

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF QUALITY

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The development of Brazilian society was much more intense over the last thirty years than during any previous period. The opposite occurred with the growth of its economy, as measured by the increase in GDP per capita. For over a century (1870-1980) Brazil's economy was the champion in terms of growth among the world's ten largest economies. The only reason that it was not in last place recently was due to the persistent stagnation of Japan. In other words, over the last thirty years there has much more development with much less growth.

This contrast should be looked at by anyone who continues to assume that development is directly proportional to the increase in GDP per capita, without even mentioning the terrible belief that development is nothing more than a synonym for economic growth. If this were indeed true, the development of Brazilian society would, by definition, have been very weak over the last three decades.

However, there is nothing paradoxical about this for those who understand that a society's development depends upon how it makes use of the benefits resulting from its economic performance in order to expand and distribute opportunities for access to goods such as: civic freedoms, health, education, decent employment etc. This is even more so for those who already also understand that development will be short-lived if the environment is excessively harmed by the economy's expansion, given that the economy is a sub-system which is highly dependent upon the

preservation of the biosphere. This is because any reasonable assessment of prosperity will tend to require not just a measure of economic performance that surpasses the outdated and obsolete gross product measures (whether gross domestic product, GDP, or gross national product, GNP). This will also demand the simultaneous utilization of two more indicators: one in relation to the quality of life made possible by the economic performance, and the other regarding the environmental sustainability of this process.

NEW MEASUREMENT

The economic performance measurement that is likely to replace GDP will be that of "real net income available per household", which is something that at present cannot even be calculated by the most sophisticated statistics agencies of the main developed economies. This was one of the main recommendations of the report produced by the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (2009), which appears to have already been well accepted by the OECD.

In France a great deal of attention is already being paid to a number of very similar indicators of the development of the "purchasing power of disposable income". In other words, what effectively remains for families or individuals after their compulsory expenses in relation to the tax authorities, social security, insurance etc. Very often there is a marked discrepancy between the development of this pur-

chasing power and that of GDP. In 2008, for example, the "purchasing power of disposable income per unit of consumption" dropped (-0.4%), while GDP increase (+0.2%). In 2009, the opposite occurred: the former posted an increase of 0.8% while GDP showed a sharp drop (-2.6%).¹

In addition to highlighting the need to measure economic performance by looking at income and consumption, instead of looking at production, new measurements of quality of life and environmental sustainability will also be essential.² Subjective measures of well-being provide key information about people's quality of life. As a result of this, the statistical agencies will need to research the assessments that people make of their lives, their hedonistic experiences and their priorities. In addition to this, quality of life also depends, of course, on the objective conditions and on the opportunities. Improvements will have to be made in the measurement of eight critical dimensions: health, education, personal activities, political voice, social connections, environmental conditions and personal and economic insecurity.

The inequalities will also need to be evaluated in a very comprehensive way for all these eight dimensions. And surveys need to be drawn up in such a way as to assess the connections between the various dimensions in each person's quality of life, especially in order to be able to come up with policies for each area. Finally, the statistics agencies will have to supply the necessary information so that the

various dimensions of quality of life can be aggregated, making it possible to construct different composite or synthetic indices.

Meanwhile the assessment of sustainability requires a small, well-chosen set of indicators, different from those used to evaluate quality of life and economic performance. An essential characteristic of the components of this set should be the possibility to interpret them as variations of stocks rather than of flows. It is possible that some monetary index of sustainability could be part of this, but it should remain exclusively focused on the strictly economic dimension of sustainability. The environmental aspects of sustainability necessitate specific monitoring by physical indicators. And this is particular need for a clear indicator to show when we are getting close to dangerous levels of environmental damage (such as those which are associated with climate change, for example).

Sustainability

Whatever one's preference for any of the numerous meanings that can be attributed to the word "sustainability", it is inevitable that it evokes the future. The responsibility to refrain from doing something today that may have a negative impact upon tomorrow or make it unlikely to come about. In its most popular version, this dilemma (or challenge) is focused on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations to do the same.

However, human societies, both current and future, will continue to attribute a lot of value to things that cannot be regarded as "necessities". It is also hard to imagine that society could easily demonstrate this type of inter-generational solidarity, if in the present it does not even manifest itself on behalf of people who are suffering

the atrocities of war, poverty, hunger, or lack of access to drinking water. For this reason, the easiest thing to do is to simply reject all this talk of sustainability, labeling it as nothing more than rhetorical illusionism.

However, there are historical examples of social manifestations of altruism, even though they are infinitely scarcer than their opposite. Perhaps the most similar example is the process that led to the end of slavery. For this reason, one cannot simply reject the idea that an increase is taking place in the moral concerns of current adults in relation to the living conditions that their grandchildren or great-grandchildren may face. Even if they do not go as far as being moved by the more serious part of the question, since it is the very existence of generations more than three generations into the future that is being put in doubt by science. What is at stake, when one talks about sustainability, is the ability acquired by mankind to shorten its expiry date by speeding up the inevitable process of its own extinction.

There is nothing else that imposes the obligation to conserve ecosystems. There are dozens of environmental problems that will need to be faced, and which are usually classified or ranked in hierarchical order in various ways. However, the same three essential questions will always be at the top of any list: climate, water and biodiversity. And this is a simple criterion that immediately distinguishes them. Some – such as river pollution, for example – can be reversed, and its consequences tend to be mitigated when societies become richer. Others – such as climate changes – are extremely difficult to deal with, even under the hypothesis that there could be joint priority effective action on the part of the international community. In addition to this, any serious global warming will

have a pronounced negative impact on many ecosystems, reducing, and even canceling out gains obtained by practices of biodiversity conservation, of management of hydric resources or of suitable food production.

Therefore, under the historic prism of the development process, it is not possible to consider reversing environmental damage to any marked degree unless the climate question is tackled in a concurrent manner. Whether in the ambit of the various types of pollution, of recycling, of the use of toxic products, of trash management, of control of exotic species or the conservation of soils or the protection of habitats. All these gains could be shown to be ridiculous if they are not accompanied by restriction of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, which are mainly caused by the use and misuse of fossil energy sources. And the adaptation to a perhaps inevitable new climatic reality.

This is the reason for the primacy of global warming. There is no path for sustainable development that does not begin with the energy transition that will make it possible to overcome the current dependence upon fossil sources. The opposite course would be to continue wasting increasingly scarce resources, at the same time as discouraging incipient innovations in the area of so-called renewable energies and vital base research into new sources.

Growth: quantity versus quality

Therefore "speeding up growth" is not the cure-all that is often heard in the political speeches of representatives of the government, of the opposition, of employers' and workers' associations, which are forever being reproduced by the media. None of them recognize that the greatest challenge for countries like Brazil is now much more of a qualitative nature than of a

quantitative one. They have not discovered the influence that the “quality of growth”³ exercises on the “style of development”⁴. Deep down they are still dreaming of an economy steaming ahead at a “forced march pace”⁵.

What caused the World Bank ten years to draw attention to the quality of growth was a triple observation: a) not everything improves as a result of an increase in per capita income, b) the things that improved never do so in the same proportion; c) and it is not inevitable that the quality of life really improves. Depending upon the society, the same speed of economic growth can result in different degrees of progress in roughly ten key areas: education, health, gender gap, civil and political freedoms, reduction of poverty, reduction of inequalities, and participation by citizens in the decisions that affect their lives, combating corruption, environmental quality and sustainability.

As was shown by the report on the quality of growth (THOMAS and others, 2002), the World Bank noted that almost all these dimensions registered a marked improvement in the Indian State of Kerala, despite the fact that its rates of growth of per capita income were much lower than those of other Indian states and other countries. If all Indian states had the same poverty reduction elasticity as Kerala, for example, India would have tripled the number of its citizens who had been pulled out of poverty.⁶ South Korea’s experiences illustrates the importance of investing efficiently in basic education. In the same way, Chile is a shining example of the possibility of economic opening balanced with management of risk and social protection. And Costa Rica is a symbolic case of environmental protection.

The processes of these four countries indicate the emphasis on the quality of growth is triply essential.

First, because it directly promotes well-being by influencing more uniform access to and distribution of the virtuous trio made up of education, health and environmental quality. Second, because the compass of growth tends to be less volatile when qualitative aspects are prioritized. When you have very unstable growth rates, the negative aspects are particularly pronounced for the poor. Third, because one avoids the frequent temptation to subsidize physical capital, or to overexploit human and natural resources, as a result of anxiety to encourage faster growth. For this reason, the report goes as far as evoking the existence of a “political economy of quantity *versus* quality” (THOMAS and others, 2002, p. 185).

The reflection of the Cepal economists and sociologists who, thirty years earlier had proposed the notion of “styles of development” had been very different. As creative as this image that the process of development by necessity has various “styles”, the efforts made by those in Cepal to characterize these styles did not really clarify things. A good example can be found in the simplified classification sketch used by Aníbal Pinto (1982, p. 46), whereby the styles are the result of combinations between three dichotomies: disegalitarian, consumerist-environmentalist, and dependent-autonomist.

However, what is of crucial importance is Sunkel and Gligo’s (1980, p. 62) observation that the environmental perspective in this discussion inevitably led to a series of “beliefs derived from the economic growth ideology that had prevailed over the previous decades” being placed in doubt. These became problematic as follows:

- a) the confidence in exponential unlimited economic growth;
- b) the possibility of sustaining over the long-term a development style

based on the export of natural resources;

- c) the conduct aimed at accumulating the maximum of material consumer goods;
- d) the advantages of urban concentration;
- e) the indiscriminate faith in the progress of science and technology and in their capacity to make nature artificial in an unrestricted way;
- f) the possibility of making the high levels of consumption seen in industrial countries and in high income groups in the underdeveloped countries compatible with obtaining similar levels of consumption for the great majority.

There is no need to go any further to declare that these two approaches – quality of growth and style of growth – advise against any voluntarism in the direction of an economy at a forced march pace. Even more so in the current Brazilian context, in which specific macroeconomic circumstances also limit ambitions of turbo charging GDP at an annual rate of growth over and above the 5% level.

To grow better

In Brazil, in addition to the fact that total domestic savings have historically been low, the situation took a turn for the worse in 2008- 2009 because the incentives that increased consumption were of a fiscal nature, thus reducing the public sector’s savings. In other words, the increase in the rate of investment were not followed by increases in total domestic savings, requiring further external savings to be obtained by means of current account deficits.

As Pastore and others (2010) stress, persistent current account deficits increase the external liability, depreciate the real exchange rate, and after a while limit the absorption of

external savings, and prevent higher investment rates, which imposes a limit on growth. The accumulation of external liabilities prevents the continuation of high current account deficits due to the costs that such liabilities inevitably incur. Costs in the form of interest if the external liability accumulates as debt, or in the form of profit remittances if it accumulates as investments.

It is under this prism that we need to look at the “to grow more and better” banner, the motto of the agenda that the industrial sector is proposing to the candidates for President of the Republic. Not so much on account of its quantitative ambition to “double per capita income every 15 years”, this would require the annual rate of GDP growth to be slightly greater than the aforementioned 5% level. But mainly, due to the pressing need for the implications in terms of the qualitative aspect contained in this ambition that Brasil needs to “grow better” (CNI, 2010) be understood and assimilated.

This agenda, which certainly reflects the more mature aspects in the perception of industrial entrepreneurs regarding the oath of national development,⁷ contains five major guidelines, or five “main areas” which the “strategy” proposed by the industrial sector should “act upon”: a) integration of the domestic market; b) internationalization; c) innovation; d) projects to boost the economy; e) low carbon economy (CNI, 2010, p. 23-24).

Isn't this formulation according to which a “strategy” should “act upon” certain “key areas” rather strange? Couldn't it be that all this semantic ambiguity is nothing more than an indication of the absence of any real strategy? In order to arrive at a strategy, wouldn't it have been necessary to establish hierarchical relations between “areas” chosen?

These doubts by necessity lead us to a much simpler, basic question: what, after all is strategy?

Strategy

The use of the term “strategy” is almost always very naive. Almost all of its users regard strategy as being any activity that links ends to means. Or, in an even more simplified way, any procedure that is aimed at an objective. This trivialization has gone so far that any long-term phenomenon is characterized as being strategic.

There are two cognitive problems that can be found in all these cases of misuse. The least serious of these is the widespread “amnesia of the genesis”, as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu used to say. The terms comes from the Greek *strategía*, and results from the joining of the word *stratos*, which means “army” or “armed force”, with the word *agein*, which means “to lead”. Perhaps because of this it is only among military types that there continues to be a consensus in relation to the following type of definition: strategy is the conjunction of intellectual and physical operations required in order to conceive, prepare and conduct, in a conflict environment, every activity that has a clearly specified objective.

The second problem is much more detrimental, as it results from a broad lack of knowledge of the controversies that have arisen, over the course of almost half a century of teaching the subject “strategic planning”, among the world's most highly regarded business schools. It is unusual for someone to speak about this subject with the awareness that the five meanings of the word strategy would need to be assumed simultaneously. It is extremely rare that the approach adopted is explicitly presented as being one out of ten competing analytical lines.

The best source of information

regarding these twelve strategic planning approaches is the monumental analysis produced by Mintzberg and others (2000). It may well be that there is no better “route through the strategic planning jungle”, as its sub-heading says. However, ten years after this very decisive analysis was published, it seems that all twelve of these schools of thought are about to collapse, due to the extreme fragility of their common foundations. And the best way of understanding the size of this threat of collapse is to study cases about the decision processes that lead to the consolidation of any of the available options.

In successful experiments, there is usually no choice, bet or commitment to any specific strategy. The most common approach taken by companies is to adopt a portfolio of options that are congruent with the company's aspiration to become the leader in a given field. And all this at a point in which nobody can safely declare which of the options will be the most advantageous. Without trying to predict the future, successful companies are those that internally assume an array of business plans that mirror the competitive process that is taking place outside.

Instead of adopting a strategy that the best analysis of scenarios may indicate as a guarantee of long-lasting competitive advantage, the company encourages an evolutionary process whereby it is the market forces themselves that indicate which of the options should be selected or eliminate. An experiment that subverts all the conventional ways of drawing up a strategic plan, as instead of making a certain choice and then committing the company to it, the experiment imposes four major observations.

The first and most general of these is that the creation of a context that is favorable to the emergence of the

best option entails the adoption of a portfolio of experiments that will only be reasonable if the parties involved have a sound understanding of the situation, as well as sharing the same aspiration. The second is that the conductors, or leaders, need to pay a great deal of attention to the differentiation possibilities of business plans. The third is that the organization needs to create a selection mechanism that really reflects its respective market. And the fourth is the vital need for a process that amplifies the best plans while eliminating the worst ones.

In addition to radically contradicting the common assumptions of the ten schools of thought that are discussed in the jungle that is strategic planning, this new approach is heavily inspired by the modern synthetic theory of Darwinian Evolution. A proposal which is set out in detail in Chapter 9 of the book ‘The Origin of Wealth’, by Eric D. Beinhocker (HARVARD, 2006). As well as being essential reading for anyone who is interested in strategic affairs, this book has an even more ambitious goal, in that it is intended to make you understand the economy/economics as an evolutionary system. In this context, the five “main areas” that “Brazilian industrial strategy” should “act” upon, according to the CNI, can be interpreted as the main options that are available. This is the array that has to be assumed, given that not even the best scenario analysis could guide any prior choice, much less a commitment. To the contrary, it involves stimulating an evolutionary process where the options to be selected will be indicated by a complex global historical process. In other words, it will do no good at all at the present moment to argue in favor of immediately giving priority to “the emphasis on innovation” aimed at the “transition to a low carbon economy”,

instead of “focus on large projects”, “insertion in the international market” or “making the best use of the size of the Brazilian market”.

However, the same does not apply to the need to clearly identify the factors that are opposed to the emergence of a context that is widely favorable to the selective process. There is no way it can succeed if the main parties involved do not have a good knowledge of the situation; if the leaders did not pay much attention to the possibilities for differentiation; if a selection mechanism that truly mirrors the historic moment fails to emerge; and if there is no dynamic that amplifies the best plans while eliminating the worst ones.

For this reason, what will most influence the quality of growth, as well as its pronounced impact on the style of development, has little to do with the part of the CNI’s platform that tries to define the “strategy”. It appears later, in the part that is reserved for the formulation of an “agenda for competitiveness” which lists 268 proposals regarding a dozen very serious problems: infrastructure, foreign trade, small and very small companies, education, taxation and public spending, environment, financing, bureaucracy, labor relations, innovation, legal security and macro-economics.

Scientific education

The educational part of this “agenda for competitiveness” shows a serious incoherence with the need for an “emphasis on innovation in companies”, which is the third out of the five “strategic areas”. Despite insisting on the question of the quality of education, and of making thirty very relevant proposals, there is no sign of any concern regarding the lack of scientific education. Yet, they core of the “strategic” argument, which appears 120 pages earlier, is of the

precariousness of the formation of scientists and engineers.

The key is to forge “well prepared minds”, as they are the ones that are favored by luck, according to Louis Pasteur. Given this perspective, nothing could be more decisive than effectively prioritizing science education right from junior school. Teaching people to reason scientifically, encouraging curiosity and passion for knowledge in a big way, breaking with the social representation of the sciences as being a type of knowledge that is very hard to access and which is the exclusive property of a few.

In the same way that artistic education is not aimed at turning everyone into musicians, painters or writers, it is not the objective of scientific and technological education that every citizen should be capable of building a subway station or a ring-road. But it should ensure that everyone is able to understand and influence the decision making process about their routes, about the social functions that they should fulfill, in addition to transporting efficiently, and in relation to the environmental impacts that will need to be mitigated and compensated. Without strengthening the ability of non-professionals to understand the language used by the experts, there will be no way of managing the socio-environmental consequences of their technical choices.

Brazil needs to change the level of its system of Science, Technology and Innovation (CT&I). There is maturity in the scientific and technological community, in addition to a growing perception in the business community regarding the need to invest in innovation, which, in principle, creates the right conditions for the emergence of a development plan that is both ambitious as well as realistic. Therefore, it could be expected that scientific education would be given

top priority, and that this would cause a healthy shock among the elites who have been very slow to realize the importance of education. It is also urgent that they realize that nothing could be more crucial than the introduction of scientific knowledge right from junior school. However, the lengthy agenda drawn up by the CNI is unfortunately a clear sign that this is not yet happening.

Low carbon

The second serious shortcoming of the CNI's platform is the way it approaches the question of environmental sustainability. It starts off very well by proposing the following idea: "Change of philosophy: from conflict to partnership". The CNI is correct in stating that in Brazil "an exaggerated priority is given to the imposition of costs and regulations, reducing the emphasis on the desirable and necessary partnership between the public sector and industry in order to bring about sustainable development".

However, out of its five priorities for the environment, the CNI showed very clear incoherence vis-à-vis what had previously been presented as the fifth "strategic area": the transition to a low carbon economy.

The five priorities are as follows: clarity in the environmental licensing processes; approval of a national solid waste policy; revision of the Forest Code; greater effectiveness in the management of hydric resources; and payment for environmental services. None of which are aimed at initiatives that reduce the energy intensity or carbon intensity of Brazil's urban areas, at the same time that deforestation and the use of slash and burn techniques for clearing land are being minimized (as well perhaps as methane gas emissions from animal husbandry).

This incoherence between what is regarded as "strategic" and what

appears in the twenty initiatives listed in the "competitiveness agenda's" environmental topic is another symptom of the delay that victimizes businessmen in Brazil's industrial sector. In other words, the belief that the demand for environmental sustainability is much more of an obstacle than an opportunity continues to be predominant. Although on page 43 one can read that "the climate changes represent an opportunity for Brazil's development", there is absolutely nothing derived from this statement in the twenty demands listed in the environmental part of the competitiveness agenda (p. 197-204). There is not even any mention of the need to create centers of clean growth in order to pave the way for the sustainability of development. Summing up, in order to be able to assess the size of the aforementioned delay all that you need to do is to call up the recent UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade & Development) report (from 2010). Even more so if the CNI's idea is compared to those contained in Besserman Vianna and others (2009), or in Abramovay (2010).

CONCLUSION

The CNI's proposal "to grow more and better" falls behind precisely on two crucial themes: education and environmental sustainability. Therefore, there is no need to move on to others such as: health, employment, gender gap, civil and political freedoms, reduction of poverty, reduction of inequalities, participation by citizens in the decisions that affect their lives, or corruption. What is clear is the degree to which "more" continues to prevail over "better" as far as the Brazilian industrial elites are concerned.

Worse: the CNI's agenda da CNI ends up making a tremendous mess

between means and ends. How can it be possible to imagine that development (no matter whether or not it is sustainable) may be seen as one of the means in a process the purpose of which is to increase income? It is hard to believe that someone could make a logical inversion on this scale. And the only possible explanation for this phenomenon is clearly the overwhelming effect of the fetish for growth. Something which makes the idea of "growing better" nothing more than mere rhetoric, as the idea of "growing more" remains totally dominant.

Apart from this, the CNI's reflection will also need to incorporate the view that has been called "industrial ecology". But it would be too much to demand that its agenda for 2010 were already in synch with such cutting edge research.

In general terms, it is very important to remember that the arising of new business and markets will be infinitely boosted by institutions that regulate and make greenhouse effect gas emissions more expensive, and by the consequent restrictions upon the utilization of fossil fuels. Which explains the support of the more modern global business elites for mitigation policies, being hesitant at the outset and then very firm, and now characterized by the perplexity brought on by the reversal of expectations in relation to the performance of the main economies.

None of this invalidates the idea that combating global warming is of an eminently ethical nature. After all, as has already been said, what is at stake is the danger that imprudent decisions will contribute to speed up even more the process of extinction of the human race. But it makes it possible for a strategic program of sustainable development to be pragmatic, since it is founded on the already observable trends of transition to what has been

called the “low carbon economy”. It is clear that the global economy could also be driven by a new wave of military technology. But in addition to being undesirable, this is also a scenario that would make any reflection about the path to sustainable development simply meaningless.

It is just as important to understand the symmetry that exists between the few dozen “central” societies and the hundred or so “peripheral” ones, as well as the complexity of the intermediary situation that prevails in the “semi-periphery”, mainly among the countries that are referred to as “emerging”, “up-and-coming” or which belong to the “new second world”. Contrasts which obviously impose serious differences in the options that are open to each one of these geopolitical groups regarding their prospects for development, whether “sustainable” or not. While we are beginning to see the idea of “prosperity without growth” being debated in the so-called central countries, the peripheral countries need to begin to grow. And in the emerging economies, such as Brazil, the key question is the quality of this growth.

NOTES

¹ www.insee.fr.

² More detailed, contextualized explanations regarding the recommendations contained in the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission’s report can be found in the fourth chapter of the book *Mundo em transe* (2009).

³ “The quality of growth” was the subject of a World Bank report in the year 2000: see Thomas and others (2002).

⁴ The “styles of development” have been intensely debated by Cepal since the mid 1970s: see Pinto (1982), Sunkel and Gligo (1980), and Sunkel (1981).

⁵ “Economy at a forced march pace” was the expression that characterized the so-called “strate-

gy of 1974” of the II PND: see Castro and Souza (1985).

⁶ A phenomenon that has recently been confirmed in Brazil: from 1995 to 2008 there was a greater reduction in terms of the number of those who were poor and impoverished in the regions with the lowest GDP per capita growth: the South and the Southeast. Cf. “Institute of Applied Economics Research’s Communication No. 58 “Dimension, evolution and projection of poverty by region and State of Brazil” (“Comunicados do IPEA nº 58 “Dimensão, evolução e projeção da pobreza por região e por estado no Brasil”), July 13, 2010.

⁷ It first began to be drawn up in November 2009 with the application of an electronic questionnaire to 1,300 business organizations in order to identify the sector’s priorities. More than 1,500 businessmen took part in a process that culminated in Industry’s 4th National Encounter (*IV Encontro Nacional da Indústria*), which resulted in two documents – “Industry’s Charter” and “Priorities and recommendations for 2011-2014” – which specified guidelines that were already contained in the “Strategic Map of Industry 2007-2015” (“*Mapa estratégico da indústria 2007-2015*”). And before the confederation’s board of directors validated the current agenda’s proposals and recommendations, they had been discussed at Thematic Councils, with subsequent decision on the part of the National Forum of Industry (FNI) regarding the strategic orientation.

⁸ The idea of revising the Forest Code was very reasonable, but unfortunately it “back-fired”, as is made very clear in Lewinsohn and others (2010).

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