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Rural development in Latin America A critical territorial approach¹

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Abstract

Latin America attends currently to the construction of a paradigm of rural development based on the potentiality of the territory to encourage processes of rural wellbeing. Some international studies relating rural development to territory from an institutional perspective have recently come out, greatly contributing to the construction of a territorially based rural development in the region. The paradigm is mainly centred in a monetary approach, stressing the need to increase incomes at local level through new agricultural or non-agricultural production and/or increases in productivity as well as through education for migrating to urban areas.

Development policies and projects that promote social and institutional transformation have to deal with the confrontation of those who oppose changing the *status quo*, particularly the local elites, and the resistance of those communities that consider that their identities may be lost as a result of that transformation. Therefore, a critical approach to territory (understood as an arena where different local and non local actors try to realize their projects) should be build up in order to comprehend the process generating rural poverty and development.

The purpose of this paper is to present the main ideas and concepts of an analytical framework under construction that may allow us to understand rural development from a critical territorial approach. The hypothesis is that social mobilization of local actors is a main issue when approaching and promoting development in poor rural regions of Latin American countries, especially the organization of peasants and farmers as they constitute the majority of the inhabitants and are largely excluded from the socioeconomic and political system.

Introduction

This paper is a proposal to develop a framework for considering an alternative approach to rural development in Latin America to the current that is being gaining place in different government agendas. The continent is well known to have an unequal distribution of resources (private and public) among the population that live there and within its geographical areas (Kay, 2006). A diversity of population and livelihoods also

¹ This paper is part of my doctorate thesis project conducted from 2006 and as a proposal these ideas may need further exploration. I will be very much grateful for receiving comments, critics and opinions.

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characterized the region (native communities from the Andes' highlands down to the rainforests, European descendant's settlements, urban and rural movements³). Therefore it proposes some ideas and concepts to reflect on development centred in the comprehension of social relations and in the different ways development could be approached.

At the present time Latin America attends to the construction of a paradigm of rural development based on the possibilities of the *territory* to encourage processes of improvement in the quality of life in the inhabitants of rural areas. In general terms it can be sustained that this territorial paradigm is centred, mainly, in a monetary approach, stressing the need to increase incomes of the local population, by finding new agricultural or non agricultural products and/or an increase in productivity, aiming an insertion in the global market.

The role of the territory and the promotion of local development is emphasized as: (i) a way to transform the local productive systems to obtain certain competitiveness in the global and national markets (Boscherini and Poma, 2000; Silva Lira, 2005) or else (ii) as a pathway towards the democratization of the local territory, when promoting and strengthening the citizen participation in the context of the political decentralization. These elements have been incorporated into the rural development policies of different national governments⁴ and into the agendas of most of the international organization for cooperation and financing.

I considerer that the comprehension of social dynamics in rural spaces, in special collective actions from bellow, have not been fully incorporated in development policies carried out by those international organization and national governments. There are many examples of social mobilization in different countries that are showing *resistance* to the way "development" is taking its course in the region. These movements depict the need to approach development from a different point of view than the mainly promoted.

In this proposal the focus centres in the social, economic, political and cultural dynamics of rural territories since I associate them with the possibilities to encourage processes of improvement in the well-being of rural population. In this context I put special attention to know how *power* is built and rebuilt through these relations. This way, I try to provide some guide lines and concepts for a rural development theory focused on a critical territorial approach. My intention is to define a concept of territory that permits us to think thoroughly on the role of it to promote social welfare in local scopes, taking into consideration critical perspectives of development and collective action.

My hypothesis is that *social mobilization* of local actors is a main issue to reflect on and to promote development in poor rural regions of Latin American countries, especially the organization of peasants and farmers because they make out the majority of the inhabitants in these areas and they are largely excluded from the socioeconomic and political system.⁵ I think that their participation in the political life can alter the relations of power for their own determination. The institutional backgrounds and the diverse way that they perform collective actions will trigger different socio economic and cultural outcomes, resulting in a distinct well-being (development) model in each local scope.

I consider that actors and the institutional contexts from which they act are configuring a particular territory when defying particular geographical areas of influence. In this sense,

³ Such as those concerning to human rights and democracy; or those related to gender, organic production, and environmental rights or access to land, water or native genetic material, among others.

⁴ Brazil and Chile for example.

⁵ It could be said that some of them are included but in a subordinated way.

territory is a result of conflicting social relations and dynamics that involve diverse actors and their institutions in order to obtain control over located resources (material and symbolic). Such actors, institutions and their networks can trigger or limit different processes of well-being and social justice when promoting certain kind of projects over others.

By defining territory as an “arena” where spatial relations of power take place, the local scope gets a new role to reflect on development. Therefore the concept of *place* may help us to build a critical theoretical framework to understand rural development in Latin America.

The paper is structure as followed: the first part after the introduction presents the main premises that characterized the Rural Territorial Development in Latin America (DTR) as is mostly known this new paradigm in the region. In the second part, I expose the main set of concepts I propose for a critical perspective to reflect on (rural) development. Finally, I present some concluding ideas about the contrasts between the current normative rural development and a critical territorial perspective.

Rural Territorial Development (DTR) in Latin America

The study of development as local or territorial development has its background in diverse theoretical and empirical analyses from different social disciplines. From an economical perspective of development, Alburquerque (2004: 158) points out that “during a long time, the territorial (or local) nature of the economic development has gone through a situation of theoretical marginality”. According to the author, the principal cause of the theoretical marginalization has to be examined in the simplification of the development process that the economic thought has done, when considering the company or economic sector as a unit of analysis and study them as abstract units leaving away its territorial reference. He also indicates that, for some authors, the crisis of the Fordist model of series production has promoted the theoretical rediscovery of the flexible production in the local level.

Recently, from new institutional perspectives, has been sustained that the development processes do not take place in a vacuity; instead they have important institutional and cultural backgrounds (North, 1993, was one of the first economist to build a theory upon this premise). The processes linked to development come about in societies with their own cultures and mechanisms of organization, as Vázquez Barquero (2000: 8) affirms

“...development is encouraged by society in specific forms of organization and institutions which are their own, and these institutions will facilitate or not the economic activities, as the economic agents take their decisions in that [particular] organizational and institutional surrounding”.

In this sense, different contributions have been made to build up a more integral view of development, incorporating the local and the institutional approach as ones of the main sources of theoretical and conceptual support (prf. Alburquerque, 2004: 157). According to Vázquez Barquero (2001) this notion of local development constitutes an alternative model to the one proposed by the dominant paradigm of development during the 50’s and 60’s, which stated that growth lies in the industrialization processes and concentration of productive activities in a reduced number of populated urban centres, from which the market mechanisms spread it later towards the peripheral cities and regions, thus favouring their development.

The institutional analysis applied to the territory and development is a theoretical perspective not yet consolidated in Latin America. In developed economies countries, such as the ones from Europe, the studies about local productive systems, institutional territorial

or company systems and the role of the organizational and geographic proximity in the conformation of economical successful local scopes, have multiplied. This has been reflected in the European policies to promote rural development (such as the LEADER programme).

Regarding developing countries, Brohman (1996: 232) mentions that during the '80s there was a kind of "alternative spatial strategy" which "calls for decentralization measures to overcome problems of economic stagnation and underdevelopment in rural peripheries of Third World countries". The author refers to the Territorial Regional Planning Approach. According to Friedman (1992: 73) the central participatory elements of this territorial approach entails...

"...the territorial character of an alternative development, greater autonomy over the life-spaces of the poor in the management of resources, collective self-empowerment, the importance of respecting cultural identities, and the democratic participation of the poor in all the phases of development practice" (quoted in Brohman 1996: 235).⁶

Brohman mentions that this territorial approach is closer linked to the radical and neo-populist thrust of alternative strategies developed in the '70s which puts emphasis on endogenous development as a way to strength autonomy and therefore proposed selective withdrawal from the international economic system (prf. ibidem: 233). The author mentions that:

"...the territorial approach distances itself from neoclassical economics in favour of a more theoretical eclectic framework which often incorporates some Marxist elements associated with core-periphery concepts" (ibidem).

The proposal tended to emphasize the role of the political sphere in the promotion of development "much more than the neoclassical models of functional integrations", but as a critic, it has been sustained that this territorial approach paid little attention to class, gender, ethnic, and other social relations which may be interrelated with the political sphere in various ways (ibidem: 236).⁷

Recently, and from a normative perspective, some institutional studies that relate the rural development to the territory in Latin America have come out (Schejtman and Berdegúe, 2003 and 2004; de Janvry and Sadoulet, 2000 and 2005). These works have greatly contributed to the construction of a paradigm of rural development in the continent, centring in the potentiality of the territory to encourage processes of improvement in the quality of life of local inhabitants. De Janvry and Sadoulet (2000: 408) comments on one of its main premises, sustaining from a normative approach that:

"...the most important path out of poverty for the Latin America rural poor should rely on pluriactivity... Assisting this path out of poverty requires a redesign of rural development, focusing on a territorial and multisectoral approach that provides institutional support to the multiplicity of income sources that characterize the vast majority of the Latin American rural poor".

This paradigm, known as Territorial Rural Development (DTR) retains some elements of the "territorial regional planning approach" commented by Brohman (1996: 232-236) such as the importance of decentralization and local participation, but it differs from it since the

⁶ Friedman (1992) *Empowerment: The Politics of an Alternative Development*. Blackwell, Oxford.

⁷ Its main critic is that it neglects the social relations by treating regions and communities as undifferentiated wholes and assuming there is not possibilities of internal fragmentation along class, gender, ethnic and other lines (prf. Brohman, 1996: 236-237).

premises are framed in a neoclassical theory (competitiveness, efficiency, global markets, dynamic economies).

Schejtman and Berdegué (2004) defined DTR as a process of productive and institutional transformation in a given rural space that aims to reduce rural poverty. According to the authors:

“...the productive transformation has the intention to articulate in a competitive and sustainable way the economy of the territory to dynamic markets. The institutional development has the intention to stimulate and facilitate interactions and agreements among local actors and between them and relevant external actors, as well as to increase opportunities so that poor population could participate in its process and its benefits” (ibidem: 4).⁸

The authors affirm that there is a convergence around some basic concepts that might be the base of a territorial approach of rural development. They sustain this affirmation on the existence of innovative interventions in diverse countries of the region, as well as the LEADER programme in Europe and the proposals of the international organizations of cooperation. According to Schejtman and Berdegué (2004) this convergence aims to:

“...finish with the identity rural development = agricultural development; rescue the importance of the urban-rural linkages and with the dynamic markets; emphasise the technological innovation; and consider the exigency of institutional reforms, decentralization and strengthen of local government, social intersectorial and public-private concurrence” (ibidem).

The author's proposal is largely based on a document prepared by them to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in 2003. It meant a significantly contribution to disclose and promote this development project in Latin America because it is the first work that systematize some ideas about the issue, such as the comments in previous paragraph about the importance of institutional transformation, decentralization and local participation among others. The objective of the paper was to give an operative “map of route” that allows the clarification of the current debate on the topic of territorial rural development so it can constitute itself as a theory of action to the design of policies and projects toward the overcoming of rural poverty.

The authors mentioned seven features that must be taken into account for a territorial rural development intervention: (i) competitiveness of the units of production, (ii) technology innovation, (iii) competitiveness of the context of production, (iv) external demand as a main cause of productive transformation, (v) rural - urban linkages, (vi) institutional development, and (vii) territory as a net of social relations that originates and express an identity as well as give a sense of shared purpose to a multiplicity of public and private agents.

De Janvry and Sadoulet (2005) referred to this new paradigm with the name of *integral* in opposition to *integrated*, a previous rural development model apply in Latin America during the '70s and '80s (DRI). They consider that while the integrated rural development policies were top-down and government managed, the integral should be decentralized and participatory, multi-sectoral and territorial. The policies promoted by this approach build on four pathways out of poverty: smallholder farming, wage labour in agriculture, self-employment and wage labour in the rural non-farm economy, and migration. Therefore, it is possible to sustain that integral and territorial rural development would be referring to

⁸ In Spanish in the original. Translation of the author.

the same topics, but with a different name.

Different international organizations of cooperation and financing⁹ are increasingly and strongly promoting the DTR approach in Latin America. In particular, the IADB, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) have formulated their policies for rural development cooperation in the region from a territorial perspective. The notion of territory and/or the territorial perspective is a common factor in the strategies and support policies that they promote for rural areas. As de Ferranti and others (2005: 103) suggest “the spatial approach to development, which focuses on the territories within countries, is again fashionable”.

In fact, in 1999 the IADB presented its Strategy of Agricultural Development for Latin America and the Caribbean indicating that there was a general need in the region to build a different rural development approach. This should be based on a territorial perspective that takes into account multisectoral elements as well as the diversity of rural conditions in the continent (IADB, 1999 and 2005). The World Bank (2002) published a document affirming the necessity to apply a territorial decentralized rural development policy in the region considering the lesson learn from the integrated rural development.

The IICA published in 2003 (Sepúlveda et. al, 2003) a paper about the Territorial Approach to Rural Development (ETDR) where declares that in order to reduce poverty and improve food security the organization promote a territorial rural development. The notion of territory is better accounted in this document, defining rural territories as:

“...geographical spaces, whose cohesion is a result of a specific social network, a particular natural resource base, some own institutions and organization forms, and specific forms of production, interchange and income distribution” (ibidem: 4).¹⁰

The FAO made it available in 2005 a methodological proposal for planning rural development based on a territorial and participative perspective (Participatory and Negotiated Territorial Development, PNTD). This report points out that the emergence of territoriality in the current discussion on rural development “is the product of economic and social changes within countries and in the wider political context of globalization” (FAO, 2005: 2). According to the FAO, this systematic vision of territory is important because offers a proper point of view of its functioning and allows the vertical and horizontal integration between territorial scales and levels. Furthermore, it sustains that:

“...working on a territorial level allows focusing on the assets of the territory (including the cultural and natural heritage), its potentialities and constraints. A valorisation of the territorial assets serves to develop synergies within a territory while taking into account linkages with other territories (competition, but also complementarities) and helps to revitalize formerly marginalized territories” (ibidem: 9).

But how are these new policies defining rural territorial development? How do they link the territorial issue to the rural development? It can be stated in general terms that this new approach is based on the promotion of different productive sectors to encourage development and on the fostering of decentralization to promote social participation in the management of local resources. The territorial perspective applied in rural development, according to the mentioned authors as well as the international organizations of cooperation, would allow to: (i) finish with the rural identity related to the agricultural, (ii)

⁹ Such as the IADB, the IFAD the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) among others.

¹⁰ In Spanish in the original. Translation of the author.

highlight the essential contribution of non agricultural sectors, (iii) link sector policies, (iv) observe the importance of urban-rural linkages, (v) coordinate different levels of government, (vi) promote decentralization of resources towards the local levels, (vii) foster social participation in public management, (viii) rebuild the social network of any specific territory through the social dialogue in order to resolve conflicts and to agree on development projects, (ix) understand the role of social capital, education and instruction in the development process, (x) incorporate the economic function of externalities to the rural territory, (xi) focus on the assets of the territory (including the cultural and natural inheritance) its potentialities and restrictions, and (xii) establish clearly the beneficiaries and the geographical area of intervention.

Therefore, this new model asserts that to encourage rural development in Latin America it is necessary to:

- Promote linkages between poor rural territories and dynamic markets,
- Stimulate the demand of products and services in local markets through strengthening urban-rural linkages,
- Execute the necessary investments in infrastructure to promote the linkages to extra local markets,
- Foster inter sector linkages,
- Increase income through the increment of agricultural production and productivity, as well as the development of small and medium size agro industries,
- Support and promote technological innovation,
- Perform institutional reforms, in special inside the governmental system,
- Support and promote social agreement: inter-sector and public-private,
- Fortify the local institutions, private as well as public, in particular the ones of poor farmers,
- Promote the capacity of farmers' organizations so that they have greater influence in the decisions that affect to them,
- Grant protagonism to the sub-national governments,
- Promote a greater citizen participation in the formulation of local economic development policies,
- Design projects and programs of rural development through participative practices;
- Grant importance to the environmental services, and
- Conserve natural resources.

It can be observed that the territorial perspective of rural development planning for Latin America presents the following dimensions or characteristics, some more outstanding depending on the organization and the strategies and policies promoted (Nardi, 2006). The territorial rural development therefore is seen as:

Multisectorial. The “multi-sectoriality” implies considering the totality of actors, the urban and the rural issues, the public and the private ones. In order to be able to be operative and put into function these sectors together, a program or project of development needs to define a “space” of intervention.

Spatial. In the latter idea, it is considered a particular physical space, with boundaries that may be specifically identified. For that reason, the term territory comes into the agenda. The delimitation and identification, according to some authors, can be done from a criteria based on the spatial and social identity. In this case the spatial dimension is also understood related to a social space: the territory like an arena of negotiation for the fortification of the dialogue and the mutual confidence. The social space of concurrence.

Local. The spatial scale that would permit the intervention and the social concurrence is the local. In some policies the territorial approach is almost considered as a synonymous of the local question. It considers the demarcation of a particular area, where a policy should be applied, as a unit of planning: region, limited space in geographic, political, administrative and ecological terms, constituting integral units of planning and initiatives of development. That is the reason why some agencies reference to the DTR as the “territorial dimension” of the economic policies for development of companies’ competitiveness. Others emphasize the fortification of grass root organizations for a greater democratization of the rural spaces.

Political - jurisdictional. The territorial issue refers as well to the sub-national political spaces of government. This is not a geographical scale but a certain level of political organization of a given country: the municipal or communal level. This is the minimal unit of government and the one that can be linked to the everyday life of the local dwellings. And for that reason the international organization of cooperation sustain that it has advantages for promoting a transparent public resources management since it is possible to succeed in a real social participation.

Territorial. In the sense of the territorial planning, the centre of attention lays in the location and ordering of certain key factors for development in a given geographic space: land, infrastructure, water, communications, etc. Example of this is the mention to the necessity to (a) make an agrarian reform or land distribution; (b) develop and extend financial portfolios in rural areas; (c) invest in the construction of mega infrastructures of transport and/or communication; (d) extend the urban services towards the rural areas; among others.

Basically, it can be sustained that the territorial proposal of rural development tries to increase the scale of intervention supported by an economicist perspective: there is a shift from company competitiveness to territory competitiveness. By doing so, the perspective ends up reifying territories or the “local” as if these social spaces were homogeneously constructed; gradually discarding that territories are constructed by actors with different interests and capacities, different abilities or power to influence and to be part of the agendas of development. It can be asserted that this new paradigm of rural development in Latin America is very much normative and propositional. From my point of view, it requires taking into account the voices of many different actors that every day are being more and more “present” in the region and demand another kind of development.

A critical territorial approach to (rural) development

In this section I intent to argue that it is need to consider a critical approach to rural development in order to think in different terms than those that nowadays are being strongly promoted in Latin America. I consider that the DTR is unlike to bring any social transformation in the direction of more equity and social justice in the countries of the continent if based upon the premises mentioned above. Most of those premises and intentions do not differ from previous national and international policies applied in the region. Therefore, I propose to consider a critical territorial approach centred in some concepts developed by the Geography; not to bring development but to understand the social dynamics and processes that underlie projects and policies of development in poor countries.

In a recent work, and from a critical perspective, Lawson (2007: 3-5) proposes a “relational and geographical analysis of development”.¹¹ The author claims to take into consideration in this kind of studies the interplay of political and economical forces; the discursive and cultural construction of gender, ethnicity, nationality and development itself; the colonial and postcolonial histories; the physical geography; and the shifting political and regulatory power of places. In this sense, she proposes to think about a “mainstream” development (or western) and a “critical” development. Lawson defines them as followed:

“...mainstream development studies take Western modernity, nation-state systems and the desirability of capitalist economic growth as given and seek to understand and improve these dominant systems” (Lawson, 2007: 11).

“Critical development geography attends to the social and geographical sense of location of subjects in power relations, axes of identity and particular places (...) Within critical development geography, ‘development’ as a concept is theorised as contextual – taking on meaning in the context of a nexus of power relations comprised of discourses, material and intellectual histories, institutional practices and political milieus” (ibidem: 12)

From this perspective, she considers that the term *development* is complex, contradictory and powerful and “takes on particular meanings in the context of specific intellectual, institutional and political moments”:

“...geography challenges much development theory by pointing out that D/development does not exist as a thing or an end point. Rather, it is a series of historically specific relations between places, social groups, culture, spheres of production and consumption. D/development is viewed both as a politically powerful discourse and as relentlessly material, entailing substantial transformations of society as a result of these power relations” (2007: 27).

The distinction between Development and development has to do with the idea that the term has two meanings, one more general than the other:

“1. Development as the expansion and extension of (generally capitalist) systems of production, exchange and regulation. 2. Development as organized interventions with explicit and implicit goals” (Bebbington, 2003: 299).

I consider that this approach to D/development may help researchers to comprehend the social dynamics in rural spaces and the generation of rural “poverty”, as well as understand the subjects that are being beneficiaries of national and international policies and programmes of development and economic growth. In this sense, I agree with de Janvry and Sadoulet (2000) when they mentioned that in many cases the causes that produce rural poverty in Latin America have not been clearly understood.¹²

In rich agricultural countries in Latin America, such as Brazil or Argentina in South America, the advance of commodities crops (ej. soja) or the integration to industrial dynamics (ej. tobacco) are proving to be a cause of enrichment for some sectors of the population, but for most of it have caused poverty and exclusion. Hence, I would like to

¹¹ Lawson (2007: 11) points out that “[c]ritical development geography came of age in the 1990s, bringing Marxian political-economy analysis into creative tension with post-structural feminist, antiracist, and postcolonial theory (...). These researchers emphasize the importance of identity, difference, subjectivity, knowledge and power, in relation to the unfolding of capitalism restructuring...”

¹² The authors sustain that “The policy record in dealing with rural development has been highly uneven and generally disappointing, with sources of gains in reducing the relative number of rural to urban poor mainly cause by populations shifts as opposed to successful rural poverty reduction... The causes and the dynamics of poverty have been much misunderstood. Setting the record straight regarding what creates rural poverty and how specific individuals and communities have escaped poverty is thus an important part of the solution” (De Janvry and Sadoulet, 2000: 390).

stress the need to comprehend in a relational way the generation of poverty and the generation of wellbeing (or development). Examples from South America can demonstrate this point:

“...while the hunger reaches record levels in Argentina, vast cultivable surfaces are being transformed into “ghost hectares”, dedicated to produce commodities for export -oils and food for cattle- and incapable to guarantee the food security in the national territory. Thus, the logic of monoculture, typical of most vulnerable countries in the world, is gradually being introduced in an agro-alimentary model that day by day is more dependent on the multinationals technological packages...” (Backwell and Stefanoni, 2003: 31-33).¹³

This illustrates that in some rural areas of the continent the lack of resources, social capital and public investments are not the causes of poverty as the main development policies supposed. In areas like north Argentina or south Brazil, for example, smallholders and farmers are very much integrated to the tobacco complex, incorporating the latest technology and producing one of the best tobaccos in the region, but still they live in conditions of scarcity and poverty.

The interest here then is to outline an approach centred on the actors and their relation of power, by defining the problem of poverty as a conflicting struggle not only at local level but global to get access to resources (material and symbolic). Consequently, the concepts of territory and place present an important connotation since they may permit to think in a relational way about the located social structures of power. In this sense I agree with Lawson (2007: 18) when she mentions that:

“A geographical analysis of poverty (...) directs our attention to the interplay of economic, political and cultural processes in places. (...) this geographical work theorizes processes (economic development, identity formation, struggles over land, and so on) as conditioned by located structures of social relations and webbed connections with the workings of power in other places. The idea of place-dependence of processes analyses the uneven working of power as they are situated in, and connected across, places”.

In the following part then, I intend to give a definition of territory and place (and connected with them the notions of territoriality and terrains of resistance) that allow constructing a critical territorial approach to rural development in Latin America.

Territory, territoriality, place and terrain of resistance

The concept of territory has long been delineated and applied in studies of Political Geography. In general terms it is defined as the result of spatial relations of power (Sack, 1983; Raffestin, 1980; Lopes de Souza, 1995). Johnston and others (2000: 824) define it, mentioning that broadly “...territory refers to the bounded social space occupied and use by different social groups as a consequence of following strategies of territoriality”.

Cox (1991: 5) sustains that during the 80’s there was a concern in social theory about Human Geography. In this theoretical “movement” the word territory has been appropriated, bringing the possibility to be “redefined and redeployed”. According to the author, there are two aspects that are prominent in this new use of the concept, but still they take another meaning, the notions of power and of bounded spaces:

¹³ The authors adds that “...a model of “agriculture without agriculturists” tends to consolidate, strongly increasing the dependency of the producers -users of technological packages- and progressively clipping their capacity of autonomous decision on what and how to produce. At the same time, the economies of scale derived from the mechanization of agriculture and the methods of direct sowing induced a strong concentration of units of production that left a great amount of smallholders out of the economy” (Backwell and Stefanoni, 2003: 31-33).

“In the first place, and obviously, it does indeed have to do with ‘power’: but not necessarily ‘power’ in the sense of having to do with the state. Rather it is a matter of its chronic implication in social relations. This would include such obvious cases as those of class, gender and race” (ibidem).

The second aspect to which Cox (1991) refers has to do with the “idea of bounds or bounded spaces” in the redefinition of territory, referring to the geographical limits of a certain social relation in a broader sense and not only political-jurisdictional:

“...bounds as zones, of which the jurisdictional boundary is a limiting case. It clearly accords with the idea of the political as an essential moment of any social relation and so not necessarily limited to the state (...) To pose the issue of territorial bounds in this way is also to pose the question of what is being bounded: this is not mere territorial extent but some set of social relations which are, for some reason or another, localized. Combining this with the earlier-broader-definition of the political, territory emerges as an arena for conflicts: conflict between business and labour, for example, between different age groups, or between the genders” (ibidem: 5-6).

The author asserts that the concept of territory, as it is being used by social theorist nowadays, has to do with the idea of “bounded areas or arenas within which conflict occurs” (ibidem: 6). In line with these ideas, Sack (1983) defines territory when proposing a theory on human territoriality. The author mentions that territory is an area delimited by an individual or group to influence, affect, or control objects, people, and relationships. He adds as well that “geographic area can refer to either fixed or portable areas, and *x* does not have to be in the territory to assert control over it” (ibidem: 56).

Sack points out that human territoriality is “...the attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area” (ibidem: 55). Since territoriality is defined as a relationship and not an object, “territorial relationships are defined within a social context, albeit an extremely general one, of differential access to things and people”. In this case, “this definition cuts across perspectives and levels of analysis. It involves the perspectives of those controlled and those doing the controlling” (ibidem: 57).

The author mentions that the use of territoriality and its tendencies does not mean that it is either negative or positive and it can be described in a neutral way, he sustains that:

“This prevents territoriality from becoming the captive of any particular ethical theory or theory of power... It needs to be combined with or informed by descriptions of contexts or theories about power and influence” (ibidem: 58).

I consider that the concept of *territoriality* has the potential to help us to understand important practices and actions that can be observed in different actors in poor (and non poor) regions of Latin America and their local and non local connections of power. As Cox (1991: 6) mentions:

“In fighting it out, local organizations, local branches of the state, firms, etc., try to mobilize extra-local sources of power. Coalitions may be formed with others elsewhere. This poses the question of the articulation of social relations, localized within ‘territories’, with those elsewhere or with networks of social relations defined at much broader scales”.

Lopes de Souza (1995:78-79) asserts that once that territory is defined as relations of power, the central issue to understand the social dynamics is who and how dominates or influence on this space. The author sustains that there is a banal space, people interacting with a space firstly transforming the nature through work, and secondly creating value when modifying and re working that social space. Therefore, it can not be imaged that a space that has been object of valorisation might not be territorialized by someone. Such as

power is omnipresent in all social relation, territory is present in all social spatiality (prf. Lopes de Souza, 1995: 96).

From this perspective, how can we link this notion of territory to the idea of development? Lopes de Souza (1995) proposes to rethink and “territorialize” the concept of development. He mentions that in the same way that the concept of territory was captured by a certain kind of “state centrism” that was directly or indirectly legitimating the role of the State, the idea of development has been condemned from diverse schools of thoughts to “increase the capitalist Western civilization as a universal paradigm” (prf. Lopes de Souza, 1995: 99-100). Having this in mind, the concept of territory should be relevant when thinking about generation of processes of well-being:

“...the use and control of the territory, in the same way that a real redistribution of power, must be put in a level of great relevance, as well as the formulation of socio-spatial development strategies in a broad sense, not merely economic capitalistic; they should contribute to a more social justice and not be limited to claim for economic growth and technological modernization” (ibidem: 100-101).¹⁴

According to the author, the initial concern about development is a political question. This do not mean that it should be left aside the economical issue, but rather to approach the political one in first place, which concerns to the exercise of power and decision in a society, if what it is to encourage is a real transformation of the society towards a general sense of welfare. In this context, the idea of autonomy is the base to redefine development. This way it can be built an alternative conception of development where the territorial question, referring to greater levels of autonomy, acquires importance to reflect on the political and spatial matters of development.

Lopes de Souza considers that for a social transformation in line with this, it is necessary to outline projects, “horizons of actions and thoughts”. And therefore he remarks the importance of social mobilization and social movements, since those are the only one that can bring alterations and ruptures to the effective order.

“...the question about development (...) presents itself in small and huge challenges, everyday and in diverse scales. In every case, actors will be confronted with the need to defend a territory, as a way to express their willingness to keep a certain way of life, vital resources for surviving of a group, of an identity or liberty of action” (ibidem: 109).¹⁵

In this sense, Routledge (1996: 510) calls for a more radical comprehension of the political issue, in relation to exercise of power from “above and below” and the resistance to certain kind of domination and influence. This brings us back again to the notion of territoriality and its exercise. Friedman (1992: 133 quoted in Brohman, 1996: 235) suggests that alternative development strategies must stress territoriality for different reasons. The author considers the notions of territory and territoriality when thinking in a normative perspective of development:

“Territory is coincident with life space, and most people seek to exercise a degree of autonomous control over these spaces. Territoriality exists at all scales, from the smallest to the largest, and we are simultaneously citizen of several territorial communities at different scales...”

Though in general terms studies about territoriality focus on the different territorialities that diverse organizations may have, in particular the national or sub national states, here I propose to observe in a certain geographical area how different territorialities converge all

¹⁴ In Portuguese in the original. Translation of the author.

¹⁵ In Portuguese in the original. Translation of the author.

together and how influence and control over persons and things (material and symbolic) are performed in this territory. These networks of influences are not merely local but regional and global, as mentioned before.

The success to implement and realize different local or global “projects” affects the social construction of place and the everyday life of people (Pred, 1984). From this perspective, the concept of *place* shows also a potential to understand social dynamics and comprehending alternative ways of thinking on development. According to Lawson (2007: 56)

“...critical development geographers are theorising place and space relationally, recovering a ‘local that is constitutively global’ (...) and revealing how globalised processes operate through culturally constituted relations of gender, race and class, as well as localised forms of organising, resisting or accommodating broader forces. Particular places, and people positioned within complex geometries of power in those places, have contradictory relationships to neoliberal development policies...”

Routledge (1996) explains the important of the place in terms of sites of creation of alternative knowledge, where interplay between local and global practices take ‘place’ and may become “sites of contestation” to hegemonic or dominant projects¹⁶:

“A sensitivity to particular places of resistance implies the acknowledgment of the intentionality of historical subjects, the subjective nature of perceptions, imaginations and experiences in dynamic spatial contexts, and how spaces are transformed into places redolent with cultural meaning, memory, and identity” (Routledge, 1996: 519-520).

For this reason it is relevant to take into consideration the actions performed by those actors that control and those controlled concerning the acceptance or confrontation to that influence or territoriality (Sack, 1983). This leads us to reflect about the notion of *resistance*. Vander Zanden (1959: 312) affirms that “resistance implies behaviour on the part of some or all of the members of society, either passive or active, which is directly toward the rejection or circumvention of a social change”. According to Johnston and others (2000: 705) political resistance

“...places emphasis on the creativity, ingenuity and resilience of non dominant groups and individuals (...) The frame of politics was enlarged to include a myriad everyday symbolic and material practices that contest not only class exploitation but also gender, racial, sexual (and other) forms of domination and oppression.”

The authors affirm that “from a Foucauldian perspective, resistance is neither inside nor outside but present everywhere in the power network”. This is connected to the definition of power that Foucault presents upon which he develops a whole theoretical framework.¹⁷ Routledge (1996: 511) adds to these ideas that:

“In articulating the relationship between domination and resistance, Foucault (...) argues that every power relation implies a strategy of struggle in which the forces of domination and resistance do not lose their specific nature -each constitutes for the other a kind of

¹⁶ Pred (1984) article on the process of structuration of place defines “dominant projects”: “Within any given place certain institutional projects are dominant in terms of the demands they make upon the limited time resources of the resident population and the influence they therefore exert upon what is doable and knowable. Or, certain institutional projects are dominant in terms of the impact they have on the daily paths and life paths of specific people and, therefore, upon the details of individual consciousness development and socialization” (Pred, 1984: 282).

¹⁷ In next vignette I will present some definitions of power, but it is not the intention here to discuss about the different meaning that the concept may have.

permanent limit, a point of possible reversal. These forces coalesce power at particular sites, and these sites provide the locations where hegemonies are contested.”¹⁸

From this perspective, the author refers to *terrains of resistance* as a site of contestation where hegemonic or dominant discourses and practices are opposed by a counter-hegemonic force command by social mobilization. They carry out particular symbolic meanings, political discourses, cultural practices, social and economic relations and physical settings:

“A terrain of resistance refers to the sites of contestation and the multiplicity of relations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic powers and discourses, between forces and relations of domination, subjection, exploitation and resistance. It refers to the movement within and between these forces and relations -a movement of contradiction, multiplicity and heteronomy. More specifically, a terrain of resistance represents an interwoven web of specific symbolic meanings, communicative processes, political discourses, religious idioms, cultural practices, social networks, economic relations, physical settings, envisioned desires and hopes. These are endowed with varying degrees of strategic force, movement and meaning according to the particular spatial, cultural and historical contexts of a conflict” (Routledge, 1996: 516).

The authors sustains that terrains of resistance are made of practices, materials and knowledges of everyday life. They assemble in one way or another different beliefs, values, goals and meanings and combine a political praxis that includes macropolitics and micropolitics, with their own tactics, strategies and symbolic processes (prf. ibidem: 517). In this sense, the notion of collective actions and in special social mobilization recovers again importance.

Power and social movements

Through actions and practices (and their meanings and structures of organization) social relations are constructed and as such, they carry out denotations of “power”. My intention here is not to enter into a discussion about this complex topic, but to present some definitions that may allow understanding the difference in opportunities (and therefore results) by certain people (locally isolated communities, indigenous communities, women, young people) to impose their view of the world, their ideas about development, to realize “their” projects in a given place and to exercise certain territoriality in the territory. In particular, I am interested in those actions carried out in places as a response to external interventions in development and/or as strategies resulting from their own creation of opportunities and to pursuit their aspirations (Bebbington, 2003).

In this case, the definition about power that Foucault (1978) gave is accurate. According to him, “power is not based on itself and it does not occur from itself”. The author considers that mechanisms of power are present in all kind of relations (production, family, sexual) as an intrinsic part of them. Mechanisms of power are their cause and effect and are different in time and space. Routledge (1996: 511) includes that:

“Concerning relations of power, Foucault (...) argues that power is of a multiple and decentered character, constituting mobile, circulating systems of relations that are interwoven with other relations of production, kinship, family, sexuality, and so on, that extend beyond the limits of the state”

Jessop (2007: 35) mentions that “Foucault stressed three themes in his ‘nominalist’ analytics of power: it is immanent in all social relations, articulated with discourses as well

¹⁸ There are some interesting studies showing the linkages between resistance, social mobilization and development in different places from a critical perspective (Routledge, 1996, 1997 and 2000; Townsend and others, 2004; Nelson, 2003).

as institutions, and necessarily polyvalent because its impact and significance vary with how social relations, discourses and institutions are integrated into different strategies”.

From an operative point of view, Cumbers and others (2003: 328) mention that power has been conventionally defined as the ability to achieve certain ends, but

“...recent contributions have moved beyond this ‘power over’ perspective by emphasizing the importance of ‘power to’ in terms of the ability of certain groups and institutions to pursue particular interests, to get things done and to gain recognition or identity”.

I consider then that for understanding rural development and poverty in Latin America it is necessary to analyze social relations that could show us the manifestation and mechanisms of power in places, how they are developed, which the results are and what kind of “territory” they construct.

Connected with the above proposition, and with the idea of resistance, the notion of social mobilization (or social movement) gets significance. Vander Zanden (1959: 312) mentions same years ago that the literature about the topic was very much concern about the role of social movements to promote social transformation up to the point those mobilization concerning resistance to change were not conceived as social movements.¹⁹

From that time, a lot of studies have been made from different approaches.²⁰ Therefore, definitions abound. In general terms they are conceptually treated as agents or actors in a given social structure (local, regional, international). Routledge (1996: 514) sustains that “social movement agencies represent a multiplicity of voices, discourses and practices” and “...frequently pose political, cultural, discursive and economic alternatives to the state and state policies” (ibidem: 510). He adds later a notion about social movement that links them to the idea of development and resistance previously discussed:

“A social movement is a heterogeneous formation comprising myriad (and at times conflicting) interests and identities (of gender, race, class, sexuality, and so on) that constitute an analytical and political-cultural terrain of contestation in which the hegemonies of state, the development project, aspects of modernity (economic growth, progress) can be explored, defined and challenged” (Routledge, 1996: 511).

The author clearly conceptualized social movement as a “heterogeneous formation” which presents the feature to contest hegemonic or dominant policies or agendas of development and modernity. In this sense, they are creating and recreating some part of the “reality” by proposing different cultural, economical and political visions of social life that not necessary can be expressed through the political system (political parties and government). As Routledge (1996) mentions, in their everyday life and from their place social movements create networks, connections and possibilities to generate strategies against particular dominating power relations and articulate alternative futures:

“Contemporary movements are seen as engaged in the self production of their reality in multifaceted and complex ways-through their own organizing processes, through their interaction with their (cultural, economic, political and physical) environment, through multiple socio-cultural and political networks that circumvent the state (...) [the] sitting of social movements in relation to the practices of everyday life and the socio-political processes of the state is one of perpetual movement, negotiation, changing alliances and

¹⁹ The author affirms that “...‘social movements’ traditionally has been defined in a manner that would automatically exclude movements resisting social change. This has been the product of either explicitly or implicitly treating social movements as agencies seeking to bring about social change, often of a fundamental sort” Vander Zanden (1959: 312).

²⁰ The two main theoretical corpuses are those which analyze social movement as “resource mobilization” or focus in the “new social movements”.

affinities, cooptions and infiltrations, contingent upon particular spatio-temporal conditions. Within this perpetual movement, social movements are located within a contested web of power and knowledge relations” (Routledge, 1996: 510-511).

The author links the above with the idea of terrain of resistance, which allows understanding how the different visions of “development” as well-being is locally constructed and promoted (in general opposing the national government as the main promoter of the capitalism system in its territories and representing the hegemonic power):

“...social movements frequently embody popular practices that are specific to particular spatial and cultural contexts. They can often represent symbolic and informal networks submerged in the practices of everyday life within a community; they can embody different inner and social rhythms, alternative frames of meaning, and different ways of perceiving, naming and acting in the world (...). These different ways of becoming expand the notion of the political domain to include everyday practices and knowledges that are articulated as counterhegemonic positions. In the contested terrains of the development project it is precisely the affirmation of these local everyday practices in relation to the hegemonic practices of the state and private capital that has led to a myriad ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ (...). Social movement struggles are frequently over cultural, economic and political meanings, differences and identities that are place-specific, articulated in opposition to state-centred and defined meanings and values” (Routledge, 1996: 512).

In reference to Latin America, many studies have come out. The importance here is to take into account their role in a changing society as Nelson (2003: 53) suggests:

“Social movements are key actors shaping contemporary political and social change in Latin America, from antiauthoritarian movements in South America in the 1980s to the resurgence of indigenous organizing in the 1990s (...) Excitement about the role of social movements in democratic transitions, and in the emergence of new political discourses and identities in Latin America, has given way to a more critical exploration of their longer term impacts on society and politics in the region”.

Concluding reflections

In this paper I tried to expose the main premises of the Territorial Rural Development policies promoted in Latin America by international organization and some national governments. This territorial perspective of rural development clearly presents itself as normative and propositional. Its main objectives are to bring institutional and social transformation and development to the poorest regions of the continent.

The DTR is taking into its paradigm of intervention premises based on promoting economic competitiveness, increases in productivity through technological innovation and insertions in dynamic global markets. It could be said that from the perspective of the DTR the lack of development of many “territories” in Latin America is a result of their lack of engagement in the current process of globalization. The premises suppose that it is necessary to do so, therefore many territories should reconvert themselves in order to be part of the global logic. This would require transforming their values, norms and traditions, which explains the major concern in the “institutional transformation” promoted by the DTR.

Latin America is characterized by a very heterogeneous patchwork of cultures and cosmovisions, landscapes and livelihoods, many of them do not completely share the ideas and values promoted by the current kind of globalization that is taking place in the continent. As a result, there are many social manifestations that are showing contestation to these tendencies, in special when they are promoted in the name of “development” and

from an “economicist” conception of the world. In this case, the lack of engagement in the globalization may be fully intentional.²¹

The DTR proposal about defining different “territories” for intervention is reifying the territory as object of empirical enquire and with certain homogeneity. This way, the territory is regarded as an agent itself. The consideration of territories with identities fails to observe the conflicting social relations and the differences in power and ideology between groups and people. The DTR may obscure the fact that some elite groups are acting on behalf of a particular place. I consider that this perspective of development overlooks the importance of social relations when thinking about development and proposing measure of implementation. Its territorial approach treats regions and communities as undifferentiated spaces, tending to ignore possibilities for internal fragmentation along class, gender, ethnic, nationalities, etc.

This paradigm has given privilege to a “horizontal” vision of development (consensus of the totality of intervening actors at local level or in the territory) regardless of a “vertical” (sectorial, planning from the national government “down” to the municipality) at the same time putting in an equal level of importance the role of social actors in the planning of the development. The hierarchies to promote development blur. It is no longer the public sector that must plan for the long term and regulate the short terms interests of the companies or productive sector in general.

Although the national states are necessary actors for achieving macroeconomic stability, as some organisms point out in their territorial development policies, it would seem that they are not required for planning development and income distribution among poor territories or undeveloped sectors. Therefore, the role of the State as regulator of the social welfare and the national economy is left aside. In the play of actors that the international organisms propose, the importance of the national state to put the “rules of the game” becomes blurred. This can be related to a neoliberal version of development, where the actors must leave themselves out of poverty, counting with background conditions to achieve it (stability, decentralization, labour qualification, etc.) (Nardi, 2006).

Previously it was promoted a “sustainable” rural development; nowadays the discourse has changed to focus on a “territorial” rural development. Although within this last paradigm the subject on the sustainability (of natural resources, economic profits and political systems) has an outstanding consideration, it would seem that it has been put in a background. The *time* factor was replaced by the *space* aspect, rearranging itself the perspective of intervention.

The critical territorial approach that I tried to present in this paper stresses the need to focus on the actors and subjects and their mutual relations in the comprehension of territories as arenas of social conflicts, where many territorialities (power relations, influences and control) take place. And at the same time, territories are places and sites of contestation and resistance to internal and external forces that causes ruptures and changes that are not always welcome by the majority of the people.

Analyzes in different places, centred in social relations and their difference of power may help those concern with a critical development geography to comprehend the different visions about development that diverse kind of people have. To do so is to address the

²¹ In this context, I agree with Cumbers and others (2003: 338) when they mention that “...much institutionalist research tends to foreclose alternative economic development projects by focusing upon prescriptive supply-side policy solutions that largely accept the logic and dominance of neoliberal globalization”.

practices of social movements and collective actions. These practices and actions depict a vision of the world, a cosmovision that may be (or not) antagonist with hegemonic tendencies, but should be considered or at least “heard”.

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