



## Construction of Territory Through Cyberspace: A Latin American View of Young People's Perception of Virtual Space

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| Article History                                                          | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| Received: 06 June 2023<br>Revised: 05 Sept 2023<br>Accepted: 01 Nov 2023 | <p>This article presents a balance about the chapter guidelines for teaching construction of the territory concept in schools today, which is part of the doctoral thesis "La construcción del territorio a través del ciberespacio: una mirada latinoamericana de la percepción de los jóvenes frente al espacio virtual. Presented at University of Valencia, Spain. This unit was focused on the construction of guidelines for learning the territory concept in geography, it is set from a comparative analysis between Spain, Colombia and England, in order to reflect the contributions of the Latin American, European and Anglo-Saxon countries, in line with the reconstitution of geographic knowledge at a global level to expand new approaches to the concept. This is in contrast to the policies in charge of regulating education in these countries. In this way, it is intended to make analytical and conceptual contributions of the territory from teachers' point of view in relation to the discussion of the territorial approach given by these institutional spaces to expand and develop a conceptual framework that contributes to generating significant transformations in the daily activity of educators. proposing a shift in the geography learning, which allows re-meaning the concept of territory in accordance with innovations in knowledge.</p> |
| CC License<br>CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0                                            | <b>Keywords:</b> Education, Territory, Teachability, Teachers, New Epistemologies, ICT, Social Construction Of The Territory, Geography                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

### 1. Introduction

According to Haesbaert (2014) "there is no way to define the individual, the group, the community, the society without inserting them in a certain geographical, territorial context", (p. 20), and even more so today when the concept of territory allows understanding the multiple processes that furrow the complex social world, being no longer only a reference that describes the physiographic conditions of a national state. In this sense, recent approaches to the concept of territory have constituted it as a concept that allows explaining the role of the environments in which communities and social space are inserted as a factor of development, at various scales: local, regional, national or supranational,

which modify the very concept of territory, allowing thinking about the various ways of social construction of the territory and its borders, in the context of government policies of the State and of the social agents in those territories. This discussion arises in the context of the modification of the knowledge of geography, notably driven by the existence of a new geographic reality resulting from the disciplinary renewal mainly in the geographic field and the re-organization of spaces in the world, given by the processes of globalization and the progressive slippage of geography fundamentally based on the natural sciences towards an epistemology re-centered on the social and human sciences.

But in spite of these transformations, according to Mendoza (2012), a series of problems remain unresolved in geography that blur its teaching and research, presenting a disciplinary and pedagogical crisis due to its gap with the emerging complex realities, the theoretical and methodological advances of academic work and the challenge of contributing to a more social and human formation. According to Morales, and Poveda (2022) from the technological point of view, the value of the analyzed scenario is taken advantage of, part of a social change that interacts in futuristic and future scenarios, in this way, a convulsed scenario can be observed, where the teaching of geography is highly questioned, due to the obsolescence and apathy as it perceives the accelerated environment, the lack of vision towards social change, the validity of the transmissive practice, the preservation of the conditions of indolence towards the status quo, turn the teaching of geography into an obligatory point of the national educational agenda to understand the dynamics of the territory in the new historical conditions, where dynamism and transformations demand the understanding of geographic spatiality, from the meeting of its temporal, spatial and social conditions, given its role in society.

Thus, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of the analysis of geography where it is necessary to overcome fragmentary and linear postures to understand the complex and changing situations of the territory, establishing solid links between theory and practice with the advancement of the achievements of the academic-scientific world that avoid inaccuracies and erroneous decisions, in addition to the widening of the gap between academic thought, teaching practice, scientific production and school contents. This fact has required transformations and revisions in the debates within the fields of knowledge production, forcing teachers to rethink the use of ideas and concepts of the disciplines in general and the concept of territory in particular from geography, which has nurtured the discussion around this concept considering the contributions and experiences of authors and teachers in various parts of the world. Under these assumptions, this article is organized in three sections. The first section presents the methodology used for the study. Here we show the context in which the research was developed and the different techniques and approaches used to approach the object of study of the work. Next, the discussion on the guidelines for approaching the construction of the teaching of the concept of territory in schools today is presented. And as a last point, a conclusion on the work presented will be presented.

## **2. Materials And Methods**

This article is framed within the qualitative approach, understood as a process of multiple inputs that is fed back with the experience and knowledge that is acquired from the situation. In this sense, the experiences of some young people in public and private education in the city of Villavicencio, Colombia, and the viewpoint of several Latin American, European and Anglo-Saxon teachers are collected to conjure up a theoretical proposal that allows understanding the new representations of the territory from the use of ICT and a series of guidelines that allow working on the teaching of the territory. To develop this proposal, an interview technique was used with thirty-two students and thirty-two professors from Europe, Latin America and England, using a semi-structured approach, conversational in nature, taking symbolic interactionism as a reference in order to generate a colloquial environment that would facilitate communication among those who interact. In principle, the semi-structured interview that was proposed had as categories of analysis, the concept of territory, the use of social networks considering their properties as construction of identity and alter ego, the establishment of social relationships, the quality of the responses of these and the connections with other members of the network.

It is because of the above, that subjects use the Web as an ecosystem to build avatars, with which they strengthen and create social links to share new experiences. At the same time, the potential for teaching the concept of territory can be identified. On the other hand, the link between the subjects and the virtual communities and their participation in these scenarios was studied, based on the creation, production and dissemination of contents. All this, with the purpose of analyzing the impact of these dynamics, in the virtual representations that the participants had about the idea of community and the quality of the links that are established. In addition, interviews were conducted with participants on the reliability and verisimilitude of the information disseminated on the network, in

order to discuss the meaning, use and credibility of the information circulating on the Web. At the same time, a discussion on the horizons that could strengthen the teachability of the territory in school was raised. In a context where fake news predominate and a series of images that favor certain groups of power are constructed; likewise, contested discourses on social inequalities, social gaps and new trends supported by the concerns of postmodernity were generated.

Finally, it was stated that both the concept of territory and cyberspace have generated the digital transformation in the way we work, educate ourselves, live and even relate to others, because it has transfigured the way we do business, therefore, many companies today use social networks to create an identity, sell and have a space in the memory and hearts of their customers. It was also discussed that the responsibility for the misuse of technologies does not correspond to innovation, i.e. television, telephone, Internet and social networks, but to the practices and uses we have with them. In this way, the applied instrument overcomes the formal exchange of questions and answers, allowing to capture and motivate the interlocutor, raising his level of interest and collaboration, recognizing his achievements, preventing falsification. In addition, this technique facilitates formalisms, exaggerations, stimulates memory, reduces confusion and helps the informant to direct his comments.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The elaboration of this proposal was based on the recognition of a series of difficulties detected in the interviews and surveys to teachers and in the reviews of the different national and foreign bibliographic sources consulted in the elaboration of the doctoral thesis regarding the recognition and teaching of the concept of territory, where a tendency to its fragmentation was found, and a scarce inclusion in the teaching processes in the classroom. Therefore, it is proposed below to point out a series of guidelines to facilitate the teachability of the concept of territory in the school with the intention of providing clues to think of possible itineraries, and not a correct model of content presentation. It is hoped that the proposed itinerary will not be confused with a new curricular prescription that indicates a unique and rigid way of sequencing contents, but that it can be seen as a flexible and open model that, once understood in its foundations, can be recreated and transformed by the teachers who require it according to their own needs. In this order of ideas, one of the greatest challenges of geography teaching lies in providing a knowledge that serves the construction of an active and committed citizenship with the spaces and communities in which it participates, constituting the knowledge of the territory in one of the key dimensions in the formation of the citizen, since it intervenes in the ways in which identities, commitments and responsibilities are elaborated and put into play in the different instances of participation in the construction of society.

For this purpose, teachers interested in teaching the concept of territory must have two articulated purposes: on the one hand, to understand territory as a basic concept, noting the organization of contemporary spaces and societies; and on the other hand, to provide didactic situations that allow building a significant knowledge about this concept. In this sense, it is necessary to propose the first guideline around a clarification of the concept of territory with others that, due to their affinity or proximity, may tend to be confused with the first one. Thus, due to the characteristics of this work, it is proposed for this exercise to understand the concept of territory as a particular and subjective space that refers to the fact of making sense of it, of marking it and appropriating an individual of a space, so that each place implies a set of possibilities, prescriptions and prohibitions whose content is both spatial and social. A view that contributes to leave aside a series of assumptions that underlie the conceptualization of the territory as a support, a stage, or a physical place, to consider it as a social space historically constructed through relationships, social practices and human activities, which are permeated by power, tradition and memory, from which identities, forms of appropriation of space and concurrence of forces are expressed, as stated by Montañez (2017) and Montañez and Delgado (2018). That lead to understand the territory as an appropriated social space, in which there are a series of powers exercised by different social actors inside and outside it, at macro and micro scale, delimiting, legitimizing and differentiating each space; promoting a certain degree of cohesion within it, and establishing relationships with neighboring territories through tense or friendly ties.

This approach contrasts with the concepts of territorialization and territoriality, the former being the process, becoming, happening, movement towards autonomy, dependence or interdependence, flowing towards deterritorialization and reterritorialization (encoding and decoding, establishment and leakage, destruction and reconstitution of new processes of sedimentation, towards new marks and planes of consistency). (Echeverría 2010) While the second is understood as the exercise of territoriality, i.e. the actions of expression and marking, establishment and consolidation, protection and defense, from multiple and diverse origins (sources) and dimensions that in their intervention and confluence give existence to the territory in multiple senses: imaginary, daily, organizational,

institutional, political, technical, economic, formal, aesthetic, spatial, etc. Thus, it can be observed that the dynamics of a territory is made up of a set of objective and subjective material and immaterial elements constructed by social organizations on the basis of collective and individual projections. These elements define the territory from the existence of a geographical space in which a subject or a social group exercises certain dominion, a power relationship, a quality of possessor or a power of appropriation, as stated by Montañez (2017), which in turn creates an exercise of sovereignty and the emergence of identity relationships with that space. For its part, the concept of geographic space from the approach proposed by Milton Santos (1997 cited by Montañez, 2017) is defined as: An inseparable set of objects and systems of actions. The systems of objects do not occur without the systems of actions and the latter do not occur without the former. Space is historically constructed (p. 20).

Santos (1997) adds that geographic space today is a system of increasingly artificial objects, caused by systems of actions equally imbued with artificiality, and increasingly tending towards ends foreign to the place and its inhabitants. A new system of nature is established which, thanks to the ecological movement, knows only a hint of its denaturalization. (p. 21). Given the above conceptual framework, the author of this text will understand geographic space as a set of spatial structures that relate to each other, on the earth's surface as an object of human action, thus assuming geographic space as a social construction, given as a material objectification of the meanings and human - environment relations that materialize in space. Another concept that is closely related to that of territory is that of place, since it is comprised of a series of common variables that define them beyond physical, material and objective spaces, to be configured by the intervention of human beings that turn them into a social, cultural, political and economic production, which is defined according to the interests and subjectivities of those who produce it. In this sense Marc Augé (2013) proposes the study of the concept of place considering it as identificatory, relational and historical; characterizing the first element by the identity links between individuals and the "place" they inhabit; where the experiences of personal lives are filling the identity of certain places in space with content and emotions.

The second characteristic of place is relational. Considering that the different elements that constitute the place relate to each other without the need to overlap. In a population, for example, the rules of conduct imposed on a child, or the child's behavior patterns in relation to space, are different from those of an adult, but they are related to each other and coexist. As a third element, place also carries an implicit historical root. Marc Augé (2013) proposes that: "the place is necessarily so, from the moment when, combining identity and relationship, it is defined by a minimum stability. For those who live in it can recognize there signs that will not be the object of knowledge. The anthropological place, for them, is historical, to the exact extent that it escapes history as a science". Thus, it can be recognized that the place is constituted as a construction from the human social relations, product of them and of the dialogue between men and the rest of the beings that compose it, producing these relations the identity of the subjects of the Place. In this way it can be observed that territory and place are social constructions that define the way in which human beings occupy space, represent it, signify it and use it, recognizing the space perceived, lived and felt by the members of a community in their daily lives.

### **Characteristics of the concept of territory**

As a second guideline for teaching territory, it is essential to take up the contributions of Montañez and Delgado (2018) to define the minimum characteristics that make up the concept of territory and that allow the understanding of the current structuring of sociospatial training according to the following considerations. All social relations take place in the territory and are expressed as territoriality. Territory is the scenario of social relations and not only the spatial framework that delimits the sovereign domain of a State. Territory is a space of power, management and domination by the State, individuals, groups and organizations, and local, national and multinational companies. Territory is a social construction and our knowledge of it implies knowledge of the process of its production. The spatial activity of the actors is differential and therefore their actual and potential capacity to create, recreate and appropriate territory is unequal. Different local, regional, national and global territorialities concur and overlap in the space, with different interests, perceptions, values and territorial attitudes, which generate relations of complementation, cooperation and conflict. The territory is not fixed, but mobile, mutable and unbalanced. The geosocial reality is changing and permanently requires new forms of territorial organization. The sense of belonging and identity, regional awareness, as well as the exercise of citizenship and citizen action, only acquire real existence from their expression of territoriality. In the same space, multiple territorialities and multiple loyalties are superimposed (p. 48).

In this way we find that this view contributes to the conceptualization of territory beyond a support, a stage, or a physical place, to consider it as a social space historically constructed through relationships, social practices and human activities, which are permeated by power, tradition and memory, from which identities, forms of appropriation of space and concurrence of forces are expressed. That lead to understand the territory as an appropriate social space, in which a series of powers are exercised by different social actors inside and outside it, at macro and micro scale, delimiting, legitimizing and differentiating each space; promoting a certain degree of cohesion within it, and establishing relationships with neighboring territories through tense or friendly ties. Hence, the concept of territory not only connotes the idea of something closed, representable on a map, but also a political sense of social relations that can be expressed as hegemonies or subordinations accepted, tolerated or supported by other social actors and that, on occasions, are a mechanism to regulate their own relations.

### **Multi-scalarity of the territory**

As a third guideline, it is considered that, for a long time, the teaching of territory constituted a knowledge closed on itself, which formed self-centered visions of its own social realities. Nowadays, in accordance with the disciplinary and didactic changes in the social sciences and in particular in geography, the understanding of the modes of organization of the territory is framed in broad spatial and temporal frameworks and multi-causal and multi-scale explanations where the study of local, regional, national and supranational spaces is contemplated, which are essential to be considered in the school management of basic and secondary education because they allow a more global and interdependent understanding of the territory. In this regard, Gurevich (2015) states that the complexity of the territory is explained by the fact that societies in global times are constituted and involve a multiplicity of elements and factors of different kinds, which may be of natural, social, political, economic, cultural, legal, technological, ethnic, religious origin, among others. In which "complex processes are multidisciplinary - as they encompass all the dimensions of social life and their multiple interrelationships -, multi-scale - as they involve a variety of temporal and spatial scales for their analysis and resolution - and multijurisdictional - as they require for their management and governance a broad set of actors, decisions, regulations and rules" (Gurevich, 2015, p. 34).

In this sense, it is understood that contemporary territory is framed by the emergence of a multi-scale and selective synthesis that interacts with pre-existing conditions in a continuous adjustment of temporary accommodations and rearrangements of the existing structure itself. Where each territory is framed in different processes that unfold and interfere from different scalar levels, in consonance with the interrelationships involved between globalization, regionalization and placeness that account for the increasing spatial and temporal mobility of people, objects and ideas, as posed by Manuel Castell (2017), Oliver Dolfus (2013), David Harvey (2014). Hence, geography today is posed as a key question to decipher the special networks and channels through which the social processes of different scalar scales interact. This challenge implies a selection and reading of the dominant socio-territorial processes at each level and an elaboration of models of inter-level articulation. In other words, to study how the interactions between territorial dominants operating at different scales are articulated. Considering that the relationships that exist between scales, sizes and positions of territories in space, make the appreciations of diversity and territorial dominants vary according to the scale. Thus, it is urgent to make a transition from the traditional study model based on links of geographic space and their respective connection indicators to different scalar dimensions (society/nature, traditional/modern, concentrated/dispersed, networks/hierarchy/regional/general, global/local), aiming at a better and fairer understanding of the diversity of territories. Territory from fragmentation, inequality, and difference.

As a fourth guideline, it is necessary to recognize the territory from fragmentation, inequality and difference, affirming that the world and the current territories are made of fragments, whose totality is not expressed in the sum of the parts that compose them, but in an articulating and at the same time disintegrating dynamic of these sets of zones and places (Gurevich, 2005). Many of these fragments of territories are closely linked to each other through material and immaterial networks that make them share the world in real time. Others, on the other hand, are found without any network, forming pockets of isolation, poverty, oblivion and marginalization, as expressed by Thomas Piketty (2014). Inequalities are growing in terms of life and work opportunities for people around the world. The gap between the distribution and the consumption of goods and services is progressively widening, depending on people's social status and cultural capital, whether as workers, consumers or citizens.

With regard to fragmentation, Santos (2010) recognizes the enveloping and practically unique line, in technical-operational terms, dominant at present, which accompanies it in a complementary way. A globalized and fragmented world at the same time. For the study of territories, this feature is of utmost importance, since it completely blurs the homogeneous and orderly paintings prescribed by systematic, continental, regional or national geographies. This allows me to unveil the current meaning of the use of the concept of territory, today given mainly under the market economy model, which seeks the growth of the material conditions of the territory, expressible in better infrastructure and better production conditions for greater productivity and territorial competitiveness. From this perspective, the territory is seen as a productive factor, with all that this entails (Castells, 2014). And especially the emergence of the concept of natural capital, under which nature and human beings, together with culture, and values are seen from a mercantile point of view and become capital, being now conceived the territory as one more resource to be exploited to obtain the greatest benefit at the lowest possible cost, leading this to the pauperization of the human condition.

In broader terms, territory is then considered as a social construct resulting from the interweaving of territorialities constructed by the agents in their process of appropriation of resources, and is considered a complex expression that combines the environment, the components and processes it contains: social groups, relations, conflicts; so it is not reduced to the complexity of the merely physical - natural, but to the nature - society articulation that acquires new contents in the context of globalization, since social relations overflow the borders of the community, of the nation, intertwining with other processes occurring in the world, "such as mass media, transportation systems, international trade, the advances of the scientific and technological revolution, among other things." (Souto, 2015, p. 67). In this sense, it can be said that the notions of time and space of past eras have been disrupted, but also evidenced the weakness of the cultural foundations on which the promises of a promising future that emerged in modernity were formed. In this way, territories become spaces with a great social tension, sharing the progressive sense of linear time, cyclical times and the experiences of simultaneous time, opening the territory to a range of directions, of options, of outlets for the social actions of human beings, which implies the very possibility of fragmentation or a new integration of this type of spaces.

In short, these guidelines seek to develop in the school context students with a critical-reflective thinking that transforms them into active citizens, who besides simply living in it, interpret it, understand it, detect its difficulties and think of possible solutions to the various spatial difficulties from the political, religious, cultural, ethical order, in such a way that allows them to re-signify their relationship with the territory by being subjects who have a deep knowledge of the environment in which they live, establishing a conscious and participatory relationship with the environment; Otherwise, they run the risk of alienation, marginalization and consumerist massification, without making use of their capacity for critical thinking. In this sense, we seek to build for society and the world a thinking, critical citizen, with his feet on the ground and his eyes on the horizon, always seeking to understand all the phenomena that occur in the reality of which he is an undeniable part. Assuming that critical thinking allows man to govern his world, and not just exist in it; it also allows him to be aware of the importance of his role in the development of society and its communities from a territorial framework.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In view of the most recent theoretical and methodological advances in geography, there is evidence of a crucial innovation in several of its fundamental concepts, among others, that of territory, so that its study must necessarily have an impact on social science studies, especially its teachability. The changes have had to do mainly with the internal discussions in geography, during the sixties and seventies, between three epistemological currents: positivism, phenomenology and Marxism, which coincided with the so-called cultural turn in the social sciences, where geography went from being a somewhat old-fashioned and descriptive discipline, based on the memorization of things, facts and accidents, to become "a discipline very concerned about issues such as power, culture and history and to contribute to the development of a critical social theory" (Ortega Valcárcel, "a discipline very concerned about issues such as power, culture and history and to contribute to the development of a critical social theory". (Ortega Valcárcel, 2012, p. 45) In this sense, the current use of the concept of territory has overflowed from the field of geography to other social science disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, social work, history and political science, which have reconceptualized it as a relational, multivariate and complex field, allowing the development of new methodologies for the production of knowledge about it in accordance with its new ontological status.

Now, in the case of geography, a series of discussions have been developed on what we can understand by territory and how this concept helps to enrich the understanding of spatial processes, so that its study is far from being a mere academic exercise and becomes a fact that transcends this sphere. It can even be considered a political act that marks a starting point for whoever establishes the analysis, since this concept is at the center of representations of the complexity that surrounds us, where it has traditionally been associated with a delimitation of physical space, when in reality it is a term that combines the natural physical environment and the ordered or humanized one, which includes the people who appropriate it. For the case of this work and with the balance made, it was possible to define territory as a particular and subjective concept that refers to the fact of giving meaning to it, of marking it and appropriating an individual of a space, so that each place implies a set of possibilities, prescriptions and prohibitions whose content is both spatial and social.

Projecting the territory beyond a series of assumptions that underlie its traditional conceptualization as a support, a stage, or a physical place, to consider it as a social space historically constructed through relationships, social practices and human activities, which are permeated by power, tradition and memory. From which identities are expressed, forms of appropriation of space and concurrence of forces on a mass, macro and micro scale, delimiting, legitimizing and differentiating each space that may be defining futuristic and future scenarios. Promoting a certain degree of cohesion within them, and establishing relations with neighboring territories through tense or friendly ties. In this way, it is established that societies shape territories and territories shape societies, "since they are a basic condition of human existence, promoting a certain degree of cohesion within them, establishing relationships with neighboring territories through tense or friendly ties and building identity in the respective actors" (Pulgarín & Quintero, 2010, p. 67). Therefore, within a large territory there may exist diverse powers such as gangs, guerrillas, peasant groups, indigenous groups, large landowners, urban tribes, street vendors, street dwellers, cattle ranchers, etc. and, consequently, borders may be created where they clash with each other.

Therefore, following Santos (2006), the concept of territory not only connotes the idea of something closed and representable on a map but also a political sense of social relations that can be expressed as hegemonies or subordinations accepted, tolerated or supported by other social actors and that, at times, are a mechanism to regulate their own relations. All the above raises the question that constitutes the great challenge at the current juncture of the crisis of global capitalism as to whether the scientific knowledge generated in academic circles serves for emancipation (Habermas, 1987), with a critical social sense (Harvey, 2016; Santos, 2012; Soja, 1997) or will it continue, as Echeverri (2010) criticizes, to be consecrated to a culture characterized by the domination of nature in the belief that it is unlimited and available as a resource for the infinite techno-scientific rationality of the human being.

Faced with this scenario, it is necessary to create new meanings to knowledge in order to deconstruct the prevailing rationality, expressing itself in renewed concepts such as territory, which from radical geography has been providing elements to critically interpret the current social debacle. In this sense, geography as a discipline in the field of social sciences, ceases to be an object and becomes a tool for action. Especially in the school field where the teacher is challenged to face the changes that occur inside and outside schools, in addition to taking up in his work the complex reforms of the education systems that are underway. As Palacios (2018) says, there is a need to train a teacher who masters the processes of reflection and learning, so the faculties of education should keep these demands in mind. How to train a reflective teacher? At what point in their training is the exercise of reflection considered? This responsibility should be combined with the teacher's own conscience, who should teach based on a reflective practice that takes the form of a spiral of action-reflection-action, offering the opportunity to develop the capacity to question knowledge, to make students look at themselves and question their thoughts and teachers their actions so that they are able to face the educational reality, to intervene in it with clear criteria and much professionalism, thus avoiding the risk of automation and the routine exercise of the teaching practice.

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