory linked to the production of space set along this paper. For its part, the territory (or territories) constitutes an inseparable element of the production of space and it is for that considered as a subspace. The territory, as a subspace, is not unrelated to the dialectic interrelations that prevail in the production of the geographic space as a whole. However, territory and territories show their own dynamics, asymmetric and differentiated, and they respond to a logic of larger spatial production. In this respect space and territory interact dialectically so that the parts are identified with the whole. Nevertheless, "large misunderstandings are due to the conceptual confusion in relation to space and territory" (Haesbaert, 2007:44).

Territory crystallizes some particular relations between society and nature, that is to say, it represents the specific and unique materialization of the geographic space. Consequently, from a dialectic perspective, space and territory are terms that are intimately matched but they are not synonyms. In relation to space, the Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin points that space is in a previous situation in respect of territory, so that territory is created from space, as a result of an action conducted by a syntagmatic (*syntagmatique*) agent, who is the responsible of making a program. On that appropriation of one space, the agent territorializes space in a specific or abstract way (Raffestin, 1993: 143). So that the production of space is in a constant process, from the construction of territories or territorialities to different geographic scales, always involving an interrelation between nature and society. Then, territory is represented as a social production draw from space, as a subspace inscribed within some defined power relations.

From this social construction notion of territory, it is required to deepen on both what is territorialized and deterritorialized, in a way that it is possible to advance consecutively on what is pretended to reconstruct or reterritorialize.

III. CONCLUSIONS

From a dialectic analysis of the reality's process of totalization and space as part of that social totality, the transformation of space appears as a potential reality. A new paradigm of social organization requires the production of a new possible geographic space, where other forms of labour and life are developed.

Space is understood as a social and historic product, linked to production processes, labour organization and technical advances. Thus, the type of production in its widest acceptance and the organization of labour process gain a special category in the spatial analysis. Notwithstanding, the capital, understood as a process, shapes and rationalizes space from its logic of accumulation and its geographically expansive character. Because of that, mutual aid and cooperative labour are considered to be new elements of territorialisation and give the possibility to potentially modify the spatial rationality of the capitalistic mode of production.

Finally, territory (territories), understood as a subspace, presents opposite dynamics within the same spatial production of capital, a drift that is performed through territorialisation, deterritorialization and reterritorialization processes. Under this dynamic, rural social activism, both *socioterritorial* and *sociospacial*, lead a reterritorialization based on the relearning of a cooperative practice, on the organization of the cooperative labour as a central axis of social life and as an action of spatial transformation in order to produce a new geographic space, a cooperative space.