


The concept of development in Brazilian and German Geography curricula

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The concept of development in Brazilian and German Geography curricula

Abstract

This paper analyzes content featured in Brazilian and German Geography curricula with the aim to explore how they handle the concept of development. The Brazilian sub-sample consisted of three curricula, namely one valid in the state of São Paulo and two across the nation. In contrast, the German sub-sample entailed three documents approved in the Federal State of Berlin. Given the federal education system in Germany, the validity of all curricula is restricted to the states. For this study, we considered two documents that regulated Geography in West Berlin and one document approved in the aftermath of German reunification. Our analysis first looked into each curriculum's overall framework condition, always setting an emphasis on the prevailing conceptions of Geography and development. The results uncovered synergies between academic and school Geography in the two countries, but also found a number of differences in the approach to the concept of development. For example, critical perspectives originating from academic Geography had a stronger impact on school Geography in Brazil, leading to the more evident presence of the concept of uneven and combined development in two of the three curricula. In the German case, the role that the concept of sustainable development has gained in recent decades stands out, with implications for Education for Sustainable Development.

Keywords: School geography. Curriculum. Development.

O conceito de desenvolvimento nos currículos de geografia: uma análise a partir do contexto brasileiro e do alemão

Resumo

O artigo analisa documentos curriculares elaborados no contexto brasileiro e no alemão, especialmente os conteúdos de geografia para a educação básica, e procura compreender como o conceito de desenvolvimento aparece em cada uma delas. No caso brasileiro, foram selecionados três documentos, sendo um de abrangência estadual (São Paulo) e dois de alcance nacional. No caso alemão, foram selecionados

três documentos do estado federal de Berlim, sendo dois implementados antes e um depois da reunificação alemã. Na análise, consideraram-se o contexto de elaboração de cada um deles, bem como as concepções de geografia e desenvolvimento predominantes. O estudo mostrou em cada contexto como se relacionam a geografia escolar e a acadêmica, indicando semelhanças e diferenças na abordagem do conceito de desenvolvimento. Entre os resultados, verificou-se maior influência das perspectivas críticas da geografia no caso brasileiro, o que resultou na presença mais evidente do conceito de desenvolvimento desigual e combinado em dois dos três currículos analisados. No caso alemão, destaca-se o papel que o conceito de desenvolvimento sustentável tem ganhado nas últimas décadas, com implicações na Educação para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável, o que contrasta com o verificado no caso brasileiro, no qual esse tema mal aparece.

Palavras-chave: Geografia escolar. Currículo. Desenvolvimento.

El concepto de desarrollo en los currículos de geografía: un análisis a partir de los contextos brasileño y alemán

Resumen

El artículo analiza documentos curriculares elaborados en los contextos brasileño y alemán, centrándose en contenidos de geografía para la educación básica y busca comprender cómo aparece el concepto de desarrollo en cada uno de ellos. En el caso brasileño, se seleccionaron tres documentos, uno de los cuales era de ámbito estatal (São Paulo) y dos de ámbito nacional. En el caso alemán, se seleccionaron tres documentos del estado federal de Berlín, dos de los cuales se implementaron antes y uno después de la reunificación alemana. En el análisis se buscó analizar el contexto en el que se creó cada uno de ellos, así como las concepciones predominantes sobre geografía y desarrollo. El estudio permitió comprender cómo, en ambos contextos, la geografía escolar y académica se relacionan, indicando similitudes y diferencias en el abordaje del concepto de desarrollo. Entre los resultados, hubo una mayor influencia de las perspectivas críticas de la geografía en el caso brasileño, lo que resultó en la presencia más evidente del concepto de desarrollo desigual y combinado en dos de los tres currículos analizados. En el caso alemán, se destaca el papel que ha ganado el concepto de desarrollo sostenible en las últimas décadas, con implicaciones para la Educación para el desarrollo sostenible, lo que contrasta con lo visto en el caso brasileño, donde este tema rara vez aparece.

Palabras clave: Geografía escolar. Plan de estudios. Desarrollo.

Introduction

Over the last five decades, the concept of *development*, in various theoretical readings, has had a significant impact on discourse in geography, both as a school subject, and as an academic discipline, across the globe. In the case of the school subject, curricula are the best artifacts that reflect such debates impacting basic education during the mentioned period of time.

This paper aims to analyze curricular documents from Brazil and Germany, with a special emphasis on how geographical content deals with the concept of development.

The Brazilian case study entails three curricular documents, one at state level (São Paulo) and two at federal level. The curricula were introduced at different times over the last four decades and, thus, reflect stages of Brazilian school geography with regards to the concept of development.

The German case study focuses on the Federal State of Berlin.¹ Berlin is an ideal case study for a number of reasons. First, it is the only federal state that joined, in the aftermath of German reunification, territories of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) with those of the former German Federal Republic (GFR). Second, resulting from the above, the newly established State of Berlin had to handle two very distinct traditions of teaching school Geography. Third, the city-state carried on with a more liberal and less prescriptive curriculum, as opposed to more traditional Southern states, such as Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. For the purposes of the study, we selected a total of three curricula, two of which were published before German reunification and one in the aftermath of 1990.

It seems important to stress that curricular analysis cannot grasp the complexity of school Geography, as it only covers normative prescriptions but fails to address realities of everyday classroom teaching. Nevertheless, despite all limitations, we find it important to explore how curricular documents handle dominant concepts in specific contexts. The analysis of the three Brazilian and 3 Berlin, curricular documents requires, on the one hand, the careful consideration of framework conditions leading their design and implementation, and, on the other hand, the prevailing concepts of the development in the respective geographies.

The Concept of Development in the Geography Curricula for the Brazilian Basic Education: The Cenp Curriculum

Developed by the Coordenadora de Estudos e Normas Pedagógicas (Cenp), Secretaria Estadual de Educação de São Paulo (widely known as 'Cenp proposal'), the curriculum is one of the two main documents entailing the core concepts shaping the theoretical-methodological revision of Brazilian geography leading to what has become widely known as Critical Geography. Its main framework is the lengthy re-democratization of Brazilian society following the long

¹ A historical perspective of school curricula in Germany requires a prior clarification of some general matters. Before reunification, both German states implemented a different educational system: that of the GDR was centralized and had a common curriculum, and that of the FRG became the responsibility of the states. Consequently, most studies on education issues in Germany tend to focus on one or more German federal entities, as a national-scale approach would require a comparative perspective. After reunification, the country expanded the FRG model to the entire national territory, leading to the consolidation of 16 educational systems, one in each federal state.

military dictatorship with profound impact on all aspects of social life, including the teaching and learning of Geography. One of the major forces, if not the most important, was the law number 5,692/1971 that dissolved Geography and History as independent school subject and recontextualized them within the new school subject of Social Studies. Concurrently, the law restricted History and Geography as distinct higher education study programs, inherently leading to a precarization of initial teacher education, and an overall image loss of traditional subject-based study programs with clear disciplinary identity. These changes marked the beginning of the relocation of Geography initial teacher training programs to private universities. Also, programs became shorter and offered much less content. In essence, the new programs entailed an understanding of Geography, based on memorization and description, primarily relying on textbooks across all educational levels.

In addition to the military government's political objective of dismantling the teaching of History and Geography, these two actions affected Geography's methodological clarity. The ambiguity of teaching Social Studies, which was still often replaced by the disciplines of Social and Political Organization in Brazil or Moral and Civic Education, brought about Geography's equivalation with patriotism. Basic education required students in Geography to locate the main Brazilian rivers, 'the richness of our nature', and natural landscapes. The relationship between society and nature and the contradictions that came from it were left out of this interpretation, as they were contrary to the boastful project that the teaching of Social Studies sought to build.

Critical Geography gained strength, on the one hand, due to the precariousness of Geography teaching in the aftermath of the Law 5,692/1971 and, on the other hand, the movement against the dictatorship in Brazil. It also impacted debates on school teaching and teacher training, eventually leading to the new curricular proposal of the Cenp. Starting with the 1980s, a range of bodies, among others, the Association of Brazilian Geographers, maintained an intensive debate live leading to an alternative curriculum. This process gained strength in different states. In São Paulo, a group of university professor and school teachers got engaged in preparing a new curriculum. The aim was to broaden the debate on the relationship between society and education mediated by schools and the basic education curriculum, which resulted in a curricular document far from a prescriptive perspective. Thus, Cenp's curriculum proposed topics, debates, and methodological discussion for school teachers to engage with Geography curriculum making at institutional level.

Curricular analysis easily delivers proof of the prevailing historical-dialectical materialist perspective in school Geography:

The concrete analysis of concrete situations is what allows understanding the organization/production of space in constant transformation. The adoption of the dialectical method allows the analysis of the production to be done in a critical way, that is, questioning the present and investigating its contradictions. It is, therefore, a critical process that produces and reproduces a living science, because science that does not renew itself, does not transform, is dead science, is dogma (São Paulo [Estado], 1988, p. 17).

The proposed Geography curriculum views space as a result of social production and, therefore, a means, condition, and product of the social relations, discussions on regional inequalities, globalization of capital, the relationship between local and global, the impact of the capitalist mode of production on the natural processes and transformation of nature. Against this background, the dominant conception of development is directly linked to a historical-dialectical materialist Geography. Thereby, the focus is on the concept of uneven and combined development, which, according to the document, contributes to explain, among others, the inequality between countries, regions, or cities:

Produced by unequal societies, spaces, also unequal, assume their own characteristics that, in turn, are diverse, combining into a unit – the social whole. Thus, for example, the countryside and the city, composing different spaces, are internally organized, but maintain a contradictory and unequal complementary relationship. In this way, countryside and city form a unit, translating a social formation in different ways. This involves multiple determinations within it, constituting mechanisms that sustain it. At the same time, it elaborates other mechanisms that lead to the overcoming of this concrete social reality (São Paulo [Estado], 1988, p. 19).

The above quotation emphasizes the importance of the concept of uneven and combined development to understand geographic contents, such as the relationship between the countryside and cities. Other parts of the curriculum entail a similar conception in the analysis of the industrialization process, whether at a national scale or defined based on the relationship between countries, as well as in the discussion on Brazilian regionalization. The same goes for understanding the relations of development and underdevelopment, defined in the curriculum as an expression of inequalities, on multiple scales, resulting from capitalist production.

It should be noted, however, that the Cenp document only mentions the hegemonic Western concepts of development. On the contrary, alternative logics of production and socio-spatial organization appear as residues/delays to be incorporated into capitalist development:

In this sense, it is necessary to consider that there are still some areas incorporated into the current socio-political-economic systems in different countries of the world. They are societies with an autarkic economy, still based on self-subsistence activities, handicrafts, agriculture and pastoralism, in which production relations take place under other molds, with a less complex structure and less advanced techniques. Thus, even today the people inhabit the arctic region (the Eskimos of North America), the indigenous peoples South America, the Pygmies Central Africa, the Bushmen South Africa, the aborigines Australia, the Papuans New Guinea, the mountain peoples Central Asia, etc. (São Paulo [Estado], 1988, p. 99).

In this reading, the Cenp curriculum is directly linked to the process of theoretical-methodological renewal that shaped Brazilian Geography from the end of the 1970s. This process also impacted the genesis of the curricular document, fostering more participatory formats engaging school teachers and university faculty in discussions on the guiding concepts of the document that remained directly linked to the methodical perspectives of historical-dialectical materialism.

The Concept of Development in Brazilian Basic Education Geography Curricula: the National Curricular Parameters

From the 1990s onwards, as a result of geopolitical and geoeconomic changes that mark Latin American territorial dynamics, a set of liberalizing actions came to dominate public policies in Brazil, with explicit effects on educational policies. Adopting the principles of the 1989 Washington Consensus and the 1991 UN Conference on Education for All, the Brazilian governments that succeeded the military dictatorship began to apply educational policies focused on what was conventionally called New Public Management. According to Oliveira (2015, p. 631), among the principles of New Public Management, the following stand out:

[...] the dissociation of the functions of execution and control; the fragmentation of bureaucracies and their openness to users' demands and requirements; the competition of public actors with the private sector and service outsourcing; strengthening the responsibilities and autonomy of the public action execution levels; management by results and hiring (the so-called management contracts) based on achieving objectives and performance assessment; the normalization, via standardization, of professional practices based on evidence and on exemplary experiments

In educational policies, these principles materialize both in evaluation instruments applied on a large scale and in a competencies-based, standardized curriculum. The National Curriculum Parameters (NCP) emerge under these framework conditions. As the name already indicates, unlike Cenp's proposal, the NCP claim nation-wide relevance. Nonetheless, they remain indicative of how the different teaching networks and school units should organize their curricula and their educational practices.

NCPs also differ from Cenp in their genesis. In the case of the NCP, the Ministry of Education (MEC) invited specialists of various disciplinary fields to prepare the curriculum documents for each of the areas. The public debate only used the final version prepared by experts. However, the MEC did not undertake an intense process of seeking the involvement of education entities and subjects in the discussion of the proposal.

The result was a more prescriptive curriculum, indicating skills and abilities to be developed in the different stages of basic education. However, as already mentioned, the document never reached mandatory status and thus an implementation requirement in every Brazilian school. The PCN thus allowed teachers and schools to shape the curriculum along their practices and implemented curricula.

Regarding Geography, the PCN adopted a critical position on the methodical conception of historical-dialectical materialism typical for both the academic discipline and the school subject.. The criticism primarily focusses on materialism's emphasis on the economic reading of reality, which, according to the PCN, limits the possibilities that Geography could present to students.

Thus, the PCN emphasize the importance of the imaginary in teaching geography and in the representation of space, in a clear allusion to the phenomenological perspectives of humanist geography gaining strength in Brazil:

More plural explanations are sought, which promote the intersection of Geography with other fields of knowledge, such as Anthropology, Sociology, Biology, Political Sciences. A Geography that is not only centered on the empirical description of landscapes, nor exclusively guided by the political and economic explanation of the world; that works both the socio-cultural relations of the landscape and the physical and biological elements that are part of it, investigating the multiple interactions between them established in the constitution of places and territories. Overall, thriving for finding explanations in service of understanding (Brasil, 1998, p. 24).

The curriculum, very much like the Cenp document, maintains the uneven geographical development as its core understanding of development. It seems crucial to understand the role of geographical scale for each phenomenon, in particular regarding the relationship between the local and the global in the context of uneven geographical development:

The local and the global constitute an inseparable common entity. Depending on the need and relevance that one wants to give to some specificities of a topic, the length of time spent studying one of the two scales will depend on the teacher's field of interest defined by his/her program (Brasil, 1998, p. 31).

In addition, the PCN also allows other development logics than the hegemonic Western models. Recurring to perspectives of a Humanist Geography, the document emphasizes the need to conceive space also in terms of social and environmental differences:

The study of Geography allows students to develop habits and build meaningful values for life in society. The selected contents must allow the full development of each individual's role in the identity construction at their place of residence and, in a broader sense, with the Brazilian nation and even with the world, valuing the socio-environmental aspects that characterize its cultural and environmental heritage. They must also allow for the development of awareness that the national territory is made up of multiple and varied cultures, peoples and ethnic groups, heterogeneous in their perceptions and relationships with space, developing attitudes of respect for the sociocultural differences that mark Brazilian society (Brazil , 1998, p. 35).

Despite being an emerging concept in the Brazilian geopolitical context as a result of ECO 92, sustainable development only plays a marginal role in PCN's Geography section. The concept is only named once, linked to the debate on international relations and Brazil's role in the global environmental debate. Once again, the development concept falls back on uneven geographical development, seeking to understand the geopolitical intentions that mark its emergence and the need to deepen the understanding of the environmental and social impacts of the capitalist mode of production at different scales:

For the teacher, working with this issue involves many possibilities. However, dealing with the environmental issue from a political point of view is a complex task. However, through case studies, the teacher can introduce and historicize the process in the Brazilian and global context. For example, when studying the destruction in a more accentuated way of the places where predatory economic activities were found, one can introduce how the environmental protection movements were articulated; how they advanced in questioning the development model of governments and countries. The study of deforestation, whether in the Amazon or in the Atlantic Forest, offers ample possibilities for understanding the action of different stakeholders active in tropical forests (Brasil, 1998, p. 122).

Thus, PCN and Cenp entail the same understanding of development based on the discussion of uneven and combined development and its unfolding as geographically uneven development. At the same time, they put less emphasis on economic contradictions emerging from the capitalist dynamics, in particular the vanishing debate on the role of the class struggle in the unequal production/appropriation of space. Such processes may originate in the curriculum authors' methodological choices targeting the emerging Brazilian phenomenological/humanist perspective.

The Concept of Development in Brazilian Basic Education Geography Curricula: the Basic National Common Curriculum

The context of elaboration of the Basic National Common Curriculum (BNCC) is similar to that of the PCN. Conceived as an ongoing process of educational policy revision, the New Public Management relied on large-scale assessment, standardized curricula, and more direct control of teaching practices. The curricular revision commenced under the government of Dilma Rousseff (2010-2016) of the Workers' Party (PT), and concluded under Michel Temer of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB). The process only offered limited possibilities for democratic participation but led to criticism by various stakeholders representing the school subjects.

Both the PCN and the BNCC are normative documents following a paradigm based on competencies, abilities, and different areas of knowledge. However, unlike the PCN, the BNCC is mandatory, which means that the various education networks and school units must use it as the mandatory framework for their teaching. Naturally, BNCC is organized in a way to set such framework references, namely entailing lists of skills and abilities in each area of knowledge by year to be followed by teachers.

Another similarity to PCN lies in its genesis: specialists from each of the areas were invited by the MEC to develop the core document which later was shared with the other subjects of education; however, their participation in the ground-work was not required. With the political-legal coup suffered by Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and Michel Temer's coming to power, the teams that drafted the curriculum were replaced. Consequently, BNCC's development became even less democratic, which has been, until today, the target of wide criticism among professors and their representative entities (Giroto, 2017).

BNCC's Geography curriculum differs significantly from the two previously described curricular documents. While both the PCN and the Cenp positioned the teaching of geography within the broad field of geographic epistemology, the BNCC leaves the history of geographical thought unconsidered.

In general, BNCC entails a vision of Geography based in geographic reasoning, understood as the student's ability to apply principles, such as analogy, location, situation, and distribution, among others, to understand reality. In addition, the document indicates six geographical key concepts (space, place, region, territory, nature, and landscape); however, it refrains from systematically discussing them. Also, a phenomenological reading of Geography guides the curriculum, as manifested in the emphasis on understanding the individual scale and of issues related to class, race, or gender.

Concerning the concept of development, two elements stand out. On the one hand, the curriculum abandons the concept of uneven and combined development and moves on to the diversity of development opening up to understanding the uniqueness of places to the detriment of a multiscale and articulated analysis. Thus, unlike Cenp and PCN, the BNCC defines spaces primary based on their singularities instead of their multifaceted production frameworks.

The concept of sustainable development is missing from the Geography curriculum. In addition, unlike the PCN requirements, the debate on the global environmental dynamics linked to its geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions loses importance. While the PCN required for the debate on development and the environment a broad discussion of the global geopolitical dynamics and the responsibilities of different entities and governments, the BNCC places the responsibility on the individuals. Thus, a limited vision of citizenship emerges:

In this way, the study of Geography constitutes a search for the place of each individual in the world, valuing their individuality and, at the same time, placing them in a broader category of social subject: that of an active, democratic and supportive citizen. Ultimately, citizens are products of societies located in a given time and space, but also producers of these same societies, with their culture and norms (Brasil, 2018, p. 364).

The emphasis on the individual as reflected in the curriculum (development of skills, competences, etc.) may, in some ways, indicate the BNCC's implicit step towards shaping neoliberal subjectivity, as discussed, among others, by Dardot and Laval (2014).

However, presenting alternative forms of socio-spatial organization and their forms of development, such as those carried out by traditional communities, unites the BNCC with the PCN:

It is imperative that students identify the presence and social diversity of indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, quilombola, gypsy, and other peoples and traditional communities in order to understand their sociocultural characteristics and territorialities. [...] Due to the study of the role of Europe in economic and political dynamics, it is necessary to approach the worldview from the point of view of the West, especially of European countries, from maritime and commercial expansion, consolidating the Colonial System in different regions of the world. It is equally important to address other points of view, whether that of Asian countries in their relationship with the West, or that of the colonized territories, with emphasis on the economic and cultural role of China, Japan, India, and the Middle East (Brasil, 2018, p. 368/384).

Overall, the way the three curricula present the concept of development reflects its epistemological roots. Looking back at the history modern Geography's institutionalization in Brazil, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the development concept played an important epistemological role from the beginning, transforming itself according to theoretical-methodological changes in the field.

At the beginning of Brazilian academic Geography's institutionalization stood the introduction of the Geography program at the University of São Paulo in 1934. Until the end of the 1970s, a conception of development directly linked to the Vidalian school prevailed. Under the influence of the theoretical-methodological renewal of Brazilian Geography, which deepened the dialogue with the methodical perspectives of historical-dialectical materialism, new conceptions of development gained prominence. One of them is the uneven and combined development, which starts to contribute with the analysis of the dynamics of the Brazilian territory considering its insertion in the process of reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. As we saw in the analysis of curriculum documents, this conception has a methodical centrality in the school geography that is produced based on other fundamental concepts of geographic epistemology, such as geographically uneven development.

Starting with the 1990s, driven by the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (ECO-92) held in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the idea of sustainable development begins to gain strength in different fields of knowledge, especially in Biology and Ecology. However, despite its political strength thanks to the wide dissemination made by international organizations (in particular the UN), this conception has always been intensively met with criticism by the Brazilian geographic community, including for its epistemological limitations to understand reality. One of the main points of criticisms is the limited reconcilability of sustainable development with capitalist production. This may be one of the explanations for the fact that the concept, as we have seen, rarely appears in curricular proposals, even in the most recent ones.

In recent years, geographical research in Brazil has brought forward other development concepts based on decolonial perspectives. In this context, conceptions linked to several Brazilian socio-territorial movements, especially the indigenous and Black movements, problematize the predominance of the Western conception of development and its effects in silencing other space-time logics of social organization/production. Even in a residual form, it is possible to find some effects of this “decolonial turn” in Brazilian geography in school curricula, for example, in the recognition of other socio-spatial logics, such as those produced by traditional communities. Both the PCN and the BNCC implicitly show students alternative readings of development reaching beyond the prevailing Western discourse.

The Concept of Development in German Geography Curricula

In West Berlin, the curricular reform of the late 1970s led to the introduction of the 1980 Geography curriculum for secondary education (Senator für Schulwesen, 1980). In the spirit of the *thematic approach*, the curriculum emphasized General Geography, reducing regional aspects to topographic components only serving the purposes of spatial orientation. Thereby, *Daseinsgrundfunktionen* constituted the overarching framework. From an educational perspective, educational *objectives* and *exemplarity* shaped the curricular architecture, stressing that “[t]he structure of the curriculum does not follow the systematics of the subject [Geography as an academic discipline] but pedagogical and educational-psychological criteria” (Senator für Schulwesen, 1980, p. 6).

The 1980 Berlin curriculum constitutes a late example of the *thematic approach* adopted in the aftermath of the 1969 German Geographical Congress of Kiel that led to the abandonment of the traditional Hettnerian regional approach of *Länderkunde*. Instead of analyzing every country in part, based on a strict raster (i.e., position, relief, climate, hydrography, soils, flora and fauna, population, settlements, and economic activities), the school subject turned to thematic units primarily resting on geographical sub-disciplines. Nevertheless, the dominance of the Munich school of Social Geography becomes evident by stressing the *Daseinsgrundfunktionen*—a set of basic needs of each human being, including living arrangements, work, recreation, education, mobility, community, and basic services (cf. Haversath, 2020).

In contrast to previous documents, the 1980 Geography curriculum prioritizes the educational objectives and, thus, both social relevance and contribution of the school subject to every individual's education over the idea of passing on accurate and deep geographical knowledge following the internal logic of the academic discipline of Geography. In doing so, the curriculum incorporates the grand educational movements of the second half of the twentieth-century, namely the introduction on educational objectives (*Lernzielorientierung*) and the principle of exemplarity (cf. xxxx). The former movement, mainly marking the 1970s, added *objectives* to educational processes, often distinguishing between cognitive (content), instrumental (methods), social, and emotional aims. In consequence, lesson planning took on a more detailed and aim-oriented shape. The principle of *exemplarity*, as an additional layer, required the careful selection of the best example for a given content. In geographical terms, instead of teaching all volcanoes of the Earth (along the countries of each continent, based on their location), teachers were required to pick the best example of a volcano as an archetype to analyze its structure and dynamics. Equipped with this knowledge, students were expected to transfer their knowledge to any other volcanic formation, regardless of its geographical position.

Development in the 1980 West Berlin Geography curriculum covers economic and social aspects within the Cold War framework. Consequently, the curriculum divides the world into three parts and positions developing countries (*Entwicklungsländer*) into the category of the Third World (*Dritte Welt*).

Following this mindset, the curriculum places dependency and modernization theories at the heart of the content when addressing developmental differences:

[Students should] explore, based on specific examples, typical social and economic problems of less developed countries along with their causes (e.g., natural environment, post-colonial structures, population dynamics, different formats of agricultural production, social structure, social systems, industrialization and employment, structural change, economic dependency). Students should realize that beyond generalizable features of developing countries, each developing country faces specific factors and constellations of non-generalizable problems that, generally, cannot be solved in the short-term.

India and China are seen as examples of how the problem of population growth can more or less be solved in different ways (Senator für Schulwesen, 1980, p. 14).

Of particular interest are measure of development aid:

A global orientation on developing countries, the population growth, and status and measures to improve the nutrition of the global population should be given. Thereby, different ways of development aid including their positive and negative effects on the developing countries should be considered. Content of the sixth and seventh grade already touched upon the characteristics and structures of agriculture in developed countries (Europe). This previous knowledge is to be activated. Should be students also be addressed beyond the cognitive by means of personal engagement, during class, a development-aid simulation game ca also be played (Senator für Schulwesen, 1980, p. 16).

In addition, the curriculum also prescribes mandatory geographical terminology. Relevant for development matters are, among others, Third World, decolonization, development aid, developing country, development politics, colonialism, underdevelopment, and agrarian revolution.

The curricular content and the educational objectives connected to it reflect the dominant discourse in German Human Geography of the late twentieth century. Both the Berlin (Scholz, 2004) and the Tübingen school of developing countries (Neuburger; Heinrich, 2005; Kohlhepp, 2021; Coy; Huber; Töpfer, 2022) had a major impact on how development as a concept was defined. From an epistemological perspective, geographical research on development tended to embrace a more integrative perspective that aimed for an integration of physical- and human-geographical perspectives.

On the pedagogical side, the curriculum embraces problem-based learning by requiring students to uncover challenges of different types and actively seek out solutions by applying their (newly acquired) geographical knowledge. Simulation games traditionally offered the methodological framework to explore the cost, effects, and durability of different scenarios when applied to the specific case of a developing country. In doing so, the school subject perpetuated both the main development theories and a strongly positivist view of the world that favored quantitative approaches and models. Geography indeed suggested that societies obey general rules as physical systems do and adjusting the necessary variables will inevitably lead to measurable success.

Half a decade later, starting with the school year 1984/85, West Berlin received a new interim Geography curriculum. Its final version was implemented in the fall of 1987 (SSBS, 1987). Concerning the organization of geographical content, the revised curriculum embraced the *regional-thematic approach*, still continuing to rely on the guiding concept of *Daseinsgrundfunktionen*. Educational *objectives* and the principle of *exemplarity* remained unchanged, cementing the educational framework already established in 1980.

From a geographical perspective, the core innovation of the 1987 curriculum lies in the introduction of the *regional-thematic approach*. As a reaction to the events of the 1969 German Congress of Geography in Kiel, Geography as a school subject abandoned its regional tradition consisting of studying every country of the world following the Hettnerian raster. As showcased by the 1980 curriculum, geographers and Geography teachers in charge of curricular development opted for a marginalization on any regional aspect reducing it to a minimum of required topographical knowledge. Nevertheless, teaching Geography without giving any

basic regional orientation and failing to equip students with region-based knowledge was yet another extreme and equally harmful as the traditional regional approach was. Therefore, the 1987 curriculum introduced the regional-thematic approach that connected certain topics to specific regions. In doing so, it embraced, even to a stronger extent, the principle of exemplarity as chosen regions were required to be the best examples of the content to be discussed. For example, Amazonia served as the best example to learn about rainforests.

While connecting topics and regions, the curriculum embraced the concept of cultural spaces (*Kulturerdteile, Kulturräume*). Originally coined by Newig (1998), the concept of cultural spaces described characteristic features of certain regions, based on their historical development, following an objective and quantitative-based perspective of modelling in Human Geography. City models, such as the North-American, the Latin-American, the Socialist, or the Islamic City (cf. Bagoly-Simó, 2013b) are great examples of the mindset underlying cultural spaces. In international terms, the approach displays several similarities with Huntington's (1996) global order described in the Clash of Civilizations.

Another significant change implemented in 1987 was the establishment of direct links between objectives, content, and concepts. Such links supported teachers during planning activities at both unit and lesson level. In general, the 1987 curriculum chose to use of softer tone and opted, in several cases, for recommendations instead of prescriptions. In doing so, it increased teacher agency in two significant ways.

The concept of *development* remains strongly tied to the economy. The introduction of the regional-thematic approach further aggravates the clustering of countries according to their degree of development. Overall, the curriculum strongly enforces the ties between natural resources at economic development at national scale. Human resources are missing and, when addressed (e.g., demographic explosion), population matters are often represented as challenges (i.e., employability, lack of jobs, challenges for the economy). Nevertheless, when discussing Europe, the curriculum prescribes integrative perspectives by requiring teacher to explore possibilities of collaboration at a scale that surpasses the national (i.e., European community).

Despite a clear division of the world, the curriculum prefers to mention developing countries (*Entwicklungsländer*) instead of the Third World (*Dritte Welt*). Overall, development is the key to success—defined in terms of economic prosperity.

When discussing underdevelopment, the curriculum also adds particularities at the continental scale. For example, one of the objectives when learning about Africa is: [Students should] recognize how a country can overcome the dependency from a former colonial power (SSBS, 1987, p. 5).

Content to be taught is, among others, “from a colony to a developing country: agriculture, mineral resources, industry, transport infrastructure development (e.g., Algeria, Ghana)” (SSBS, 1987, p. 5), some of the recommended terminology covers mother country/colony and decolonization.

Using the concepts of demographic explosion, self-sufficiency, and global market, students should also learn about “physical-geographical and economic factors as causes for problems in developing countries” (SSBS, 1987, p. 5).

Also, using the Sahel Zone as a case study, the curriculum introduces development aid measures to achieve the following objective: “recognize the physical-geographical and economic factors as causes for problems in development-aid regions” (SSBS, 1987, p. 5).

Finally, the curriculum recommends to focus on “multilateral-bilateral help” while using concepts, such as development policy and the German Development Agency, to address the content “characteristics of a developing country: different ways toward economic development, development projects (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania)” when working towards the objective to “compare different ways towards economic development [and] being knowledgeable of different forms of development aid and the organizations providing them” (SSBS, 1987, p. 5).

The curriculum targets a different set of content and concepts when addressing development within the Asian context. For example, using India as an example, teachers are required to work towards the following aim: “being knowledgeable of the physical-geographical, religious, and social factors as causes for problems in India, understand religion and social structure as development obstacles” (SSBS, 1987, p. 6).

Industrial development and challenges in the agriculture are key content elements both in case of India and China. However, the educational aim connected to China is slightly different: “understand the physical-geographical and demographic factors as problems of China’s national development, being knowledgeable of revolution-induced economic and social change” (SSBS, 1987, p. 6).

The curriculum links matters of development to Latin America as well and prescribes the content “influences and consequences of the colonization (e.g., in Mexico, Peru)” to achieve the following objective: “being knowledgeable of the European occupation, understand physical-geographical and historical causes of regional variations in development” (SSBS, 1987, p. 6).

Overall, economic development remains tied to industrialization and, in the case of developing and underdeveloped countries, reforms in the primary sector.

The regional emphasis on Germany, in general, and Berlin, in particular, adds another layer to the development concept, namely the urban space. Berlin serves as an example to explore urban development and dynamics, both in the past and during the Cold War. The development concept, when applied to urban processes, covers both the urban fabric and, thus, urban materialities, as well as the social development of urban space in the West and the East of the divided city.

Concerning the pedagogical dimension, there are only minimal changes compared to the 1980 curriculum. Still, while the curriculum reinforces both educational *objectives*—even tying them much stronger to content and concepts—and the principle of *exemplarity*, problem-based approaches are more modest and less visible. A possible explanation could be seen in the overall increase of teacher agency and the more suggestive tone of the 1987 curriculum.

The Concept of Development in German Geography Curricula: Geography in Reunified Berlin

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought about the need to implement a common curriculum for the former West and East Berlin. The first Geography curriculum of the reunified Berlin (SSBS, 1992) can be seen as a revisited version of the 1987 West Berlin curriculum. Both the organization of the geographical content (*regional-thematic approach*) and the educational framework experienced some changes.

The revised curriculum carried on in the tradition of the *regional-thematic approach*; however, it abandoned the concept of *Daseinsgrundfunktionen*. Instead, the global economic integration, not yet named as globalization, is the guiding force of much of the content. Despite the centrality of economic factors, the curriculum presents a broader understanding of society also considering social, political, and, to a growing extent, ecological aspects. In doing so, the curriculum introduces, for the first time, the concept of sustainable development.

The main educational framework kept educational *objectives* as the guiding principle. However, they experienced a certain reconfiguration. In addition to the already established concretization of cognitive aims by means of content and recommended concepts, the 1992 curriculum entails geographical methods as a separate dimension, taking the instrumental objectives to a next level.

The concept of *development* experienced a considerable shift as well. Following the expansion of an economic understanding of development towards a broader conceptualization also including urban spaces and urban development, the 1992 curriculum adds sustainable development as a major third layer to the concept.

Changes in the first layer, namely economic development, concern an overall perspective along the lines of an economic globalization and global economic integration. Along these lines, the concept of economic development and its spatial dimension experience some alterations. Most importantly, the revisited curriculum prescribes the study of developing and newly industrializing countries one year later as its predecessor, arguing for a better access and deeper understanding of their structures and processes. Both educational objectives and content reflect a trend of stronger integration along the geographical scale. For example, while studying the Orient (i.e., MENA), students are required to

recognize mineral oil as a key factor for the development of developing countries (fossil fuel) and raw material for the developed countries (fossil fuel and raw material), as well as the global dynamics of the mineral oil economy as a component of global peace (SSBS, 1992, p. 8).

In addition, the curriculum prescribes the Maghreb countries of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco as content to explore the “particularities of newly industrializing countries [and their] export structure” (SSBS, 1992, S. 8). Some of the associated concepts are mother country and protectorate.

Some content tied to Sub-Saharan Africa also tackles economic development, with students required to study “forms and impact of colonial rulership and development aid”, using “colonial and post-colonial development” as examples (SSBS, 1992, S. 9) along with the Sahel-countries “taking over colonial economic structures to secure economic development” (SSBS, 1992, S. 9).

Almost all educational objectives connected to Asia address economic development: “recognize the importance of the population’s education level for purposes of development [...] understand China’s physical-geographical and demographic development factors [and] show the situation of an Asian newly industrialized country” (SSBS, 1992, p. 9).

The prescribed geographical terminology entails, among others, structural change, cheap labor, and prolonged workbench. The curriculum also suggest to explore how Asian economies are connected to the German, European, and Pacific economic spaces.

The study of Latin American development carries on in this mindset when focusing on their role within the global economy. The two main objectives are:

gain insight into the economic and political relationship of Latin-American countries with Europa and the United States within the framework of ecological and socio-economic problems [and] being knowledgeable of and being able to apply development criteria. Being knowledgeable of the interconnectedness between consumption behavior in the developed countries and the situation in the developing countries. Being insightful that treaties between developed and developing countries should foster continuous development (SSBS, 1992, p. 10).

Achieving latter objectives requires the close examination of the characteristics of developing countries, development aid, and commercial treaties and agreements. Useful concepts, according to the curriculum, are bilateral and multilateral development aid, sustainable development, transnational companies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Lomé Convention, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The curriculum proceeds to suggest, as useful approaches, addressing

“Where do the credits go to? Development ai guidelines of the Federal State of Berlin; selected examples of institutions, methods, and aims of German development aid; comparison: SE-Asian and Latin-American newly industrialized countries; consequences of the agricultural protectionism” (SSBS, 1992, 10)

Given the major political and, inevitably, economic and social impacts of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the curriculum stresses the overall link between the type of economy and the living standards of a certain country. Naturally, the kind of industry and the status of industrialization play an important role. However, when addressing Eastern Europe, the curriculum also prescribes that students should “recognize, based on natural and human factors, the connection between economy and ecology (development by means of command economy)” (SSBS, 1992, 6). In a similar vein, the exploration of North America also

takes on a more holistic and historical perspective requiring students to reflect on the historical-geographical development of the United States.

Urban development, the second layer of the development concept, continues in the tradition of the 1987 curriculum. Unsurprisingly, the social and political dimension play an even stronger role in the exploration of urban development in the reunified city. Dynamics of its social structure and urban fabric become equally important.

Finally, the third layer of development, namely sustainable development, appears both as mandatory content and as an overarching perspective on geographical content. The curriculum repeatedly requires students to explore a certain content in ecological, economic, and social perspective. In doing so, school Geography inherently implements the three traditional pillars of sustainable development (Bagoly-Simó, 2013a). It is worth mentioning that the very concept of sustainable development is tied to Latin American; it is the general perspective of a sustainable development that, by means of its three pillars, permeates the content of developed and other developing regions alike.

The overall shifts in the organization of geographical content, in general, and the broadened concept of development, in particular, reflect, on the one hand, the political upheaval of the late 1980s and early 1990s. On the other hand, the Geographies encoded into the 1992 curriculum mirror the main trends of German academic Geography slowly turning away to a more regional view of the three worlds and exploring matters, such as development, in a more thematic manner (i.e., within Economic, Population, or Urban Geography). While traces of Modernization and Dependency Theories still remain in the curriculum, it becomes clear that understanding a progressively globalizing world within the framework of sustainable development will become crucial for a school subject that aims to equip young individuals to “take on responsibility for humans and the conservation of life on Earth” (SSBS, 1992, 1).

Discussion

In historical terms, Brazilian and German Geography share quite a few common strands and are anything but free of mutual influences. The comparative and contrastive study of the curricular documents in this study emphasizes some of these historical ties and adds new layers that become interesting both concerning the epistemology of Geography as a school subject and concerning its ties to academic Geography.

First, concerning frameworks, the curricular documents carry the imprint of major changes in academic Geography. In the Brazilian case, the three curricula reflect the epistemological changes, either with the adoption of a materialist-historical dialectical perspective as a way of building a critical analysis during Brazilian dictatorship or with the phenomenological perspectives and humanists more focused on individual action, found in the most recent curriculum documents. In contrast, German Geography reinvented its focus by turning away from any research based on a regional approach and delving into a strong thematic perspective along geographical sub-disciplines. One of the few exceptions—ultimately leading to what currently may be considered integrative tendencies—is the study of developing countries (*Entwicklungsländer*) involving both physical and human-geographical components (cf. Scholz, 2004; Neuburger; Heinrich, 2005;

Kohlhepp, 2021; Coy; Huber; Töpfer, 2022). Despite common experiences of radical system changes in the political framework, German reunification had a much more modest impact (if at all) on Geography as the end of the military dictatorship had in Brazil.

Second, the results vividly showcase the epistemological independence of Geography as a school subject from Geography as an academic discipline. In Brazil, as mirrored in Cenp, the involvement of academic geographers greatly affected the implementation of curricular changes in schools, favoring the critical perspective of geographic concepts and content. This perspective was maintained in later curricula, although in a more residual form. Geographical knowledge in Berlin, in contrast, encoded less radical changes and displays an overall delay of innovation implementation. This, however, is a clear consequence of the fact that, unlike in Brazil, in Germany, the school subject played a major role in inducing change and ultimately replacing outdated perspectives as early as 1969.

Third, the very concept of development underwent quite different changes in the two case studies. If, at first, Western perspectives on development, rooted in a positivist tradition, shaped the curricula in both countries, we found that Brazilian curriculum documents were able to gradually implement a more humanistic turn, probably at the expense of physical-geographical components in the curricula, while the Berlin case study remained within the tradition of modernization and dependency theories. Instead of an epistemological turn, the Berlin curriculum opted for an expansion of the development concept first to content related to Urban Geography, and, later to matters of sustainable development. The latter constitutes an interesting attempt to redesign economic development within a broader ecological and social framework that is also mindful of the matters of global and intergenerational justice and equity. This leads to the unresolved issue of the colonial past.

Fourth, the concept of development considers the colonial past in quite unique ways. The German curricula opted to move away from concepts, such as developing countries (*Entwicklungsländer*) or the Third World (*Dritte Welt*) by shifting their discourse to globalization. Nevertheless, remains of the dependency and modernization discourse remain coded in economic and social aid. In contrast, the Brazilian case study showcases an emphasis on the idea of uneven and combined development in the first two curricula, with a recent change that established a dialogue, even incipient, with post- and decolonial perspectives of the development concept.

Fifth, one of the specific aspects in the German sample is that the development concept remains strongly tied to the concept of culture. In Germany, the 1980s strongly focused on a clear division of culturally unique spaces called *Kulturräume* (Newig, 1986). Observed through the lens of the colonial past and the post-colonial condition, much of the survival of modernization and dependency theories in school Geography remains tied to such divisions of the world. Nonetheless, the details of this debate became more explicit in textbooks, reason

Sixth, returning to common aspects, we highlight the effects of recent educational policies on changes in the form/content of curricula in both countries and their possible effects on the handling of the development concept. In recent years, both Brazil and Germany embarked on a journey towards a competencies-based education that ultimately shifts the emphasis from deep, subject-specific knowledge to more generic competencies and skills (Bagoly-Simó, 2023).

Under such circumstances, implementing, maintaining, and furthering a consistent perspective on development as a geographical key concept and topic will likely become more and more difficult. There is still a risk, as we have seen in the Brazilian case with the implementation of the High School reform, of a certain erosion of Geography as a school subject, whether in its time resources (weekly hours) or in terms of content.

Finally, one of the striking differences between the two case studies is their different contribution to Education for Sustainable Development. In the German case study, this concept is relevant due to its thematic and conceptual affinity to the concept of sustainable development. In the case of the Brazilian curricula, a critical view of the concept of sustainable development continues to prevail, emerging from the critical turn in Geography. This critical position may be one of the causes of the modest participation in debates on Education for Sustainable Development. In our perspective, Geography as a school subject can in fact contribute significantly to education for a more sustainable future. To this end, it is essential to enable students to acquire a wide range of content and concepts, based on which they can interpret the contemporary world by articulating different dimensions, subjects, and processes. Concepts, such as sustainability, development, and citizenship are essential in the formation of subjects today, especially considering the need for a critical and creative approach that goes beyond common sense.

Final Considerations

The findings presented in this study contribute to a better understanding of how Geography as a school subject can contribute to educating young individuals on the essential concept of development in two quite different settings. They also showcase the interplay between academic and school Geography with epistemological and didactic impact on educating the Brazilian and German youth on matters of development.

However, a range of limitations need to be mentioned. Curricular documents only stand for the normative framework, while textbooks and educational media stand for products that directly impact learning in the classroom and elsewhere. Therefore, textbook studies could help better comprehend the generic trends observed based on the curricular analysis. Also, participatory observation and interview studies with stakeholders involved in curricular development might shed light on the negotiation of geographical knowledge and the impact of academic Geography. Finally, considering other countries and a longer historical perspective would enrich the results and offer a more detailed explanation of the ways school Geography handles the development concept.

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Authors' contributions

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