


Comparative Dialogues on Development in Geography Education

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Comparative Dialogues on Development in Geography Education

This special issue presents some of the results of an academic cooperation between the University of São Paulo and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, through the USP-HU Berlin Strategic Partnership, Notice 987 of the USP Agency for National and International Academic Cooperation (Aucani) and its German counterpart. Following a successful competitive application, researchers from the Geography Department of both universities jointly explored the project 'The Scalarity of Development: Geographic Dialogues between São Paulo and Berlin'.

Academics at various career stages compared ways academic and school Geography in Brazil and Germany conceptualized development (Santos, 2015[1974]; Scholz, 2004). Thereby, different thematic groups addressed the development concept's selected facets. While one group analyzed the contents of Brazilian Economic Geography undergraduate courses, another cluster looked into Brazilian and German secondary school Geography curricula and explored how these normative documents handled development since the 1980s. A further area of interest was how primary and secondary school Geography textbooks presented selected economic and regional-geographical topics. More specifically, groups comparatively examined the representations of the African continent and of road transportation.

One may wonder why it seems necessary to reflect on development, when geographical explorations of the topic look back on a considerable tradition. Indeed, matters of development concerned a multitude of disciplines, such as Economics and the Social Sciences since their origins; however, the shifting political and social conflicts shaping the post-World-War-Two-order moved the concept of development at the heart of the new Geography of power. Concurrently, other facets exploring, for example, *progress* and *civilization*, lost their relevance for the overall discourse and became marginalized. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, studies on development and underdevelopment, understood as a historical and structural process rather than a natural, balanced, or self-regulated process, gained importance (Prado Jr., 1972; Bielschowsky, 2000). Research on the history of capitalism showed an uneven development, whether when comparing countries, their regions, or economic sectors.

Following the establishment of neoliberal economies in the 1990s and across the world, debates on development reemerged. Neoliberal economic decisions insistently opposed state interventionism in the economy, defended privatization, and systematically dismantled state-driven development policies—particularly in Latin America. However, the failure of neoliberal economic policies (cf. the 2008 financial crisis and resulting global geopolitical changes), the 'old' development agenda resurfaced and underwent both a clear reconceptualization and expansion. The result was a much broader concept of economic development particularly enriched by additional facets and perspectives. Currently, critical scholarship on development bundles multiple perspectives seeking to identify alternatives to dominant discourses, improve them, and, concurrently, discard obsolete elements.

The four articles included in this special issue reflect some of the results produced by the different groups of scholars at various stages of their respective academic careers. The first article—‘Economic Geography and Development: Different Approaches in Undergraduate Programs in Brazil’—by Mónica Arroyo, Fernanda Laize Silva de Lima, and Igor Venceslau, explores how presential Economic Geography courses at Brazilian public universities address the development concept. The study primarily focusses on theories, authors, and reference works. The second article, titled ‘The Concept of Development in Geography Curricula: An Analysis from the Brazilian and German Context’, joins Eduardo Giroto and Péter Bagoly-Simó in comparatively examining Brazilian and German secondary school Geography curricula to paint the historical trajectory of the development concept in formal education. The two remaining articles look into Geography textbooks and explore specific topics. ‘Africa in Geography Textbooks in São Paulo (Brazil) and Berlin (Germany)’ by Antonio Gomes de Jesus Neto, Verena Reinke, and Péter Bagoly-Simó, tackles the development concept by taking a more regional stance and exploring the representations of Africa in São Paulo and Berlin. Similarly, in ‘Representations of Transport in Latin American Geography Textbooks’, Bruno Candido dos Santos and Péter Bagoly-Simó compare how Geography and Social Studies textbooks from Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Costa Rica, and Brazil portray development within the topic of transportation.

The studies included in this special issue allow to draw a broad panorama pointing out characteristics and trends and, at the same time, suggest a series of questions or concerns for future research. Undoubtedly, this special issue covers relevant topics and matters that are at heart of geographers’ work across the fields, ranging from academia to school teachers. In our reading, this special issue is a first contribution to a diverse dialogue.

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