

THE TERRITORY BEYOND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION: Subject-Universal Synthesis and Involvement in Favor of Life

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ABSTRACT

It is interesting and intriguing how the concept and category of territory is increasingly diffused between different areas of knowledge and, in certain spatial and temporal situations, in political discourses and management strategies. Use, planning, management and development of the territory are highlighted, however, they are normally used in a superficial, confusing and inappropriate way given the complexity and indivisibility of society-nature-cosmos and time-space relationships. So, on this opportunity, we decided to discuss and reflect on the territory beyond its understanding as a social construction, highlighting two issues that we consider to be of high social and scientific relevance, that is, its breadth and indivisibility at the level of the subject-cosmos relationship (trans-multiscalar and transtemporal) and its intimate relationship with our daily life (in its pluridimensionality), therefore assuming a meaning that we consider quite renewed, at the level of what we are calling territorial involvement. This is understood based on the society-nature-cosmos relationship from the university, that is, from research, training and extension: this way we can go beyond the level of the territorial approach, involving ourselves in each territory studied. Our objective is to reflect on the centrality of the university in its relationship with organized civil society, highlighting the necessary integration between science - popular and original knowledge in each process of territorial and sustainable involvement for all beings on this planet in their unity with the cosmos. Another highlight, in the theoretical-practical perspective that we will argue, is participatory-action research closely related to the method of coexistences, as we will detail throughout the text, trying to instigate the debate on the horizontal, dialogic and participatory construction of a science of its own, increasingly ours, much more focused on solving problems that are common in our daily lives.

Keywords: Territory, cosmos, popular involvement, life.

O TERRITÓRIO PARA ALÉM DA CONSTRUÇÃO SOCIAL: SÍNTESE SUJEITO-COSMO E ENVOLVIMENTO A FAVOR DA VIDA

RESUMO

É interessante e intrigante como o conceito e categoria de território está cada vez mais difuso entre diferentes áreas do conhecimento e, em determinadas situações espaciais e temporais, em discursos políticos e estratégias de gestão. Uso, ordenamento, gestão e desenvolvimento do território estão em destaque, porém, normalmente, são utilizados de maneira superficial, confusa e inadequada tendo em vista a complexidade e indivisibilidade das relações sociedade-natureza-cosmo e tempo-espaço. Então, nesta oportunidade, decidimos discorrer e refletir sobre o território para além da sua compreensão como construção social, evidenciando duas questões que consideramos de alta relevância social e científica, ou seja, a sua amplitude e indivisibilidade no nível da relação sujeito-cosmo (trans-multiescalar e transtemporal) e a sua íntima relação com a nossa vida cotidiana (em sua pluridimensionalidade), assumindo, por isto, um significado que consideramos bastante renovado, no nível do que estamos denominando de "envolvimento territorial". Este é compreendido tendo como base a relação sociedade-natureza-cosmo a partir da universidade, isto é, da pesquisa, da formação e da extensão: assim podemos ultrapassar o nível da abordagem territorial, implicando-nos em cada território estudado. Nosso objetivo é refletir sobre a centralidade da universidade na sua relação com a sociedade civil organizada, destacando a necessária integração entre ciência - saberes populares e originários em cada processo de envolvimento territorial e sustentável para todos os seres deste planeta na sua unidade com o cosmos. Outro destaque, na perspectiva teórico-prática que vamos argumentar, é para a pesquisa-ação-participativa intimamente relacionada ao método das coexistências, consoante detalharemos no decorrer do texto, tentando instigar o debate sobre a construção horizontal, dialógica e participativa de uma ciência própria, cada vez mais nossa, muito mais voltada para a resolução de problemas que são comuns em nossa vida cotidiana.

Palavras-chave: Território, cosmo, envolvimento popular, vida.

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INTRODUCTION

We don't have to go very far to clearly see that the reproduction of life, as we know it on Earth, is going through a dramatic situation, whether due to the free movement that exists in the cosmos or due to the severe impacts that we generate on this planet every day. Reacting is necessary and urgent, as is rethinking and recreating our way of life: economism, individualism, universalism, globalism, rationalism and urban centrism are concomitant and relentless processes against the reproduction of our life.

So, more than ever, we are in an acute and accelerated phase of degradation of the other (of the most diverse bodies, spread across different latitudes and longitudes, including the planet, normally objectified), of the erosion of solidarity and of economic, (geo)political, cultural and environmental extremism. And this occurs in a direction that seems inevitable, of the intensification of social insecurity and against the lives of all, a process that demands firm and drastic decisions from all of us.

Thus, it is not difficult to perceive, identify and detail the limits of Eurocentric, rationalist, universalist and globalizing theories to understand the territory and (un)development, to generate truly sustainable solutions within the scope of our daily activities. One aspect that has given us a lot of work is not to criticize these theories, but rather the cognitive turn of in(sub)version of these theories from a theoretical-practical and (a)ffectively decolonial, counter-hegemonic and sustainable perspective.

This in(sub)version, still in progress very slowly, has a cost, as there are many limits and they are rooted in our colonial, mercantile and imperial history, influencing the reproduction of social and territorial domination, including in universities. These, then, are generally understood as political spaces for the dissemination and control of knowledge, especially when researchers do not establish mediations rooted in the university (Salas Astrain, 2018).

This does not mean that the usefulness and use of academic and scientific knowledge need to be restricted to each territory, but that much more is needed than we already do, quantitatively and qualitatively, in favor of the populations of each territory, in different latitudes and longitudes. This can be done with the expected effectiveness from each university or research center with greater roots, social involvement and territorial commitment in its multidimensionality. In this way, we will gain time, depth and quality from what we research.

A movement that has been very useful, both inside and outside the university, is to deconstruct techniques and methods, to resignify concepts and categories, as well as forms of analysis, interpretation and evaluation of (un)development. The university, in this way, becomes a space for dialogues between academic and popular knowledge, integrating subjects and practices through, for example, action research, inventing methodologies to territorialize the university in urban and rural communities (Rivera; Verdejo, 2018).

It is difficult, of course, because it requires humility and recognition of our incompleteness, of our intellectual and technical limits, as well as having a very well-defined political position in favor of another university, where other theories, other methods and techniques are practiced, for other purposes that go beyond the imitation and reproduction of knowledge normally produced in other times and spaces.

For this reason, North Eurocentric methods are often applied in an inadequate and superficial manner, empirically applying theories without recognizing the immediate fusion between researcher and subject, and neglecting the singularities and heterogeneity of each time-space. More than accuracy and adaptation of theories, it is essential to be clear that science is a process that needs to be coherent with the movement of life.

Thus, if we want to care for the continuity of life as we know it, there is no other option. We urgently and radically need to build other territorialities and territories, other relationships and connections, other knowledge and practices, other sciences, understandings and daily actions, other than those prevailing ones linked to modernism, postmodernism, globalism and rational universalism. In modern or postmodern science, bodies are separated into units and parts in order to reason about the whole; we move with hegemonic Western techno-science in a movement contrary to the time of the Earth (Quintero Weir, 2021). This homogenizing universalism, therefore, is totalizing and dominant, rapid and devastating, in which the colonization and degradation of the other are prevalent.

Precisely for this reason, it is necessary to recognize that colonization is economic, political, and cultural, carried out by usurpers who implement different mechanisms of control, oppression, contempt, racism, and subordination, which give rise to misery, disease, and hunger, characterizing a continuous and dehumanizing movement, as Memmi (2021 [1955-56]) very well argued. It is not difficult to imagine and understand that overcoming more than 500 years of colonization, in Abya Yala (Pacha-kawsay, in Kichwa - Ecuador), can only happen by building our decision-making autonomy in the different spheres of life, trying to reproduce ourselves with responsibility and self-management, identifying each other at the levels of economy, politics, culture, as well as in the environmental sphere, thus building our theories and methodological practices, inside and outside the university.

This is why we consider coherent and current – along with the aforementioned theme and work by Albert Memmi – one of the precious texts by the indigenous person and geographer José Quintero Weir (2021): “Theory and practice of knowledge in favor of life”! This is our theme on this occasion, to reflect on two visions of territory and (en)velopment²:

The territorial approach to development, in which the territory results from a social construction, which is normally imbued with quantitative and/or qualitative research, whether participatory or not, historical-critical, and therefore with theories, methods and techniques, which can result in a final course work, a master’s dissertation, a doctoral thesis, a report, a diagnosis, etc., but always based on the subject-object relationship studied; although this research is normally critical, it is carried out at the level of contemplation of the object of development, that is, the researcher observes, describes and reflects on a certain social-spatial process.

The territorial approach *to* and *in* development, incorporating, in addition to the aspects described in item “I”, participatory action research, carried out in phases and coexistences (of research and cooperation with the subjects of each territorial praxis), that is, with the necessary horizontality, implication and solidarity between the different subjects of (un)

² In Portuguese, in the original, the author makes a play on words between “(en)volvimento” (“envelopment”) and “(des)envolvimento” (“development”).

development (including the researcher), characterizing the necessary subject-subject relationship. There we can create communities of solidary, cooperative, reflective, participatory and sustainable involvement!

And it is precisely on this path that we are on, believing that it needs to be a movement of reciprocal learning in which popular and scientific knowledge are integrated into the world of life; and furthermore, they can and must be brought together theoretically, methodologically and politically based on a common objective, overcoming outdated and historical dichotomies. Thus, it is necessary and urgent to decolonize theories, methods, daily practices, understandings and explanations, inverting and subverting the dominant order in its multidimensionality (which can be related to multidisciplinary when, in fact, cooperation occurs between people from different disciplines, in a perspective that is coherent with reality, relational, complex, overcoming economism [Max-Neef, 2005]). Decolonization must occur at the levels of economy, politics, culture and nature, co-creating solutions, creatively and sustainably, based on the singularities of each time-space (Saquet, 2022).

Singularities are precisely events, that is, spatial and temporal relations, and therefore have duration (temporal) and extension (spatial), simultaneities and connections, as Whitehead (2019 [1919]) argued very well. And it is there, at the level of the singular, as our research and other actions have revealed, that the “keys” to unraveling existing (dis)developments and qualifying them for all beings lie. In this way, a decolonizing territorial approach becomes indispensable.

Decolonizing, in this theoretical-practical sense, means breaking with economism, individualism, urban centrism, globalism, etc., breaking dependencies and dominations, classifications and racisms, overcoming dichotomies and oppressions, and the private and degrading appropriations of space turned into territory. Decolonizing means overcoming the colonial order and the prevailing praxis of domination (Quintero Weir, 2021; Mariman, 2018; Vivero Arriagada, 2018). Decolonizing is practicing-reflecting and reflecting-practicing, with the greatest possible environmental and social commitment, every day, inside and outside each university, creating, affectively, community and life for everyone.

Thus, rethinking and reconstructing territorial approaches to development is one of the fundamental conditions, redefining territory and (un)development, as we highlighted in Saquet (2021). There are many resources for this, so on this occasion, we will highlight some that we consider to be highly relevant for the reflection we are doing.

Argument 1: Fundamental Conceptions and Implications

Dallabrida (2020, 2022) and Dallabrida, Rotta and Büttenbender (2021) have demonstrated, with considerable coherence and detail, different theoretical assumptions of the territorial approach, highlighting a multidimensional perspective in which the territory is highlighted as heritage – the “starting point” of a certain analytical, management and development process –, together with critical analysis procedures. In the territorial approach advocated by these authors, some aspects need to be considered, such as social and social-spatial relations, spatial totality and diversity, as well as the interaction between the different dimensions of the society-nature relationship. In short, it is a broad and complex conception, current and relevant, which is related to the achievement of development with decision-making autonomy and

environmental sustainability. Therefore, the concept and practice of territorial development assumes integrated meanings (society-nature; material-immaterial) and operational meanings (related to the multidimensional transformation of a certain reality) and all of this is related to the theoretical-methodological and political option on the part of each researcher or research and management team of the present and future.

In this very well-constructed and argued synthesis by Dallabrida (2020, 2022) and Dallabrida, Rotta and Büttenbender (2021), among other texts that could be cited, we clearly identify the emphasis on the relational nature of our daily lives, both at the level of the society-nature relationship – in its multidimensionality – and in the connections between different spatial scales; the heritage resulting from the historical and social-spatial character of the territory is also evident, as well as the need for them to be studied – heritage and territory – and reorganized towards the construction of a participatory and horizontal management of development, with a view to the great objective of sustainability.

These are all fundamental aspects of a historical-critical and relational conception of territory and development that, in fact, we can identify in some works considered classics, at an international level, when we refer to this debate. Briefly, among others, we can refer to Italian literature, a reference on themes such as territory and development, and even central to the debate and practice of public policies, both in Europe and in Latin America.

When we consider the sociologist Bagnasco (1977, 1978), for example, we clearly see that development is understood as a “territorial problem”, directly related to power relations, cultural-identity processes and the distinct Italian ecosystems. A not very different conception can be found in the work of the geographer Dematteis (1988), as he conditions territorial forms and contents to development processes, and vice-versa, that is, development results from each territorial condition, natural and social, historical and current, bringing together local self-organization, self-management and multi-scale public policies.

When we analyze these and other concepts in more detail (Saquet, 2007, 2021), we notice a certain dialogue between different authors and concepts, especially to overcome economism, as Arnaldo Bagnasco and Giuseppe Dematteis do, mentioned above, and as the economist Becattini (2000 [1979], 2000 [1989]) did: his concept of development is called “socio-territorial”, based on Marshallian industrial districts; development contains local specificities, changes, continuities, technologies, cultural-economic belonging, networks, etc.; the territory occurs at the local level, but is the result (as is development) of internal and external factors. As the territory is natural and social, development is also, considering, from the industrial districts, the concentration of people and companies, where there is community (cooperation) and competitive (market) “interpenetration”. What a synthesis, in our view, still very current and relevant to a territorial approach to development!

Thus, it seems to us that, over the years and in different countries, conceptions of territory and development are being formed that are interdisciplinary (some perhaps transdisciplinary), multidimensional, historical-critical and trans-multiscalar. And this means, in the last quarter of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, a significant paradigm shift in terms of theories, conceptions, categories and public policies, a more radical movement assumed in the last 20 years, in favor of decolonial and counter-hegemonic perspectives.

And this is where we are situated, through a praxis of research, training and cooperation with the subjects of each project, which recognizes and values the historical-critical construction of territorial thought and is in favor of the involvement that, precisely, resulted as one of our learnings: the horizontal, dialogical, participatory and supportive commitment with the subjects of each territory, has meant a differential in the research and other cooperation actions that we have carried out in the last 28 years, in favor of decolonial and counter-hegemonic perspectives.

We are, therefore, despite the many difficulties faced inside and outside the university, working on a process of participatory research (diagnoses, analyses, reports, etc.) and participatory action (training and cooperation, contemporary and prospective) that, together, form the basis of our method of coexistence (Saquet, 2023), of territorial approach and action, in the present-future without disregarding the past. To this end, and this is another lesson, understanding the subject-cosmos synthesis is a condition for our involvement and commitment in favor of life, highlighting the necessary care for our existence on this planet.

Argument 2: from the body-territory to the subject-cosmos

We have already shown that we are, every day, time-space, society-nature, subject-cosmos, simultaneously, that is, there is a unity, which conditions and results from our life, which is natural-social-universal. Thus, we understand that this understanding goes beyond the idea, normally narrative and abstract, of the body-territory, that is, of the body as a socially appropriated space-time, also composed of symbols, subjectivities and desires.

Our body, in the social-natural-spiritual sphere, is appropriated and dominated, controlled and mistreated, violated and submissive, and is therefore characterized as a territorial “knot” in a broad and vast web of territorialities that come and go, from the body to the cosmos, from the cosmos to the body, the result and condition of energy waves. It is therefore not possible to separate time and space, body and soul, feeling and reason, being and thinking, local and global, domination and oppression, society and nature, atoms and particles. Thus, as it is not possible to separate appropriation from domination and, obviously, control from submission, the idea from matter, the symbol of colonial and mercantile objectivity, there is a need for significant changes in the level of our ideas and practices. We already know very well that many so-called critical conceptions are not enough to overcome the imitation of the colonizer, the colonial content of the so-called developmental modernity and postmodernity.

Thought is in motion, like the cosmos, along with our bodies. We interact with universal energy through the energy of our bodies, because we are energy (Quintero Weir, 2021). Thought is in our nature and nature is in thought: events are superimposed, extended over each other (Whitehead, 2019 [1919]). Those who think are not separate from the movement that sustains our life in an uninterrupted totality (Bohm, 1980). These are already very good motivations, in our understanding, to opt for a territorial conception *of* and *in* (dis)development.

The predominant dichotomies in social sciences, such as geography, are a very useful way to fragment and hinder a more complete and sensitive, theoretical-practical understanding of the world. “[...] Mind and matter are not separate substances but rather different aspects of a total and uninterrupted movement” (Bohm, 1980, p. 32). We are and are in relativity and quantum mechanics, there is no way to get out of them to understand territorial (un) development, so we must share in the coexistence of body-Earth-cosmos.

For this reason, we corroborate the need to break with Eurocentric, universal, global and rational paradigms. There is also a need to overcome the so-called Latin American critical thinking (Salas Astrain, 2018), as it has been dependent and insufficient to understand and explain our heterogeneity. For this reason, we are working with participatory action research, based on the method of coexistence, trying to contribute to drastically redefining the territory (as a concept, analytical category and social, temporal and spatial process, as well as a worldview) and the problem of development, initially understood as (un)development and, now, as a committed involvement with the continuity of qualified life for all, in the sense of “buen con-vivir” (Quintero Weir, 2021).

And this is also why we consider it fundamental to confirm Thompson’s (1981 [1978]) understanding of “being thought” and “lived thought”, from a perspective that is the opposite of that of René Decartes; the being – of each one of us – is influenced by and influences other beings, minute by minute, second by second, and this is a necessary conception to overcome “academic theoretical imperialisms”, bourgeois narratives, whether modern or post-modern.

[...] la tesis de definir a los otros hombres como no reflexivos, no críticos o ambos, significa negarles a las culturas la posibilidad de pensar su propio mundo, es ya una tesis a-crítica y, por lo general, ligada a intereses ideológicos de variada índole del que no están ausentes los intelectuales mismo (Salas Astrain, 2018, p. 185).

The thesis of defining other men as non-reflective, non-critical or both, means denying cultures the possibility of thinking about their own world, it is already an a-critical thesis and, in general, linked to ideological interests of various kinds from which intellectuals themselves are not absent (Salas Astrain, 2018, p. 185)

Finally, we understand that being, thinking, existing, and living are indivisible, daily and historically, through everyday territorialities and temporalities, in which there are (perhaps infinite) coexistences, simultaneities, overlaps, intersections, and connections woven into the Earth, with successions and phases, appropriations, and (im)material dominations (Saquet, 2007). There are elements and factors, always in the plural, movements and specificities, historical and geographical, political and economic, cultural and environmental mixtures, in the art of making territories (Castillo; Cury, 2022; Cury, 2022). Evidently, there are also, simultaneously, resistances, struggles (of classes and “within” each social class) of confrontations made in praxis, in defense of the territory of life (Quinchía Roldán, 2021), in different situations of transtemporal, multidimensional, and trans-multiscale appropriation.

Argument 3: from social construction to our pro-life engagement

The drastic redefinition of development, therefore, seems essential to us, which is why we have worked, in theory and in practice, contributing to creating grassroots (un)development communities, with their own characteristics, based on our work at the interface between university and organized civil society, sciences and popular knowledge/actions (Saquet, 2021, 2022). (Un)development means contributing effectively to eliminating oppression, to taking care of the environment, unmasking and reordering power relations, individualism, the concentration of wealth and the centralization of power.

These are not easy or quick tasks, obviously, but they are essential for the preservation of life as we know it, (re)activating feelings of affection, trust, solidarity, cooperation, respect

and care, in a continuous movement in favor of synergies of reciprocity, which are based on the understanding that nature-society-cosmos is in an indivisible unity and is the heritage – common good – of everyone.

In this sense, we are in favor of the territory-heritage of humanity (integrating humans and non-humans): i) as a place and habitat, home and hearth, natural-social-universal co-evolutionary; ii) as a space-time of (in)formation, mobilization, struggle and confrontation in the face of oppression and colonization, pollution and environmental degradation, misery and exploitation, in a practical-theoretical territorial approach, that is, focused on decolonial and counter-hegemonic territorial praxis, carried out participatively, sustainably and popularly, sharing knowledge and practices, coexisting experiences between different subjects (Saquet, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023).

When this occurs, we believe that we are practicing community and territorial involvement, as a scientific and cultural project in a co-evolutionary and sustainable tendency to live through self-organization, solidarity, cooperation, justice and sustainability (Dematteis and Magnaghi, 2018). Here, mobilization and struggle are essential as a movement for the participatory management of the territory and our own involvement, through collective actions aimed at more humane, dignified and inclusive relationships (Quinchía Roldán, 2021), opposing inequalities and the homogenization of economic globalization.

When this occurs (b), and our learning through participatory action research reveals this very well, there is an emphasis on territorial anchoring, as a movement of rooting and commitment in building involvement, valuing and enhancing local synergies, relationships of belonging and recognition, ecosystems, as well as political-cultural proximity and relationships of trust, already existing between the subjects of the urban neighborhoods and/or rural communities where we have worked over the years.

In this way, we have experienced and learned a great deal about the daily importance of our political-cultural commitment in a praxis that is culturally, politically and territorially anchored, at the interface between universities, NGOs, associations and unions of urban and rural workers. Our scales of action have been diverse, but we have stood out at the local and municipal levels, without disregarding, of course, the state, regional, national and international scales.

There, proximity – spatial, organizational, political, cultural and environmental – has always gained centrality, theorized and practiced with (anchoring) courage, social immersion and horizontality, forming distinct short networks of solidarity. This is a praxis of research, training and cooperation, also of management that we are boldly calling territorial, popular, decolonial and counter-hegemonic, in which we participate directly through participatory action research (Saquet, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Anchoring practiced, taking as a reference the maximum possible coexistence and the identity of the subjects of each project, became fundamental potentials to activate the sense of belonging, trust, mobilization and the struggle to achieve what they need and deserve. In this way, we believe that the community is the most appropriate social and territorial level to work on this perspective that we are arguing. It is within the community that there is still solidarity and sharing, recognition and synergy, “beings close to others”, living with others in a “community praxis” (Dussel, 1986). “Community life in itself is an example of these exercises

of democracy” (Acosta, 2016 [2012], p. 147) and, thus, it can very well mean a mediation for the effective praxis of liberation (Vivero Arriagada, 2018; Saquet, 2022) and participatory action research (Saquet, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

As Giuca (2019) has consistently reaffirmed, communities still contain cultural, emotional and political recognitions, centered on the daily reproduction of life, often preserving and enhancing their identities and roots, their knowledge and practices, in short, their territorial heritage. Thus, the “simple” fact that there is still a rural population is already very important, as is producing healthy food, recovering and preserving historical centers, carrying out ecological tourism, protecting material and immaterial heritage – including the still existing sociobiodiversity –, valuing identity products and short marketing circuits, etc.

In this way, we have invested and dedicated a lot of time to research and cooperation in a supportive, cooperative, ecological, participatory and horizontal perspective, involving ourselves in processes of struggle and resistance, of demands and proposals, of management and co-creation of solutions, all done with bodies and souls, sciences and emotions, technologies and techniques, from the perspective of a popular territorial science.

The researcher (he/she), therefore, is also researched (he/she). The researched person (h/she), therefore, is also a researcher (he/she) and both (he/she) participate actively and in solidarity in the process of research and desired social and territorial transformation. And this is a choice and position that is incompatible with the supposed neutrality of modern science, with systems and subsystems, with modeling, with classifications of areas, with the nature-society and university-society dichotomies, with universal narratives produced abstractly from hegemonic individual interests (Saquet, 2021, p. 51-52).

Argument 4: territorial science and co-production of knowledge and solutions

It may be clear to our reader that we are thinking and working in a movement against colonization and globalization. However, it is worth highlighting that the colonial and subordinating horizon of so-called modernity is contained in so-called postmodernity, as processes that are conditioned, in which the political and ideological management of academic-scientific knowledge and abstractions has been central to favoring the maintenance of social domination (Dussel, 2018).

In this context, popular science becomes a praxis against hegemonic (Eurocentrism and universalism), and is linked – obviously – to the people of each territory and place, in time and space (Saquet, 2019, 2021, 2022). It is a science carried out on the streets, in neighborhoods, in rural communities, problematizing science and reality, listening to people with political commitment, in favor of popular liberation (Verdier, 2018).

In the popular territorial science that we are discussing, we research and collaborate with the subjects of each project, that is, we act in the territorial approach of (dis)development and, at the same time, in the (re)construction of involvement, with a view to the production and commercialization of agroecological foods in short circuits, the preservation of biodiversity, and the necessary care with water, soil and forests. It is a science that is thought out and practiced, and therefore requires our involvement with immersion, commitment and cooperation, with reason and emotion, with versatility and sensitivity.

And in this territorial science, it is not enough to work only with the traditional phases of scientific research. In each action research project we have undertaken, we have always striven to ensure that theory and practice coexist, to not separate being and thought, to integrate popular knowledge and practices with academic science. We are not content with theorizing and publishing, and so we engage as much as possible with the people who truly need our research and cooperation.

One of the lessons learned from our territorial involvement – in addition to those mentioned above –, carried out in a sustainable direction (in its multidimensionality), is that there is no model for doing popular territorial science. We need to be versatile, “think outside the box”, as the saying goes, (re)inventing theories, concepts and techniques, sometimes highlighting environmental processes, sometimes political and cultural ones; sometimes giving centrality to research, sometimes to management action, sometimes to participation and cooperation in solving immediate problems and in other temporalities (Figure 1).

RESEARCH	ACTION	PARTICIPATORY
RESEARCH	MANAGEMENT ACTION	PARTICIPATORY
RESEARCH	ACTION	PARTICIPATORY WITH COOPERATION

Figure 1 – A representation of the necessary versatility in action research focused on territorial involvement. Prepared by Marcos Saquet, June 2024.

To make it effective, it is necessary to decolonize our minds (unlearn) and practices by relearning through reflection-action-coexistence, with immersion, (an)courage, confidence and political commitment, in(sub)verting science, theories, research methodologies and concepts. We need to theorize and practice understanding and social transformation in a continuous territorial, decolonial and counter-hegemonic movement, made for and with the most vulnerable social classes, precisely those who most need our popular and sustainable involvement and commitment, as we have already mentioned.

To decolonize society, it is necessary to attack social division, hierarchy, and the ordering of social classes due to capital-labor relations, but also color, religion, ethnicity, etc. (Mariman, 2018). Decolonizing the university is also essential, and this implies breaking the cycle that tends to transform students into imitators, clients, and consumers; it means interrupting the cycle in which the student becomes a consumer of educational goods, mainly disciplinary credits, certifications, and diplomas (Mbembe, 2016). Furthermore, it is necessary to detach ourselves from our daily subjection, to think and act beyond the categories of modernity and postmodernity, working in favor of social groups in struggle, serving as the cement of “co-work,” with research, training, and activism (Leyva; Speed, 2008).

To decolonize, our territorial praxis has also shown that it is essential to effectively integrate popular and academic knowledge into each research and cooperation project. Thus, we (in)form and are (in)formed, we learn and teach, contributing to resistance and demands, and to territorial management based on strengthening the organizational capacity of each urban and/or rural community.

And this is a delicate and thorny movement that requires patience and humility, as well as a great deal of study and commitment at the community level, whether urban or rural. Our learning also shows that we can work, although always horizontally, sometimes highlighting individuals and their families, sometimes their associative, cooperative or union institutions. To

do this, we also need to be versatile and sensitive, that is, in our approach and territorial action. Educational organizations have been, as expected, fundamental, as have some religious and self-organized organizations (mothers' clubs and youth groups), depending, of course, on each territory, on the individuals, their intentions and needs, their dreams and the existing conditions for mobilization, (in)formation and territorial involvement. Therefore, there is no model to be followed.

Levels of class and local consciousness have also proven to be essential, whether for initiating a participatory research project or carrying out cooperation and solidarity actions. The fact is that when individuals and families, and especially communities, reciprocate and take on a certain project, the actions take place in a synergistic and focused manner. Furthermore, initiatives, by project and by community, usually need to take place simultaneously, expanding and making more complex our challenge of managing research and cooperation while respecting ecosystems and local societies (Figure 2).

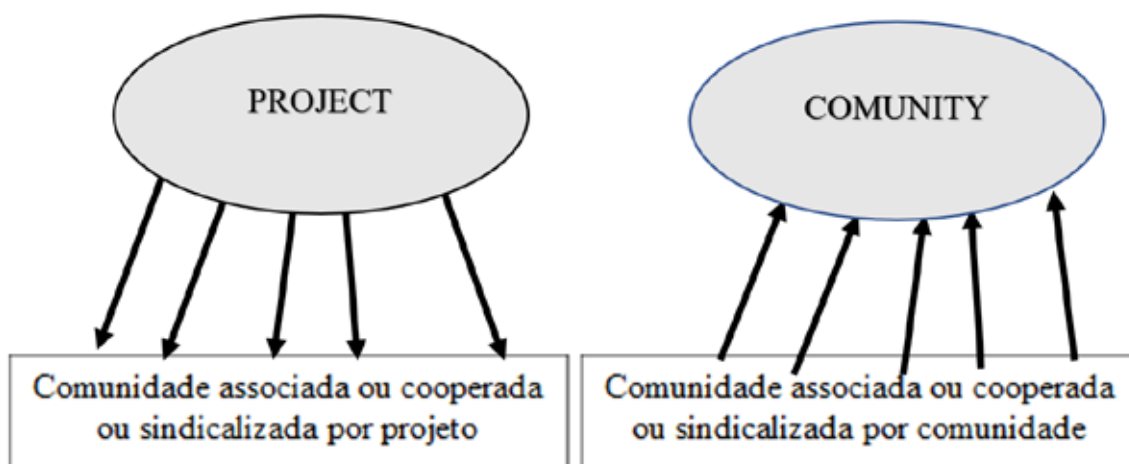


Figure 2 – Coexistence of project and community initiatives.

Source: Created by Marcos Saquet, June 2024.

To create a popular territorial science in the way we are arguing, it is necessary to prepare oneself to immerse oneself in the everyday life and heterogeneity of each space-time and territory, interacting with the different subjects, life experiences, worldviews, knowledge, techniques and technologies. To produce it, it is necessary to immerse oneself in daily territorialities and temporalities, co-producing common knowledge and solutions to problems that are often common. We need to vibrate, to understand and explain vibrant and challenging territorialities (Cury, 2022).

Thus, we understand that an (a)effectively decolonial and counter-hegemonic paradigm necessarily requires the co-production of knowledge and direct collaboration to solve the problems of our people, in a theoretically, methodologically, ideologically and politically in(sub)versive movement. This process needs to happen, on a daily basis, in a participatory and dialogical manner, cooperative and supportive, with territorial anchoring and with the maximum possible decision-making autonomy.

This movement also needs to occur “from within,” that is, our approaches and solutions must be built from Abya Ayala, because there are unique characteristics here that require unique interpretations and solutions. The political-cultural and environmental revolution is

possible, but it needs to be carried out with the “soul of the people” (Dussel, 2020 [1964-72]), who are very familiar with their daily reality.

To this end, participatory research or participatory action research are a methodological condition, especially centered on the researcher’s “feeling-thinking”³ (Fals Borda, 2015 [1970], 2015 [1979]), recognizing the other as a subject, based on their singularities, from whom we can also and, often, need to learn, through dialogues and actions. We can feel and think about the “emptiness” of the cosmos and its energy flows, the subtlety of life, with sensitivity, with emotion and the necessary care for the other (Quintero Weir, 2021).

Therefore, during our territorial projects, we encourage creativity, social interaction (coexistence), respect, solidarity, problem-solving, considering the conditions and objectives of each individual, family, social group, as well as their political organizations (NGOs, associations, workers’ unions, family farming cooperatives), trying to contribute to expanding and qualifying class and place consciousness (Saquet, 2017, 2019).

Creating is possible and necessary, taking care of the other being-Earth-cosmos! Creativity (which is within us) is directly related to sensitivity, sagacity, fantasy, perception, with the openness to learn the new and original, whether in art or in science (Bohm, 2011). With intellectual, political-cultural and environmental responsibility, yes, but boldly to meet the (dis)developments necessary for us to live longer and better, with security, tranquility, health, education, food aimed, of course, at the lasting reproduction of life.

Researching and creating with autonomy, commitment, sensitivity, and versatility influence our territorial liberation, as this movement contributes to qualifying our self-awareness of dependence, subordination, and depredation (Dussel, 2020 [1964-72]). And, to this end, “horizontal methodologies,” such as participatory action research, have proven to be essential in the dialogue with social groups that have historically been subalternized and made invisible before the State and economically and politically hegemonic groups. They have proven to be fundamental to decolonizing knowledge and practices, generating knowledge constructed participatively, with mutual involvement *of* and *in* (en)velopment⁴.

In this way, we can contribute to going beyond the political field that normally institutionalizes the knowledge produced, constituting research that enriches the different subjects involved in it, from an intercultural and ethical perspective (Kaltmeier, 2020). Homogenizing conceptions are then overcome, reaching heterogeneity, forms and actions, in favor of freedom and democracy (Hurtado Galeano; Naranjo Giraldo, 2022). Furthermore, recognizing, representing and explaining heterogeneity also seems essential, for example, for the construction of local public policies, rediscovering and valuing identities, knowledge, practices, ecosystems, typical foods, contributing, democratically, to reinventing the common future (Giuca, 2019).

“Liberation is the master’s condition for being a master. If he is a slave to the closed totality, he cannot truly interpret anything” (Dussel, 2020 [1964-72], p. 137).

“[The] *perception must be free from conditioning to already existing patterns or it will naturally* be just an extension of a *mechanical* reaction. It must be new and different, creative and original” (Bohm, 2011, p. 69; emphasis in the original).

³ In the original, in Brazilian-Portuguese, the author created a neologism: “sentipensar”, that is, to feel+think (N.T).

⁴ As mentioned before (N.T).

We therefore believe that together, through debate, dialogue, coexistence and collaboration, we can truly build our science and our popular and revolutionary philosophy, based on each research project and/or participatory action – with the greatest possible originality and versatility –, from the local, without being restricted to it; towards the present-future, without disregarding the past. Co-producing one's own (en)velopment⁵, with decision-making autonomy and self-management, is vital, and therefore cannot be defined authoritatively, whether by law or any public policy, or based on a certain theory considered absolute, or by a particular researcher.

Argument 5: From beginning to end, life!

All this and much more, which we need to reinvent every day, to take care of everyone's⁶ lives. It is increasingly clear that the complexity of life is quantum-gravitational, which goes from the micro to the macro and vice versa through intense and continuous connections, in perhaps indivisible waves, made of energy that sustains the unity of the cosmos between everything that exists in the relationship between Earth-solar system-stars-galaxies-cluster of galaxies. Gravity and quantum field mutually "pull" each other, preventing the collapse of our natural-cosmological-social life (Cox and Forshaw, 2016).

We believe that there is a totality (neither horizontal nor vertical) of flows and connections in our daily lives, minute by minute, second by second, rotation by rotation, translation by translation; it is not a question of dividing the whole into parts, each starting from research on it or on the parts, but of considering the elements and their fusions simultaneously, as if we were looking and reflecting on the horizon, on the cosmos-planet-our bodies, inseparably.

Even though our reflection is still incipient, we hope it is clear that we need to drastically reconstruct the theories and methods that we normally use in territorial studies and (un) development practices. One of the possibilities we are trying to elucidate is precisely that of participatory action research, carried out in phases and coexistences, outside and inside universities (and other educational levels), in a kind of sentient-thinking worldview (Quintero Weir, 2021), doing by thinking and reflecting by doing, turning to the heart of the Earth, interacting with the cosmos, to solve existential problems. It is necessary, more than ever, to abandon the individualistic and fragmenting self, to overcome dependence and control over others, with the continuity of everyone's⁷ life as fundamental.

"Una reina, en la hora de su muerte, dice que es fuego y aire; yo suelo sentir que soy tierra, cansada tierra" (Borges, 2005 [1995], p. 9).

"A queen, at the hour of her death, says that she is fire and air; I usually feel that I am earth, tired earth" (Borges, 2005 [1995], p. 9).

⁵ As mentioned in the previous footnote (N.T).

⁶ "Todos e todas", in the original. Distinction, in which "o" is masculine and "a" is feminine, in Portuguese, to highlight the presence and importance of feminist struggles in terms of linguistic gender. Quite common, nowadays, in lectures, conventions, congresses, etc. (N.T).

⁷ "Todos e todas" (N.T).

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