

Development? Thinking the future through a urban-natural perspective

Desenvolvimento? Pensando o futuro a partir de uma perspectiva urbano-natural

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Abstract

This article offers a theoretical discussion on urbanization, nature and development and some of the links and interdependencies that connect these concepts. The focus is on some of the underlying dynamics and issues of our current development project defined as capitalist industrialization. The article illustrates the role of cities for human development and then argues that the relationship between society and nature could be – and indeed already has been – thought from a different perspective. Finally, the article discusses the transition from “campesinato” (peasantry) to traditional communities as product of extensive urbanization, as form of resistance and as potential blueprint for an alternative development and, potentially, for the Lefebvrian urban-utopia.

Keywords

development theory; urbanization; human-nature relations; utopia.

JEL Code R11.

Resumo

Este artigo oferece uma discussão teórica sobre urbanização, natureza e desenvolvimento e algumas relações possíveis entre esses temas e conceitos. Discutimos algumas questões e dinâmicas subjacentes ao nosso projeto de desenvolvimento atual, definido como industrialização capitalista. O artigo ilustra o papel das cidades para o desenvolvimento humano e, em seguida, argumenta que a relação entre sociedade e natureza poderia ser - e de fato já foi - pensada numa perspectiva diferente. Finalmente, o artigo discute a transição da categoria teórica “campesinato” para a categoria de comunidade tradicional, e como essa transição é influenciada pelo processo de urbanização extensiva pela qual o Brasil passou nas décadas recentes. Argumenta que tal transição é parte da formação de resistências e pode contribuir para a reflexão sobre um modelo potencial para um desenvolvimento alternativo e, potencialmente, para a utopia urbana de Lefebvre.

Palavras-chave

teoria do desenvolvimento; urbanização; relações humanos-natureza; utopia.

Código JEL R11.

1 Introduction

The concept of development has always been a controversial one, from academic theory to actual development practices. This seems particularly true for economics. Classical authors such as Smith or Mills were quite aware that the progress of a given economy (which they saw as embedded in a society) depends on more than mere economic development. However, the discipline took a sharp turn in the post-war period towards a pure economic analysis of development, which culminated in growth models *a la* Solow (and others). This tendency has been somewhat reversed - more so in the academic debate than in the actual “development” praxis - by including more and more dimensions to the development concept. Yet, more often than not, this debate is hard-lined around technical issues and lacks a deeper and broader reflection on the context and the implications on the current development efforts.

The discussions brought here together attempt to address this problem. They reflect the conviction that the model of development generally considered and applied today requires a profound redefinition. There are voices advocating the abandoning of the concept altogether, condemning it as new forms of (Western) domination instead of a road to emancipation (Escobar, 1992; Sachs, 1992). In our opinion, this criticism is certainly valid, has immensely enriched development studies and has to be considered. However, we fear that a complete abandoning of the concept does not solve the problem - indeed we observe that new concepts, or arguably new names for the same, are being established as soon as the old are discredited. The efforts to re-label capitalist industrial development as sustainable development (or just sustainability), and more recently as green growth/economy, are often barely hiding this intention.

Instead of throwing the concept away, we argue that we should try to redefine, appropriate and fight for it. Our position seems closer to what Peet and Hartwick (2015) have advocated as ‘critical modernism’, essentially a response to the post-development critique. This implies both accepting the valuable insights of post-development theory (as radical development critique) and, at the same time, rejecting an overemphasis on discourse and representations (at the expense of practice). Meaning also that the focus of our reflections is rather, yet not exclusively, on the potential of development than on the actual practices we can observe around

the globe. It incorporates the idea that modernity, as Habermas (1990) famously stated, is incomplete and has to overcome its adolescence to solve its internal, inherent problems. Still, we emphasize that modernity and its concept of development as capitalist industrial modernization has to be transformed in both its meaning and practices.

This paper was born within the recently established research group on urbanization, nature and development and as the result of a round table at the biannual Diamantina Conference. It is an attempt to critically reflect on those three concepts that are – in our opinion – closely linked to each other: urbanization, nature and development. More precisely, we are trying to discuss the context, implications and (some) shortcomings of the dominant development model/approach – which could be called capitalist industrialization – considering the other two concepts and their inter-dependencies from a perspective of the Global South. It is also the attempt to apply a wider theoretical and historical framework to these issues which sometimes might appear as recent problems.

The various discussions in this paper differ in their degree of abstraction. Before starting a more detailed discussion, it is – in our opinion – necessary to clarify some very general issues about the development concept and its implications. These comments provide the underlying context to further discuss the main arguments, from the role of nature and cities to the potentialities of resistance against, or maybe more properly *go beyond*, the industrial logic. The second part highlights the importance of the city and the daily urban life for human development. Here, a theoretical discussion of pre-industrial societies and their relations and interactions with nature offers insights into our understanding of nature as a productive force. Furthermore, it discusses how cities were the privileged form-and-structure of mediation between nature and society in preindustrial economies, working as a creative and flexible platforms in the creation of social meaning to the diversity of natural resources. Finally, we discuss the possibilities of Henri Lefebvre's urban-utopia within the context of peripheral countries. Special emphasis is given to the Brazilian case, where the emergence of a "new" social category – the traditional community – can be a way to include the diversity in the social structure, denying the homogeneity imposed by the industrial logic.

Most issues discussed here are rather broad, thus the article is not meant to provide a clear and defined description of those concepts. The focus here lies

on highlighting some – in our view – very serious problems of the development concept and its consequences for nature and urbanization. While the paper is inspired by a broad variety of authors, the main theoretical background of this article are the writings of Henri Lefebvre. His work offers a particularly interesting approach on urbanization – a concept that, as he argues, reaches far beyond the mere agglomeration of people in a geographical position.

1.1 Some comments on development theory and practice

Before going any further we should establish an understanding of how the concept and narratives of development have been shaped throughout the last decades and point out some critical issues and connections, particularly those related to the other two concepts of this paper: nature and urbanization. The first crucial observation is that we are analyzing the socially-constructed concept of development rather than the mere bio-physical notion of something evolving into something else. To talk about the concept of development necessarily means talking about normative issues. It also means entering a quite controversial academic debate and discussing practical questions which have often caused human suffering - all of which leaves the researcher with a highly sensitive topic. Thus, one of the first things we should mention is that there are neither absolute truths nor ideal policy suggestions that could be derived from this paper on development and related issues. This results simply from the fact that no concept of development can be universally valid or free of social values (Nohlen, 2005).

It also implies that researchers in this field might be best advised to approach their subjects and questions with certain humbleness and with the conscience that their ideas could (and in the past indeed did) directly affect the lives and well-being of other humans and non-humans. Perhaps one of the first development economists who embodied such a spirit was Albert O. Hirschman (1967, 1981) who – after living and working in the Global South – understood that local and cultural peculiarities impede the application of universal development plans. As Santiso (2000) has argued, Hirschman's art of trespassing – particularly between academic disciplines and technical work on the ground – and his (academic) caution provide an excellent methodological approach to better understand development realities. That is the spirit this article tries to embody.

1.2 The narratives of development

The dominant ideas about development today are grounded in the ideas of modernity and rationality that began their rise since the enlightenment. Inherently linked with these concepts is the belief that mankind with its unique rationality is “destined” to dominate nature – a belief that legitimated a radical exploitation of natural resources and also the colonization and exploitation of “uncivilized” cultures and people. In fact, the whole colonization project of European imperial powers was justified by arguments of “developing” poor and backward countries outside the Western world (Escobar, 1994).

In this sense, the political Post-War Western development project (and its economic narrative and discourse) can be seen as an extension of the project of modernity and the former colonization processes – arguably with less military force, yet with similar ideology and dependency-creating interventions. Here, the argument that endogenous development is virtually impossible for underdeveloped countries, which would require foreign capital inflows to industrialize, has played a crucial role. The roughly 400 years of European colonialism and the social and economic relations it created crucially contributed to the global diffusion of modernity. As Paula *et al.* (1997) point out, the main ingredients for this project of modernity – a market economy, modern Western science and the national state – led to the political project of development via industrialization. Starting with industrial revolution and certainly since the 19th century, industry and industrialization became the dominant form of organization in Western societies – transforming not only production processes, but also reproduction processes. Or as Henri Lefebvre proclaimed a little later: “industry characterizes the modern society” (2008, p.8).

The origin of the present idea of development is, as mentioned, certainly shaped by the Western idea of progress, but if we were to find a starting point for the international project of development (as well as the academic field) it would be 1949. That year marked the beginning of the development era designed as a global political campaign to consolidate US hegemony. US President Harry Truman’s inaugural address on January, 20th explicitly mentions the need to expand the scientific and industrial progress to underdeveloped areas in order to improve and help them to further grow (here referring to GDP growth). As Esteva (2010) points out,

Truman might not have been the first to talk about underdevelopment, but his adoption of the term gained an incredible colonizing virulence. Ever since, the idea of development has meant overcoming the condition of underdevelopment, which additionally has been defined by developed nations as inhuman and undignified. By creating this convincing (and for various political and economic interests also convenient) concept, a major part of the global population was immediately condemned as inferior (including numerous negative implications) and subject to various kinds of interventions from developed and “civilized” nations and “international” organizations controlled by them.

In the post-war period the idea of Development suffered another invasion, more precisely a conceptual reduction when it became almost completely interchangeable with economic growth. Until today, this idea of increasing income and production of material goods continues to colonize the academic debate and the practical solutions in the development field and beyond. This colonization is so strong that despite the wide acceptance (even in economics) that development includes many dimensions, most of the economic discipline (and with it most of the political sphere) still searches for ways to increase GNP/capita as a way to “develop”. Obviously, this happens not only for ideological reasons. Economic growth in a situation of high income concentration – which today is a reality for almost all nations, yet really severe in the Global South – means above all to secure the political and economic power of the ruling elites, hence the support for research and spin-doctoring that is favorable towards more growth. Latouche (2010) and others argue that raising the ‘standard of living’ (measured by the quantity of goods and services that can be purchased) became a unanimous global objective. And that the thoroughly application of this quantitative indicator combined with the homogenizing force of globalized capitalism have contributed to a situation where different ‘modes’ of living are merely perceived as different ‘levels’ of income.

1.3 Industrialization, urbanization and nature

Returning to the theoretical discussion above, one result of the idea that economic growth leads automatically to more human development is the widespread adoption of policies which are designed to induce industri-

alization and technological advances. Specifically in the “glorious thirty years” of capitalism (1945-75) the industrial production and income per capita soared and helped to consolidate the “myth of development” (Furtado 1974) even in the Global South. Prominent examples of the hegemony of this development concept are China’s industrialization efforts or the Import-Substitution strategies in various Latin American countries from the 1960ies on (Wagner, 1993). It is also no coincidence that the expansion of industries occurred at the same time as the rapid increase of huge urban agglomerations, precisely because their (population) growth is fueled by the existence of large industries and the influx of ‘underdeveloped’ people/workers in search for higher incomes. We certainly have to be careful not to simplify the complex relation between industrialization and urbanization, but it seems that the expansion of industrial activity strongly encouraged the growth of today’s megalopolis and their socio-economic, political and cultural spaces. This poses a variety of new challenges, particularly for the natural environment and for the marginalized segments of the population.

The destruction of natural environment is far from being something new in the history of mankind. Yet, the industrial revolution and its more recent expansion – or we might argue its outsourcing – to the Global South have created a new reality in which the very base of (human) life on the planet is threatened (Boggs, 2012). The velocity in which our society (and that means foremost the developed, industrialized nations) consumes energy and resources has reached a level that is highly unsustainable and is already causing severe restriction for future well-being and development. Climate change, loss of biodiversity and deforestation are just some of the environmental results of 60 years of (industrial) development policies and this age of irresponsibility (Jackson, 2009). Due to generally higher energy and resource consumption per capita in urban agglomerations, cities play a crucial role in this development project of modernity. That does not imply that rural areas are necessarily sustainable or necessarily less destructive towards the natural environment – in fact, we can find many contrary examples from mining to agricultural industries.

The effects of this kind of development via industrialization and urban concentration are not only environmentally questionable, but certainly also from a social, cultural and political perspective. There is a vast literature about the potential effects of industrialization on the human condition, from Marx’s (1844) theory of alienation to more technical work

on negative externalities such as well-documented health issues (Szreter, 2004). However, there seems to be quite some variety regarding the impacts of industrialization and urbanization on energy consumption, unsurprisingly depending on your income level (Li; Lin, 2015), the overall picture is not very bright.

Moreover, if we look at the Global South and the social conditions that the development project created, it is hard to overstate the negative impacts. Of course, in purely material terms of monetary income, the industrialization of developing countries (in statistical terms specifically China and India are significant here) has created a new “middle class” of several hundred million people around the globe. However, as we argue in this paper, this monetary catching-up process is at best an insufficient development as it does not automatically create more well-being or liberty - which are by no means the only potential development objectives. More importantly, we also have to ask at what actual cost does this development occur? The obvious environmental costs (which are almost always externalized and almost never accounted for) are accompanied by severe social costs such as the exclusion of those people who could not make the ascent to those new classes. This relates directly to the issues of economic inequality which Thomas Piketty (2014) has recently illustrated. He demonstrates that wealth concentration is drastically increasing since the Post-war Period and suggested that only global taxes on wealth could actually diminish economic inequality – which in turn correlates to other dimensions of inequality such as political representation or general access to opportunities.

Piketty’s argument is mostly based on wealth inequality, but as Cingano (2014) or Bornschiefer (2002) show, there is a very similar situation in the case of income inequality which has been rising both in developed and developing countries since the 1970ies. However, there are national stories of decreasing income inequality, mainly in developing countries that applied progressive social policies and were able to reap the benefits of investments in education, such as Brazil, Argentina or Mexico during the 2000s (Lustig *et al.*, 2013). From a development perspective the most important lesson we might draw from the works cited above is that – regardless of the various causes of economic inequality – even in the hegemonic and narrow perspective of development as industrialization and GDP growth, it does not seem to solve the problem of inequality. At the

same time the reduction of economic inequality has been identified as one of the main development goals by international development agents such as United Nations, IMF or World Bank (Sachs, 2012). The failure to eradicate poverty, inequality and exclusion – together with the often externalized costs and damage this model implies – has contributed to a growing literature on critique of our current development concept.

However, while the negative effects and costs of industrialization and urbanization processes seem to be far greater than the positive ones, we should not overlook the new possibilities and realities that these processes brought. That includes potentially life-enhancing technological advances (in housing, food production, medicine, information technologies, etc.), which became increasingly available even for lower income households or individuals. It is precisely in those advances where the attraction of the modern development project lies – even more so for the central spaces of capitalism because its “side effects” have been externalized to the peripheral ones. Clearly, nobody wants to deny (or even live without) some of the material benefits of industrialization, but we definitely can look at pre-industrial societies to refine (and perhaps even revise) our understanding of how we perceive nature and how our relationship with it has shifted.

2 Nature's production and the role of cities

2.1 Nature as productive force

The birth of industry introduced a strong radical discontinuity in the history of relations between society and nature. In preindustrial societies, nature has been a source of livelihoods and material and cultural enrichment (Mumford, 2008; Polanyi, 2012; Shiva, 1995; Robert, 1995; Esteva, 1995). If we look at the question of the existence of resources or of the dynamics of production, the modern and industrial epoch has greatly modified this scenario.

“Resource” originally implied life. Its root is the Latin verb surgere, which evoked the image of a spring that continually rises from the ground. Like a spring, a “re-source” rises again and again, even if it has repeatedly been used and consumed. The concept thus highlighted nature’s power of self-regeneration and called attention to her prodigious creativity. Moreover, it implied an ancient idea about the relationship between humans and nature: that the earth bestows gifts on

humans who, in turn, are well advised to show diligence in order not to suffocate her generosity. In early modern times, 'resource' therefore suggested reciprocity along with regeneration. With the advent of industrialism and colonialism, however, a conceptual break occurred. 'Natural resources' became those parts of nature which were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade. (Shiva, 1995, p.206)

Nature, in the perception of pre-industrial societies, was not limited to a stock of raw material waiting to be transformed by human labor. The secular coexistence of man with the dynamics of nature and with its capacity for cyclical renewal has led these societies to a refined perception of nature as a great productive force.

That statement may seem abusive. However, if we evaluate much of what has ordinarily been taken as the productive forces we can see that these are mechanical, chemical, and physical processes whose effectiveness as an apparatus of economic creation extends, controls or organizes processes of nature. From this point of view, the socially organized productive forces are modifications and adaptations carried out over many dynamic generations which were before internal to a natural production:

*Production comes from the Latin verb *producere*, which meant 'to stretch', 'to spend', 'to prolong', 'to draw into visibility'. It generally referred to an actualization of possible existence. In terms of this ancient meaning, production is a movement from the invisible to the visible, an emanation through which something hitherto hidden is brought within the range of man's senses. This idea of emanation fitted ordinary people's experience, the awareness that nature, husbanded by man, brings forth a people's livelihood. (Robert, 1995, p.175)*

In modern societies, the understanding of nature has approached the view of a repository of raw materials, which must be introduced into a "productive apparatus" itself. These resources, on one hand, seem to be taken from an inexhaustible frontier, depending only on the possibilities of technology. On the other hand, the disenchantment of the world (Weber) by the scientific advances dissolves any sacredness of nature and its cycles, putting in its place the industrial reason, capable of handling nature almost without restraints (Paula *et al.*, 1997, p.205). Here, the relative share of artificiality inherent in the productive process, which previously seemed smaller in the set of forces present in production, assumed the leading role in modern understanding.

This transition is also perceptible in the constitution of political economy as a field of knowledge and as a set of political prescriptions. François Quesnay and the Physiocrats defended the protagonism of nature, of the land, in the production of wealth. "The concept of economic production

was popularized by the Physiocrats, a group of French philosophers, for whom all wealth ultimately stemmed from the earth's generative powers" (Robert, 1995, p.179). Later, Adam Smith and David Ricardo moved away from the position of the Physiocrats. For Smith the division of labor and extension of markets were the origin of the wealth of nations, thus he conceptually removed the condition of the determinant of economic success from the natural conditions. According to Robert (1995) for David Ricardo "[the] ideas tended to reduce the earth's generative powers to merely quantifiable factors - we would say inputs - of productive labor." Ricardo inserted the land, among the factors of production, as a fundamental part in the functioning of the capitalist economy, but derived this condition more from economic dynamics and less from the natural attributes of the land. Property, income, location, and even fertility enhancement are socially constituted attributes. The wealth and well-being of society came from engaging in the dynamics of trade. These attach social significance to the natural advantages held by some nation. Left out from the exchange dynamic, these natural gifts would ultimately remain inert and meaningless.

Marx (1861), however, pointed out that the 'physiocratic' point of view was not completely discarded by Smith and Ricardo, although it had been modified. The growing importance of manufacturing and urban activities in England was not in accord with the views of French economists on the non-productive character of these economic sectors. Marx discusses excerpts from the works of Smith and Ricardo, in which the importance of nature in economic life is reaffirmed. Interestingly, Smith argues that agriculture was, in its time, unequalled in terms of returns to invested capital, precisely because "in agriculture, nature works together with man." Smith adds that such a thing did not happen in manufactures, because "in them nature does nothing; It is the man who does everything" (Smith 1996, p.360). Curiously, Ricardo does not completely agree with Smith. After agreeing with his statement about the importance of nature in agriculture, he asks:

Does nature nothing for man in manufactures? Are the powers of wind and water, which move our machinery, and assist navigation, nothing? The pressure of the atmosphere and the elasticity of steam, which enable us to work the most stupendous engines—are they not the gifts of nature? to say nothing of the effects of the matter of heat in softening and melting metals, of the decomposition of the atmosphere in the process of dyeing and fermentation. There is not a manufacture which can be mentioned, in which nature does not give her assistance to man, and give it too, generously and gratuitously. (Ricardo, 1996 [1819], p.55. Note n. 24).

Marx finds in Ricardo a refined perception of how the understanding of nature, of its internal processes, deepens and enriches its cooperation with man in economic life. Thus, he points out that Smith and Ricardo held on to the physiocrats' view that nature is an indispensable productive force. At the same time, especially in Ricardo's case, it is enough to look at the terms in which the economist argues to realize how far he is from the physiocratic argument; how their arguments are mediated for the typical and inseparable knowledge and techniques of industrial practice.

Certainly this change of perception corresponds to a concrete process of expansion / intensification / complexification of human labor which was added to the material layer available in modernity. However, this process also corresponds to the constitution of a specific sensitivity, in which the perception of nature is an inert set to be dominated by human ingenuity. In this context we could formulate the hypothesis that such perception has close links to the relationships established by the Western imperial powers, to the distribution of natural resources outside Europe in the process of colonial expansion and to its unfolding in the industrial revolution and industrialization.

2.2 Reduction and fragmentation of nature in modern science

The vision of nature that would predominate in the West was already synthesized in the seventeenth century in the view of philosopher Francis Bacon's science (1562-1626). This view gained practicality and turned itself into common sense in market societies, in the globally connected economy, and finally in industrial production (Shiva, 1995). These Western socio-technical structures - market society, global market and industry - have further changed the perception of nature.

Until the beginning of the industrial period, nature had been understood through its natural cycles, creation and recreation, as a totality in movement, in time and space. The approach of modern science, and thus also gradually our common sense, has become more and more abstract. Science and industry operate with the fragmentation and functionalization of the natural elements and the relations between society and nature. But this was not a theoretical change, isolated from practice. On the contrary, if we consider, for example, the process of incorporating natural

resources from the colonial territories into the industrial economy, we will see that the fragmented perception of nature constructed by Western man corresponds to a practice. It corresponds to the one of a panoramic perception of nature, oriented by the colonial market.

Europeans suddenly found themselves in ecological contexts in which they could not or did not want to take root. This process resulted in the selective inclusion of segments of nature into economic life. An inclusion that only happened to the extent that it made sense in the colonial episteme. The natural landscapes of the colonized regions were “hyper naturalized”: their relative condition of socio-historical construction was minimized or ignored¹. Both tendencies – selective incorporation / fragmentation and hyper naturalization – led to the perception of nature in that condition close to inertia. This was even more severe in peripheral regions brought into existence within the colonial condition.

Within the colonial perception of nature, the extension of coloniality degrades the ontological status of nature, particularly in the periphery of capitalism. If we compare the understanding and management of nature that existed in non-modern societies to the praxis of development, we observe:

[...] a tremendous loss of diversity. The worldwide simplifications of architecture, clothing, and daily objects; the accompanying eclipse of variegated languages, customs and gestures already less visible, and the standardizations of desires and dreams occurs deep down in the subconscious of societies. Market, state and science have been the great universalizing powers (Sachs, 1995, p.4).

In many ways, industrialization has renewed and prolonged the colonial condition of peripheral societies. It brought a significant disorganization both of the human and non-human world that existed there previously. The inclusion of these areas in the international division of labor was oriented towards the functioning and well-being of European societies and only to their own needs and possibilities.

The reduction of social and natural diversity promoted by processes of industrialization and development projects is connected to the dilapidation of tacit knowledge held by non-Western populations about their natural patrimony. This knowledge was built on the basis of their daily practice and in fact provided them with solutions to their practical problems regarding the production and reproduction of material life. This dou-

1 There is a large literature concerning this hyper naturalization of the world carried out by western thought, particularly in the research of historical ecology. See Hecht *et al.* (2014) or Balée and Erickson (2014).

ble dilution of their diversity - natural and epistemological - contributes to the concretization of abstract poverty metrics such as comparison of economic performance and access to monetary income².

Here, we should mention that there scientific fields that try to address this fragmentation. In economics, the work of Kenneth Boulding (1966), Herman Daly (1968) and Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen (1971), among others, led to the formation of a new and genuinely transdisciplinary field within the discipline: ecological economics. Driven by the environmental and social problems that intensified due to the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism in the Post-war era, ecological economics emphasizes the interdependencies and potentials for co-evolution of the natural environment and human economies. In this perspective nature is the foundation of all human activity, making the economy a subsystem of society and, ultimately, the planet.

In contrast to environmental economics which tries to internalize natural and social relations into the market via price mechanisms (Stavins, 2008), ecological economists have a more pluralistic approach (including social, psychological, political and ethical aspects) and place an inherent value into nature and non-human beings³. Thus, the argument that natural (and social) environments are substitutable – in accordance to the concept of ‘weak sustainability’ in environmental economics – is discarded in favor of a complementary view of nature and society (Redclift *et al.*, 2015). However, ecological economics and likewise fields are marginalized in academia and their ideas are seldom incorporated in the “mainstream” discourse.

2.3 Cities as creative platform

Colonialism and industrialization have set in motion a renewal but also

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 2 This perception soon became clear to the developing world institutions themselves: “There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of cast, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with the progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress” (United Nations, 1951, p.15).

3 Obviously, academic fields are fluid and not immune against appropriation; the same is true for this distinction between ecological and environmental economics. Spash (2014), for example, argues that the dominant perspective in ecological economics has shifted towards a perspective far more consistent with environmental economics.

processes of loss of meaning for segments of the non-human world. The industry has emerged as a (new) platform for mediation between nature and society. But if there is something new in this position occupied by industry, what social structure had been in place before? Let us turn to Henri Lefebvre's statement on the centrality of industry in the creation of the modern world. Now, however, we want to reverse the chronological direction, toward the past:

Industrialization provides the starting point for reflection on our time. The city pre-exists industrialization. This is a banal observation in itself, whose implications have not been fully formulated. The most eminent urban creations, the most beautiful works of urban life [...] date back to pre-industrial times [...] When industrialization began, when competitive capitalism was born with the specifically industrial bourgeoisie, the City was already a powerful reality. After the near extinction of archaic cities in Western Europe, the City resumed its development ... [Cities] are, in short, centers of social and political life, where not only riches but also knowledge, techniques and The Works. The city itself is a Work⁴ [...] (Lefebvre, 2008, p.11,12)

Lefebvre's argument begins by identifying industrialization as the organizing factor of modern society. But, taking a step back, the author clarifies that "the city preexists industrialization", and that it was a long time ago a powerful reality.

At this point there is a subtle aspect, which the author does not make explicit in this text, but will do in another text, where he discusses the role of the city in the creation of modern economy and the advancement of the division of labor (Lefebvre, 1999). Lefebvre departs from Marx's claim, in the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 2011 [1857]), that the earth was first man's "great laboratory", which provided him with "both the instrument and the matter, its base, its place" (Lefebvre, 1999, p.86).

Even before there were permanencies, settlements or large groups, men enriched their existence through their relationship with the non-human world. Walking through paths, searching for the conditions of their surviv-

4 Lefebvre employs this term, "work", as opposed to "product." In this discussion, the latter term denotes the result of the production of commodities, of "exchange values." Work, on the contrary, refers to "use value" and, in the limit, the artistic character of the City itself prior to industrialization. In this sense, the City itself was a "work of art". "In relation to production, we know that its concept can be taken in two respects ... one is strict and precise, the other broad and vague. (...) The double meaning of the term stems from the fact that 'men' in society produce either things (products), or works (everything else). Things are enumerated, counted, appreciated in money and exchanged. But the works? This is more complex. To produce in a broad sense, is to produce science, art, relationships, between humans, time and space, events, history institutions, society itself, city, state; In one word: everything" (Lefebvre 1999. p.80).

al, men inscribed the natural space with their practical activity; left their marks, seeking to understand nature and to recognize themselves in it.

On space-nature, on the Heraclitian flow of spontaneous phenomena, on this chaos (below the body) mental and social activity launches its meshes; It establishes an order which, we shall soon see, coincides, to a certain extent, with that of words. Places are marked, re-marked, named [...] (Lefebvre, 1991, p.117)

The moment when permanent settlements arise, the expanded capacity of men in society modifies their relationship with nature. Its power of appropriation, that is, of perennial use and adapted to the determined demands, implies a nature that is no more hostile or unknown. Something closer to a co-evolution between human groups and non-human world is established. But it is fundamental to realize how much this change depends on the expansion of multiplication of permanent human settlements. Through this way of life, the human capacity to appropriate nature is strengthened.

In other words, it is necessary to ask how permanent human settlements have emerged as the privileged mediation between men (societies) and nature. It is the discussion that Henri Lefebvre establishes, when he questions the role of the city and the nature-city relations in the trajectory of societies and passages between different forms of organization of production. Lefebvre refers explicitly to the role of the city as mediation between nature and society. It refers to the passage of man in a direct relation with nature to the situation in which the city is transformed in the mediation between them:

What is the earth? The material support of societies. Would the earth be unchangeable? No. Its face changes, from pure original nature to devastated nature. This support of human societies, [from] the origin to the end of men, is neither immutable nor passive. The earth is first "the great laboratory," as Marx put it in the Grundrisse. [But] the land does not continue to be the laboratory. What replaces it? The city. (...) What is the city then? Like the land on which it rests, the city is a space, an intermediary, a mediation, a medium, the vastest of the means, the most important ... In the city and through the city nature gives way to a second nature. (Lefebvre, 1999, p.86).

From the singular relations between isolated groups, on one hand, and singular places of nature on the other, we shift to the relations of (cyclical or linear) repetitions. Through these comes learning, meaning an organized apprehension of knowledge about the natural world. And from there practices (techniques) and objects (technologies) are constituted. "In the course of these modifications, a 'social nature' replaces immediate naturalness" (Lefebvre, 1999, p.87).

Lefebvre then points out that Marx's expression of nature as "the laboratory" means that "nature does not remain a passive element of production." On the contrary, it intervenes as a dynamic element of learning and for the constitution of sociability (and not only as an inert source of materials). From this dialectic interaction between men and nature emerges the socialized nature, which is incorporated and densely concentrated in urban space and practices. Here, the human being itself, socially humanized, becomes social in the full sense.

Now, we do not have to take Lefebvre's argumentation as an 'a priori' truth. On the contrary, it can be understood as insight or theoretical hypothesis, whose effectiveness as an explanatory framework must be tested and investigated. This hypothesis, however, emerges from the fact that in the evolution to a new social condition – emerging from a condition of being wholly integrated into nature – man had the city as platform. This socially produced space, the city as constructed nature, constitutes a privileged mediation between human groups and resources, that is, what emerges and resurges, springs and re-grows from the cycles of nature. The city was the place where social meanings were produced for what was once an in-different part of becoming nature. This applies both to objects (products) and to broad human reality (works): art, institutions and interpretations of the world.

The Lefebvrian argumentation converges with other theories and also with empirical research of other areas of knowledge, which concern the relationship between society and nature and also the theme of the origin of cities and their role in economic life. Regarding the relationship between nature and men in non-modern societies, there are several fields of research in which relationships of reciprocal enrichment between society and nature are discussed. Contrary to common sense and parts of modern science, the binary opposition between nature and human labor is often not concretely verified, not even in areas considered as the archetype of isolation and naturalness. For example, empirical research in historical ecology in the Amazon region shows that part of the current tropical forest diversity is due to the presence of human groups, not their absence (Balée/ Erickson, 2006).

In the theoretical field, Lefebvre's vision converges in part with Jane Jacobs's hypothesis on the role of the city as a primordial form of the organization of social space. Jacobs describes permanent settlement both as a

place and as an inescapable structure for the creation of relations between nature and human communities. The author constructs her hypothesis in a hypothetical narrative about an archetypal settlement: New Obsidian. Within this community, the diversification of daily life - uses, exchanges, solutions, innovations - coincides with the deepening of ties with nature. The urban daily life/routine creates the interconnection of the constellation of resources of natural diversity - resources of plant, animal and mineral origin - that are continuously socialized, that is, inserted in social life (Jacobs, 1969).

New Obsidian is born thanks to the sedentary nature of the production of sharp objects made from volcanic stone. The place becomes a convergence of the natural and social diversity that surrounds it. Diversity derived from the non-human carries with it the knowledge and the uses related to it.

As the permanence of the settlement continues in time, it concentrates in its space the diversity that converges towards and within it. This process molds the settlement into a place where everyday experience has great density. In such a place, one can find the multiplicity of extracts of nature previously handled by groups that lived only sparsely and with erratic contacts (both among themselves and with their own resources). Hence, the settlement/city as a place of convergence and permanent articulation of diversity enriches human existence. And this experience in turn renews and enlarges the human capacity to intervene in nature.

After all, in permanent settlements knowledge is not easily lost or disorganized. It originates from the daily dealing with diversity and from the coexistence with multiple natural materials, for which new uses arise with ease. This knowledge is rooted in everyday life and, when it becomes necessary, is transmitted, it is learned. Its repetition and cumulativeness derives from coding and recording. Due to the tacit or erratic practice, codified techniques start to emerge and soon technological artifacts. Even if these artifacts arise at first in an elementary version, their constant mobilization contributes to the non-linear evolution of its complexity. Jacobs intertwines everyday life, nature and the emergence of the technique; and hence demonstrates the central role of the dense experience that urban life provides for the whole process.

It is noteworthy that the most recurrent discussion that the hypothesis presented in the book raises is about its feasibility – or in other words,

could the city emerge before the countryside? (Bairoch, 1991). Meanwhile, the consequences of the hypothesis in terms of human settlement / nature relations are little discussed. Going beyond the exclusionary duality of “first the field or first the city,” Jacobs hypothesis illuminates a crucial question. It clarifies how small the chance of the emergence of the complex use of natural resources is in the absence of the *dense experience* provided by a permanent, dense and diverse human settlement to which the diversity of the natural world converges and which articulates human and social experience. The urban base allows this experience to accumulate in space and to form a chain over time and generations.

What escapes this “what came first” discussion is that the permanent human settlement is disclosed as a place where the construction of social meaning for nature occurs – or we could call it the *socialization of nature*. It also eludes that this construction of social meaning - a long and fruitful process of relations between society and nature - anticipates the creation of the decisive (but not isolated) step of domestication; or better, the socialization (insertion in social life) of animal and plant species which constitute the development of agriculture and livestock. Jacobs argues that the stereotype of a primitive society of salvage cave men has a huge power of clouding our contemporary thought:

it is clear that the pre-agricultural man were much besides hunter: they were manufacturers, builders, traders and artists. They made large quantities and many varieties of weapons, clothing, bowls, buildings, necklaces, mural and sculptures. They used stone, bone, wood, leather, fur, rushes, clay, timber, adobe, obsidian, copper, mineral pigments, teeth, shells, amber and horn as industrial materials. They backed up their major crafts and arts with subsidiary goods: “producers’ goods” or “input items”, as economists now say - ladders, lamps and pigments, for instance, to achieve the Paleolithic cave paintings; burins to gouge out furrows in other tools; scrapers to dress hides. At some point the question might have been asked, How did agriculture arise upon all this industry? Instead, the long economic history of man before the agriculture has continued to be regarded as only a sort of prologue played out in the wilds [...] (Jacobs, 1969, p.45, 46).

Taken in a serious way, these hypotheses about the role of the city for the relations between nature and society illuminate a set of problems inside the conception of development as an industrial phenomenon.

So far we have discussed the fact that the city has been through history a fundamental medium between nature and society. In sum, cities have been platforms for the socialization of nature, thanks to which the urban environment creates, on a daily basis, a dense experience. Now we consider a link between the city and the birth of industry, thus its role in the

constitution of the modern world. This brings us back to the initial theme: the substance of the idea of development, its relation to nature and the urbanization processes involved in it.

The historical differences between a city in Greco-Roman antiquity, in ancient Asia or medieval Europe cannot be ignored, assuming that continuity or linearity did not exist, as Lefebvre (1999) repeatedly pointed out. Therefore, what has been mentioned above about the centrality of the city as a platform for socializing resources is relevant, but not identical in every aspect. Yet, the birth of industry can be interpreted as a convergence - and up-scaling - of technical, economic and social tendencies that the city articulates throughout the European medieval period:

In the course of this process [of disintegration of the feudal world], the city engenders something different and superior to itself. In the economic plane [the city engenders] the industry; on the social plane, the movable property (not without concessions to the feudal forms of property and organization); on the political level, the State (Lefebvre, 1999, p.46)

Within medieval cities, conditions and relations of production were concentrated and reproduced, which made industrial production possible; although (precisely speaking) industry itself was born outside the physical and institutional limits of cities. This aspect, however, further emphasizes rather than invalidates the connection between the two. As a differential emergency of the urban reality, industry affirms itself in contradiction with the city. It is a relative denial of urban institutions (Mumford, 2008) and at the same time the expansion and deepening of other dynamics that the city had harbored for centuries. For example, the formation of large markets or the practice of accumulation – both as a time transfer of resources and as a planned constitution of productive forces. Also, the deepening of the technical and social division of labor; the articulation in the inter-regional space of commercial and financial practices. And the formation of markets adapted to the consumption of sophisticated goods and to the diffusion of articles of mass consumption.

Lefebvre (1999, p.60) points out that the city “universalizes competition, transforms all capital into industrial capital, accelerates the circulation and centralization of these capitals”. All this came to existence with the fulfillment of the city. But beyond the technical-economic conditions, “the medieval city, with its corporate system, breaks and surpasses itself. The conflicting city-field relationship engenders something new; what? Simultaneously (or almost): capitalism and the world market, the nation

and the state, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat “(p.61). What Lefebvre rescues in Marx’s work is the fundamental importance of the city for the “development” of the capitalist system. We can extend this discussion and realize how these are the conditions for the development project in the twentieth century. However, as Lefebvre (1999) also points out: “with the emergence of the great industry [...] the city (its internal-external capacity for association, concentration and reunion) ceases to appear as a ‘subject’ of the historical process” (p.63).

This rescue of the role of the city, besides the theoretical value that the author develops in all his work, sheds light on the existence of alternatives to what we could call “narrative of the industrial protagonism”. Or in words which became hegemonic in the twentieth century: industrialization is a trajectory without alternatives. In spite of their intrinsic tendencies of social and environmental homogenization, which are accentuated in peripheral societies (Furtado, 1978; Jacobs, 1984), production oriented by industrial logic is presented as an inescapable path. The leading role of industry is presented as irreducible. It is then a narrative that depends directly on the complete invisibility of other forms of mediation between society and nature. In the next session, the traditional *community* as social category that can represent a way to resist (and deal with) this invisibility is discussed.

3 Overcoming development from the periphery: traditional communities and the urban-utopian

Since colonial times, the Brazilian peasantry is going through processes that endanger its way of life. It is possible, for example, to locate several legal milestones, perhaps above all the “Lei de Terras” (Lands Law)⁵. Before, the land had no mercantile value except when associated with labor (which turns it into a productive unit), but after the “Lei de Terras” land prices begin to rise substantially. This valuation is an important mechanism to prevent the poor from gaining access to land. Hindering the peas-

5 “Lei de Terras” required all land already occupied through housing and production to be legally registered. After the deadline for registration, the land could only be acquired by buying and selling or state donation. Otherwise, they would be considered as vacant land (not used by private individuals), and would be appropriated by the State. With this new law, property would no longer be recognized by land occupation.

antry's access to land means depriving it of its autonomy in a profound sense, and therefore subordinating it.

In addition to the difficulty of accessing land, the industrial logic began to travel beyond the limits of the urban centers, reaching all (or almost all) the territory. This latter process occurred in the mid-1960s – intensified in the 1970s and 1980s – and is synthesized by Monte-Mór (2006) in the notion of extended urbanization. As the author explains, since then urban structures and services, citizenship rights, laws, transport and communication systems are spread throughout the territory. But also the general conditions of production and reproduction of industrial capitalism are spread, creating new work systems and new possibilities (and necessities) to be part of a market economy.

According to Lefebvre (2014), while we think of European history through continuities (between agrarian, industrial and post-industrial societies), the Latin American case can be treated through the idea of simultaneity: the three phases are overlapped. Thus, we can say that even with the extended urbanization the agrarian logic is not entirely driven out by the industrial logic. Possibilities of coexistence will arise between these different logics (of course, not without ruptures, after all the industrial logic has a very great force of change).

From these layers overlapping would then arise the urban society (which is not the industrial one, but the result of this encounter of two realities, in other words, the post-industrial). The new structure would then be the urban - the result of this encounter of different logics, described by Lefebvre. But how would this new structure be like? For Lefebvre (2014), the urban is the present, the future and the possible: the virtual. Urban society, therefore, is not an observable result, but the possibility that arises from the encounter with the urban-industrial logic. It is born with industrialization, in the possibility of what may be its overcoming: the post-industrial.

The urban (an abbreviated form of urban society) can therefore be defined not as an accomplished reality, located behind the actual reality in time, but, on the contrary, as a horizon, an illuminating virtuality. It is the possible, defined by a direction, that moves toward the urban as the culmination of its journey (Lefebvre, 2014, p.17).

This virtuality - the urban society - would be disseminated as a possibility through the explosion of the urban fabric, as described by Monte-Mór (2006). The author sees in the politicization of space a force that could be a way to substantiate this urban society. The politicization of space would

come as a consequence of extended urbanization, which would not only spread out the urban-industrial but also the urban-utopia. Thus, the urban-utopia could, through the politicization of space, oppose the homogenizing force of industry – retaking the possibility of creation and affirmation of diversities. But, if the urban-utopia exists as a present virtuality, how can we identify its signs? Our hypothesis is that the creation of traditional community as social category, in the Brazilian case, could be seen as an urban society sign.

This social category has its origins in the Amazonian social movements (which are in some way, results of the extensive urbanization process as a politicization of space). When Cunha (2009) discusses the formation of new political strategies in the Amazon region to deal with territorial threats, she argues that everything has changed when communities realized the argumentative power of identity and environmental preservation. Now, the political strategy is to “prove” that there is culture, and, above all, a preservationist culture. Juridically, therefore, it becomes important to be recognized as a “traditional community”, which could be defined as

groups that have conquered or are struggling to conquer (both practically and symbolically) a public identity as conservationist which includes some of the following characteristics: use of low impact environmental techniques, equitable forms of social organization, presence of institutions with legitimacy to enforce their laws, local leadership and, finally, cultural traits that are selectively reaffirmed and re-elaborated (Cunha, 2009, p.300).

Besides being a political strategy, the term traditional community also solves the problem of the excessive generalization of the term *campesinato* (peasantry). For Almeida (2007), the idea of *campesinato* accompanies the tendency of modern ideas to be big narratives that bring together a diversity of objects in a single theoretical language. However, these universal narratives are in crisis because they cannot cover some specific realities.

The death of the campesinato is thus the death of a system of thought; it is the end of a code. The pieces that this code organized in the past, however, are still in circulation. (...) The end of the campesinato comes at the same time as the discourses and practices of rural democratization, of environmental self-government, of counter-hegemonic gender policies (...) are being activated as never before. If we abstract the universalizing category of the campesinato, we see that the cultural, economic and ecological traits that were associated with it remain on the daily order, although disjointed between them and highlighted in the great theoretical narrative of which they were part (Almeida, 2007, p.170).

The idea of traditional community does not intend to substitute ‘campesinato’ as a new big narrative. According to Almeida (2007), it is rather

a political category, formed by innumerable attempts to recount history from local perspectives and opposed to homogenizing or hegemonic tendencies. Thus, the reconstitution of identity is carried out by the community itself, which assigns to itself, besides a common past (mythical and/or historical), present characteristics and common future expectations that allow them to be externally recognized.

Hence, disappearance is not the most appropriate approach. The pre-existing shapes and structures combine with the new, generating a wide possibility of results. The penetration of capitalist-industrial logic does not entirely modify those preexisting structures. The *campesinato*, which can be identified within the agrarian era described by Lefebvre, perceives the risk of losing its land (and therefore its autonomy) as a need to react politically in an innovative way.

This political reaction absorbs characteristic elements of the industrial society, such as a necessity of performative culture to prove some identity and concerns for environmental preservation which are also ways of resisting the homogenizing force of industrial modernity. In the end we have a new political category, which results from a metamorphosis of the agrarian world, generated by the encounter with the urban-industrial world. Curiously, the “traditional community” is a fluid, mobile, diverse concept which reminds us of the Lefebvrian description of the urban-utopia:

During this new period (of the urban society), differences are known and recognized, considered, conceived, and signified. These mental and social, spatial and temporal differences, detached from nature, are recovered on a higher plane, a plane of thought that can grasp all the elements. (...) Urban space-time, as soon as we stop defining it in terms of industrial rationality—its project of homogenization—appears as a differential, each place and each moment existing only within a whole, through the contrasts and oppositions that connect it to, and distinguish it from, other places and moments (Lefebvre, 2014, p.37).

We can therefore suggest the emergence of the traditional community, even as a legal category, as a spark of the urban-utopia. But what about nature? Returning to the definition proposed by Cunha, the way these communities relate to nature is one of the few common characteristics that allow us to unify them under a single label. And as we have discussed before, their idea of nature - and the relationship between people and environment derived from this idea - is an inspiration to rethink our economic and social goals. Here we can return to the fact that traditional communities express themselves and organize themselves concretely as a socio-spatial reality. As urban utopia they are a contemporary manifesta-

tion of social practices, which were once restricted to life within the city limits. This includes the relationship with nature.

In addition to being a renewed rurality, traditional communities can also be understood as a singular urbanity. In these terms they reconstitute a form of mediation also unique between society and nature. In their daily space practice these populations manage local and regional resources that are the basis of their direct and indirect material survival. Direct survivorship, in so far as they locally produce food, building materials and other basic necessities. Indirectly insofar as they mobilize resources to enter markets outside the community. In both cases, the set of knowledge and techniques employed is a composition of tacit, ancestral, and codified knowledge. More than a broth of precarious subsistence there is in these practice openings and concrete potentialities of economic advancement combined with the permanence of a non-predatory relationship with the non-human world. The concrete and daily forms of urban utopia manifest themselves in these regions in a palpable way, although almost always barely visible to the trained look of those seeking development guided by a Western, modern, industrial paradigm.

4 Concluding remarks

There are many other issues involved in this debate and the few discussions and arguments presented here certainly could only scratch the surface of the complex links and interactions between urbanization, nature and development. However, there are some – in our opinion – important insights we can take away from this exercise. Perhaps, the most important one being that this Western project of development through industrialization has severe limitations and contradictions – specifically for the Global South, but increasingly also for the North. And while a variety of theoretical and practical efforts to rethink development have recently emerged, the main efforts to “develop” are still focused on this modern vision we described throughout this paper.

Another conclusion we have to draw is that our understanding of and our relationship with nature has been drastically impoverished in the modern world. Without reflecting on the broader historical, cultural and socioeconomic context – something we tried to do here – there seems to

be little chance of creating development ideas and solutions for highly specific and complex local realities. We also discussed how, in the process of socializing nature, the dense urban environment plays a key role – enhancing both human creativity and potentialities for innovative development.

Many of the discussed problems – or their solutions for that matter – require profound cultural and social shifts. Yet, public policy, which is experimenting with new approaches instead of following the old industrial logic, could certainly support and even induce changes towards alternative forms of development. And, as we discussed in this paper, the Lefebvrian urban-utopian is not limited to the city. An enormous and untapped potential – following Lefebvre’s argument – might indeed be found within the overlapping layers of realities. In this sense, (urban) policy and planning might want to look at the (often rural) traditional communities and at supposedly ancient understandings of nature and cities for new inspirations. This implies, especially in the recent Brazilian context, the recognition of traditional territories and communities rights, instead of the continuous support that the state has been giving to agro-industrial agents.

There are already various examples for the emergence of new development paradigms and practices around the world, which put (at least in theory) people and local (or regional) needs and specificities in their focus. We could cite, for example, the growing degrowth movement in Europe, efforts like the transition town initiative or the Buen Vivir approach from Ecuador. While these approaches and frameworks have been constituted in very different realities, they seem to have a common baseline – a radical critique of the current development (or even civilizational) model, the winning over the industrial logic and the vision of alternative worlds based on ecological integrity and social justice ⁶ (Escobar, 2015). Any (urban) planning able to incorporate such thinking without getting appropriated by industrial and capital interests – a certainly difficult task – could have the potential to create forms of development which share the considerations of this article.

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6 For any reader who has followed the sustainable development and sustainability debate, these elements should be very familiar because they constitute the original ideas about sustainability. They were already formulated in the 1987 Brundtland-Report but have been almost entirely absent from the new green growth or green economy debate. This shift in the sustainable development paradigm could arguably serve as an example of its appropriation by industrial and capital interests.

Finally, it is important to note that the ideas of development, nature and urbanization continue to be understood from the theoretical reference of modernity. And modernity, as Escobar (2015) argues, is based on the creation of hierarchies. Thus, development continues to be related to industrialization, which is considered superior to other productive forms. Nature continues to be related to the extraction of resources whose narrative is more powerful than the affirmation of nature's creative potential. Urbanization continues to be related to the degradation of the rural world, although it can be understood as a means of strengthening it.

However, hierarchies created by the paradigm of modernity and imposed by colonial practices (past or current ones) have never been peacefully accepted. Traditional communities – often regarded as archaic and backward-oriented – are a powerful example of resistance, and more importantly, they are a promising example that it is possible to relate to the issues proposed in this text - nature, development, urbanity - without reference to the paradigm of modernity. If traditional communities can be considered a seed for a postmodern society that has never surrendered to modernity imposed by colonialism, we must turn our gaze to the new possibilities - practical and conceptual - that are being suggested.

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