

THE QUESTION OF DIFFERENCE AND RELATIONS IN RICHARD HARTSHORNE¹

A QUESTÃO DA DIFERENÇA E DAS RELAÇÕES EM RICHARD HARTSHORNE

LA CUESTIÓN DE LA DIFERENCIA Y DE LAS RELACIONES EN RICHARD HARTSHORNE

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Abstract

The American geographer Richard Hartshorne's theoretical propositions are an invitation to reflection. Based primarily on Alfred Hettner's conceptions, they constitute a significant contribution to the study of the nature of geography, as indicated by the very title of his work published in 1939, *The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past*. The concern with the essence of this discipline has led the author to present in this book and in a text from 1959 (*Perspective on the Nature of Geography*), a systematization of ideas and propositions from important classics of the geographical thought that preceded him, particularly from the nineteenth century. Amongst the main concepts presented in these publications, the highlight area *real differentiation*— widely disseminated (and misunderstood) among geographers— and the notions of *relation* and *connection*, largely related to the question constantly reiterated in his works —*i.e.*, the variable character of the earth surface. Based on these premises, this paper lays out an analysis of these concepts, discusses their theoretical limits, and underlines the issues related to their analytical possibilities. Keywords: Richard Hartshorne, differentiation, relation, connection.

Resumo

As proposições teóricas do geógrafo estadunidense Richard Hartshorne são um convite à reflexão. Baseadas principalmente nas concepções de Alfred Hettner, constituem-se como importante contribuição ao estudo da natureza da Geografia, tal como indica o próprio título de seu trabalho publicado em 1939, *The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past*. A preocupação com a essência dessa disciplina levou o autor a apresentar, neste e em um texto de 1959 (*Perspective on the Nature of Geography*), uma sistematização de ideias e proposições de importantes clássicos do pensamento geográfico que o antecederam, especialmente do século XIX. Dentre os principais conceitos apresentados nessas publicações, destacam-se o de *diferenciação de área*, bastante difundido (e confundido) entre os geógrafos, e os de *relação* e *conexão*, muito vinculados pelo autor à questão sempre reiterada em seus trabalhos: aquela referente ao caráter variável da superfície terrestre. Com base nessas premissas, este trabalho apresenta uma análise desses conceitos, discute seus limites teóricos e evidencia questões relacionadas às suas possibilidades analíticas.

Palavras-chave: Richard Hartshorne, diferenciação, relação, conexão.

Resumen

Las proposiciones teóricas del geógrafo estadounidense Richard Hartshorne son una invitación a la reflexión. Basadas principalmente en las ideas de Alfred Hettner, constituyen una importante contribución al estudio de la naturaleza de la geografía, como lo indica el título de su obra publicada en 1939, *The Nature of Geography*:

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A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past. La preocupación con la esencia de esta disciplina llevó al autor a presentar en este y en otro texto de 1959 (*Perspective on the Nature of Geography*), una sistematización de ideas y propuestas de importantes clásicos del pensamiento geográfico, sobre todo del siglo XIX. Entre los principales conceptos presentados en estas publicaciones, destacamos el de la *diferenciación espacial*, generalizado (y confundido) entre los geógrafos, y los de *relación* y *conexión*, muy vinculados por el autor a la cuestión de estudio siempre reiterado en sus obras: la referencia al carácter variable de la superficie terrestre. Con base en estas premisas, el artículo presenta un análisis de estos conceptos, discute sus límites teóricos y destaca sus posibles aplicaciones analíticas.

Palabras clave: Richard Hartshorne, la diferenciación, la relación, la conexión.

Introduction

Following the publication of his classic work *The Nature of Geography*, in 1939, Richard Hartshorne used to say that his book had been written to highlight the path that many thinkers had taken and their understanding of geography. Thus, for Hartshorne, his study had no intention to expose a personal view on what geography should be about, but rather to demonstrate what other authors, especially from the nineteenth century, advocated to be the task of this discipline. Remarks like this are part of the memorial of his life written by Geoffrey Martin and published in 1994 in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*.

Indeed, the concern about the nature of geography and the challenge to elucidate its role and place among different areas of knowledge led the American geographer to present a general scenario of the discipline. Hartshorne took into account what had been produced so far by many scholars associated to geography and what they believed to be the task of this science. However, as much as his methodological synthesis was accurate (and necessary), his conclusions and proposals for geography were not impartial nor they necessarily meant an open direction to the different notions of his predecessors –not least because he made quite clear his position and the decision to disseminate (to deepen and review, in some cases) Alfred Hettner's theoretical message. For instance, Hartshorne's main concepts were strongly influenced by the ideas of the German geographer and, therefore, by Neo-Kantianism. That explains his notion of region and, in the same direction, the counterpoints to some French geographers.

In this sense, Hartshorne's methodological foundations carry the weight of his merits. They evidently facilitate the understanding of his theoretical alternatives and how these alternatives allowed him to

develop some important concepts such as *areal differentiation*, widely disseminated (and misunderstood) among geographers, in addition *torrelation* and *connection*. These concepts are essential to the Hettnerian issue reiterated and substantiated by Hartshorne –i.e., the variable character of the earth surface. These concepts are anchored in a system of thought very well structured and relevant to the theoretical framework of geography. However, it requires a few remarks to clarify better its analytical possibility as well as theoretical limits. What we propose in this paper is to present these concepts and outline some observations.

The author's background and his interest in the nature of geography

Richard Hartshorne is one of those names that have left indelible mark on the studies of the history and nature of geography. Born in Kittanning, Pennsylvania, on December 12, 1899, he was raised in a family environment that carefully cultivated the knowledge of the Bible. One of his five brothers, Charles, became an influential philosopher. Geoffrey Martin (1994) reports that Richard excelled in school, having won oratorical contests (including in German studies) and an award in the field of mathematics, which probably led him to attend this course at Princeton University. Despite the award and school graduation, Hartshorne used to say that his interest was more focused on human interests, especially when he came across Ellsworth Huntington's work, a professor of geography at the University of Yale who studied economic growth, climate, among other subjects. Over the years, Hartshorne kept in touch with him through letters.

Following Huntington's advice, Hartshorne went to study geography in Chicago, where he took classes with Harlan Barrows. Then the head of the department, Barrows advocated geography as a "human ecology" and researched topics such as the history of geography and conservation of natural resources. Hartshorne attended courses with Ellen Semple, Derwent Whittlesey, and the English professor James Fairgrieve, who sparked his interest in political geography² (Martin, 1994). Though, Hartshorne eventually got closer to Charles Colby and Wellington Jones, his advisor. According to Martin, "Charles Colby's course on North America constituted Hartshorne's introduction to regional geography" (1994, p. 481). At that time, he already displayed interest in the nature of geography, but

his studies were focused on a doctoral investigation dedicated to the Port of Chicago, by which he received the doctoral degree with high honors in August 1924.

Upon completion of the doctorate program, Hartshorne worked for sixteen years in Minnesota, where he taught economic geography and developed research on locations and transports related issues. Hartshorne kept his interest in political geography even in a country with a limited number of geographers effectively engaged in this field. For instance, Carl Sauer, one of the great American geographers at the time, excluded political geography from the field (Martin, 1994). Furthermore, Hartshorne (1939) argues that the debates about the nature of geography in the United States up to the 1930s, by and large, did not contemplate the theoretical heritage of the discipline, despite it being an old knowledge with a certain organization in its structure. The indifference with the history of this science and the lack of pioneering authors in the (few) epistemological studies of American geography were fairly criticized by Hartshorne. Perhaps, for this reason, he focused his efforts on geographers, according to him, clearer and more consistent with the geographical science, like the classic and pioneering German thinkers. By studying these authors, he became acquainted with Hettner's work, for instance.

In the 1930's, because of his studies in the field of political geography, Hartshorne received a scholarship to study the political frontiers in Europe. He travelled to the Old Continent, but due to the unstable political conditions in those times, he did not come across an enabling environment to examine the political borders *in loco*. As Arcassa (2013) stated, for this reason, Hartshorne used the trip to develop extensive research in several European libraries and establish contact with numerous scholars. During his stay on European soil, he expanded a short essay written in the United States. Later on, he returned to America with a manuscript of hundreds of pages, containing a deep and detailed analysis on the evolution of the geographical thought. This was his influential work, entitled *The Nature of Geography*. Before submitting the manuscript to Whittlesey, who had promised to publish it the Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Hartshorne used libraries at Harvard and Clark universities to complete his work (Martin, 1994).

Upon its publication, *The Nature of Geography* was widely read by professors and students of geography from the entire country. Several

meetings and seminars were organized to debate his ideas and many foreign scholars also expressed their praise for Hartshorne. According to Lima Neto (2012), the concept of science and the relevance of the region at the core of the American geographical thought are particularly due to this classical work of Hartshorne, which was then translated to German, Japanese, and Spanish.

Over time, comments, considerations, and disagreements about the book began to emerge. According to Hartshorne himself, it was not a text for beginners – he observed his students' difficulty in understanding its content in conversations and meetings. His goal, according to Martin (1994), was to propose a methodological approach to the problems facing geographers and to contribute to the comprehension of geography's development, by offering a systematic overview about what those thinkers believed geography should be.

In 1940, Hartshorne became a professor at the University of Wisconsin, where he worked until retirement in 1970. In the meantime, he served as the president of the Association of American Geographers in 1949 and received the highest distinction of the association in 1960. During the first two decades working at Wisconsin, his work was widely welcomed by the geographer's community, but it also faced scathing criticisms, from which Coscioni (2015) highlights the ones from Sauer (1941) and Schaefer (1953). In response to those criticisms and letters from different authors, but also because of the necessity to develop a most elucidating work about the principles of geography, in 1959, Hartshorne published his book *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, where he reconsiders and deepens ten issues addressed in the 1939 publication. As reported by Moraes (2002, p. 87), that was “the last attempt to streamline Traditional Geography, keeping its essence of searching for a unitary knowledge and giving to it a more modern version.” As the product of many discussions and correspondences, the author considered it to be a sort of continuity and completion of the book published in 1939.

In the face of the theoretical propositions of the two publications, some authors, like Moreira (2008) and Arcassa (2013, 2014), indicate notions of *areal* and *difference* as reference concepts in Hartshorne. In turn, Capel points out that, just like in *The Nature of Geography*, Hartshorne once again brought about his polemic with neo-positivist currents in the 1959 publication, where he conceives *areal differentiation*

and *association of phenomena taking place in a concrete territory* as the key to his geographical conception. Furthermore, it is necessary to note the importance given by the author himself to the notions of *relation* and *connection*, since they allow explaining the variable character of the earth surface. Indeed, the dialog and the interpretation of Hartshorne's conception of geographical thought remain open. Because of the richness of his concepts but also the need to question them, in the following, some necessary discussions are presented.

Relation and connection: essential elements of the issue

If there is the variable character of the earth surface, there is also the “unique character” of areas (Hartshorne, 1951, p. 264). However, they are unique not because they are independent from one another, but because there are numerous and heterogeneous phenomena that vary on the earth's surface, interrelated in one area and interconnected in different areas.³ Therefore, relations and connections converge and make sense of integration, trade, transformations and functionality of the areas. The variable character of the earth surface results from this process. Variable not just because of its shape but mainly for its human aspect, since, after all, relationships and connections emerge, above all, from action. That is why, for Hartshorne, what is at issue in geography is not necessarily an object or particular category of phenomenon. It can also safely be said that this is not exactly about a specific area but the dynamic profile that allows interpreting the variability of integration among phenomena in this area (or in others) or, ultimately, the variable character of the earth surface. In Hartshorne's words, “the integrations which geography is concerned to analyze are those which vary from place to place” (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 79).

Hettner also paid attention to these relations as in following passage:

(...) if there were no causal relation between different areas of the Earth (*Erdstellen*), and if the different phenomena were independent from one another in one and same area of the Earth (*Erdstellen*), no particular chorological conception would not be necessary. However, since there are such relations that are not conceived in any way or only subsidiarily by the systematic and historical sciences, a specific chorological science of the Earth or of the Earth's surface is required. (Hettner, 2011b, p. 144).

This science is geography, the German scholar concludes. Though, in regard to these considerations, Hettner declares: “If the essential characteristic of the geographical research consists in the fact that it is chorological, one cannot speak of a chorological method yet.”(2011a, p. 139) According to him, the method presupposes the path toward a goal. Hettner cautions that it not the path that is chorological but the goal, the own object of geography.⁴That is the reason that his concern “consists in knowing the character of the regions and areas, what presupposes understanding the existence of interrelations between different domains of reality and its varying expressions” (Hettner, 1927 in Hartshorne, 1978, p. 14).

Hartshorne is also interested in causal relations and variations, but through a discussion directed toward the methodological arena. He advocates that the focus of geography is not concerned with any type of variation, nor merely with the area itself nor the earth’s surface as a physical reality. In accordance with the author’s conception, geography “is that discipline that seeks to describe and interpret the variable character from place to place of the earth as the world of man.” (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 51) In addition, on the contrary to what is commonly said, areal differentiation is not a simple description of the “differences” or the forms and phenomena of a given area. It means to fundamentally understand the phenomena *relations* in a given area and *connections* (or interrelations) between phenomena in different areas.

Hartshorne presents the discussion on the concept of areal differentiation in *The Nature of Geography*, in a 1958 paper – *The Concept of Geography as a Science of Space, from Kant and Humboldt to Hettner* –, and in *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, where he rebuts some criticisms, which, for him, were aimed much more at the term rather than the concept itself. The notion of areal differentiation much discussed by the author is linked to Hettner’s conceptions, particularly concerning the role of relations: “The connections or causal relations between phenomena, as Hettner noted in 1905, consist of two types: the *mutual relations* that exist between different phenomena in the same area and the *relations* or *connections* between phenomena in different areas” (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 20, emphasis added).

It is interesting to note that the concept analyzed in many Hartshorne’s works and discussions sustain the importance given to

relations, as in this passage: “our goal, in geography, is not the study of the phenomena themselves, but rather the phenomena in their relations” (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 85). In 1949, Hartshorne was invited to present his views at the eighth ordinary meeting of the Geography Committee, set up to discuss the direction of the discipline at Harvard. Once again Hartshorne stressed the importance of relations. He stated: “when considering the problem of any area, the geographer always have in mind its relation to other surrounding areas and other areas of the world” (Glick, 1985, p. 36, our translation).⁵

This concern with relations, or what we may call scales of relationships, enables us to conceive of a type of geography that does not neglect the processes, therefore, the movement. Elements such as water, air, and even the animals move and create connections. When man comes into the scene, Hartshorne writes, “this dynamic aspect of the character of the areas becomes much more important because one of the particular characteristics of men is the fact that we do not only move from one place to another, but we also put things into motion.”(1978, p. 20) This observation is emblematic because the areas differ not only in their morphology but also in its human aspects, Hartshorne asserts. The functional meaning of the areas emerges from this arrangement involving action, relationship, and connection. It was not by chance that Hartshorne conducted research on issues related to transport and logistics, as revealed by his thesis on the port of Chicago (*The Port of Chicago: Its Commerce, Facilities, and Requirements*) and his investigation about location (Hartshorne, 1927).

The idea of interrelation is present even in the Ritter’s work, as Hartshorne noted:

In Ritter’s assessment, heterogeneity of phenomena was not only accepted but underlined as an essential characteristic of geography. The subject finds its unity and distinction as a field of knowledge through the study of the character of areas as determined by the multiplicity of features which, in interrelation with each other, fill the areas of the earth surface. (1978, p. 30)

The importance Hartshorne gave to relations triggered some criticism. Some of his readers misunderstood the notion of *relations* as the reappearance of the principle of “relation between nature and man”, associated with the deterministic controversy. The deterministic

“trauma” has possibly influenced such criticism, but particularly the lack of understanding of the meaning and role of relations in the field of Geography, as asserts Hartshorne (1978). Attributing to geography the study of complex features formed by interrelated phenomena does not mean that the *relation* is the object of its study or the goal of the investigation. Nevertheless, neglecting the interrelations or connections means to confer geography the simple role of an encyclopedic compendium of less intellectual value, warns the author. For this reason, relations and connections must be thought of as vital elements that allow interpretation of the variable character of areas. The concept of spatial variation or differences between areas, thus directly depend on the notion of relation and connection. However, the variation of movements’ forms and features must be taken into consideration, not just in the context of interactions between different spaces – meaning the connections –, but also about what Hettner calls mutual relation established between different phenomena in the same area.

From this some question arises. Which relations must be considered? If geography is concerned with the variable character of areas and not with a specific object, then what should be understood? First of all, it is important to remember that, according to Hartshorne, area (or region) is the result of a delineation made by the researcher. As space, for Kant, is an a priori representation that allows the perception of external phenomena (Santos, 2002), region, for Hartshorne, is a precondition of external intuitions. In this sense, the nature of distinction is determined in the investigation process. The multiplicity of processes and mutual relations between phenomena in this area, as well as the connection between its phenomena with the phenomena from other areas, are too ample to be comprehended. It is impossible to grasp the total complex of interactions that take place in the same area. The path of choice clearly goes through observation but demands systematic and objective methods of selection. It is a fact that a wide variety of interrelated phenomena can draw the attention of the geographer since the selection and analysis depend on the researcher and the specific features of the variations. The choice of what to analyze, for this reason, is relative. Whereas the central concerned is upheld: interpreting the integrations between phenomena that vary from place to place, but aware that the interest for this variation stems from its significance for mankind. As Hartshorne well observes:

Any phenomenon is significant in geography to the extent and degree to which its interrelations with other phenomena in the same place or its interconnections with phenomena in other places determines the spatial variation of those phenomena, and thus the totality of areal variation, measured in respect to its significance to man. (1978, p. 50)

Furthermore, Hartshorne also advocates that all sciences are mere part of a corpus of knowledge. Each represents a view point. In this sense, the question that is put to geography, besides the type of variation that must be measured due to its significance for man, does not concern whether it should turn to the simpler or complex relations nor if it is systematic (general) or specific (regional). The dualism must be avoided because, according to the author, “there is a gradational range along a continuum from the studies which analyze the most elementary complexes in spatial variation over the world to those that analyze the most complex integrations in spatial variation within the limits of small areas” (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 129). The researcher “may be interested, in greater or lesser degree, in both generic and individual results” (p. 173). It must be kept in mind whether the goal is to obtain general conclusions or examine an individual case. In the former, the highlights are the topical studies, and in the latter, the regional studies, with a greater possibility of detailed local knowledge. Keeping this in view, if geography needs both types of studies, since it is partly nomothetics and partly idiographic, Hartshorne is right to say that there is little meaning in seeking to assess the relative importance of these two types. With this, he also attempts to overcome the dualism in geography – a harmful division for the development of the discipline – by articulating the scales of interpretation according to the nature of the integrations between phenomena chosen to grasp the comprehension of the variations.

A common concern among scholars is the formulation of generalizing concepts and scientific laws or the definition of a specific object of study for each science. Thus, the scientific value of geography is questioned by the fact that a significant part of their research is focused on the detailed knowledge of small areas. First, it is important to note that the knowledge of a great number of places is a real demand and the interest of many people. Second, if the quest for laws is the final purpose of a study, it is indisputably a dogmatic posture. As for

the requirement that a science possess a specific object of study, this will depend on the nature of the knowledge involved. That is why Hartshorne draws attention to the fact that, rather than trying to fit all kinds of knowledge in a single scientific standard, it is more useful to question what kind of science each one represents. Geography – devoted to the challenge of interpreting and explaining the variable character of the earth surface, he remarks –, assumes a fundamental role in the production of knowledge about the world and its areas. It is a science much more grounded on its own methodology rather than on specific objects. Making reference to Richthofen (1883), Hartshorne says that this geographer recognized early on “that geography could not claim a specific place in the world of science concerning any particular category of phenomena, but due to its point of view and its method” (1978, p. 32). As Claval notes (1981), based on this premise, Hartshorne advocates geography as a science-method, residing in that feature its difference from the majority of other disciplines.

The differentiation process represents the strength of the method in Hartshorne’s conceptions. However, as the author underlines, such concept is generally a target of criticisms not necessarily for its theoretical foundation, but rather “for what the critic merely infers through his interpretation of the words that constitute it” (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 13). For this reason, the term “areal differentiation” is often mistakenly labeled a mere description of or relapse into the neo-positivist model of analysis and interpretation. According to Hartshorne, the concept derives from a synthesis made by Richthofen of Humboldt’s and Ritter’s viewpoints and more fully demonstrated by Hettner. He chose to keep the expression, offering it a yet richer foundation because, in addition to being classic, it was adopted by a significant number of German geographers, some of whom are influenced by neo-kantianism. Perhaps due to this theoretical bond, Hartshorne has demonstrated more interest in the function of areas, rather than necessarily in the elements related, for example, to the processes emerging from the social relations of production.

It is worth underlining this point because, with regard to social reality, speaking of “difference” is indispensable but insufficient in relation to other dimensions which also need to be highlighted, such as inequality, since because it also represents a variable phenomenon from the spatial viewpoint– which nonetheless does not allow us to conceive

of it as a synonym of difference, but rather as a specific social relation in terms of how it affects society and through it is produced. Thus, as much as difference and variation are essential attributes of the phenomena, especially of the human ones, it is necessary to highlight the extent to which these concepts allow to study the human reality and to what extent they impose limits to the debate about the dimensions of society that geography simply cannot afford not to consider.

Difference, functionality e inequality: still an issue

Differentiation, as shown above, represents a path that enables us to understand the variable character of areas. It is true that Hartshorne has drawn attention to the integration of phenomena in their fundamentally human aspects, which can be evidenced in his analysis of functional regions or in his article entitled “The Functional Approach in Political Geography” (Hartshorne, 1950). The functional conception that gives emphasis to the role of internal and external forces in the organization of a particular territory also sheds light on the relations between phenomena of different regions. Drawing on this reasoning, Hartshorne grounds the concept of functional region, which, once again, brings to light the role of relations. The functional region, warns the author, does not mean “a descriptive generalization of the character of an area, but the expression of a process-relational theory. [...] Each functional area has specific size, shape, structure, and configuration of internal movements of its own.”(Hartshorne, 1978, p. 144-145)

It is worth mentioning the emphasis given to the functionality of regions because, in addition to being an advance in the discussions about the dynamics of the areas, the human aspects remain at the core of the problem. However, if the relations underscored by Hartshorne include essentially human aspects, the effort to understand the variable character of the earth surface poses a question related not only to the notion of difference or distinction but also of inequality. This should be discussed because those notions cannot be treated as synonyms, particularly in the condition of concept. Moreira (1999) notes that difference in geography, particularly under Hartshorne’s perspective, is differentiation. In this regard, the discussion has moved away from its ontological meaning, approaching much more of an analysis of the difference between entities,

rather than necessarily the being of these entities. This obviously has put differentiation as a result of the multiple phenomena variations, even of social character. Lacoste's (1988) concept of differential spatiality is an example. For this reason, although some situations fall perfectly within the idea of difference or distinction, others require more coherent concepts, like inequality, more adequate to illustrate the processes triggered by social relations of production, which are very well discussed by Lefebvre (1973). In many cases, however, inequality is treated as a specific type of difference, which is incorrect, both from etymological and conceptual viewpoints.

Barros argues that inequality and difference "are not necessarily interdependent notions, although they may preserve well-defined relations in the interior of certain social and political systems" (2006, p. 200). Inequality is related to *being* or *having*, *i.e.*, holding more wealth, more freedom, more rights or privileges, whereas, the difference is more related to *being* (being black, woman, etc.), which is also true for objects and phenomena. For instance, regarding the spatial domain, the difference also concerns the ontological condition of how the phenomena are interrelated and characterize an area as unique. The poles of difference are not necessarily contradictory like in the case of inequality. Capital concentration and centralization, for example, bring as a consequence the spatial inequality regarding the transfer of value from one region to another, as noted by Viana (2000). Evidently, this process involves a set of relations that explains the region or area as a political arena where groups of stakeholders impose their actions, as observed by Arrais (2207).

For this reason, in the context of social relations of production, inequality is a production/imposition, a feature that characterizes it as eminently circumstantial and historical. It is important to underscore this point because even if its ideological sense makes us think differently, inequality is reversible. On the other hand, in most cases, difference is irreversible, what circumscribes it to the interpretation and not necessarily the transformation level. In accordance to Barros, that is why the social struggles "are generally not directed to abolish differences, but to abolish or minimize inequalities." (2006, p. 201) This poses a new challenge to science because, when it is merely devoted to interpret the phenomena, it reaffirms inequality within the context of irreversibility and, in fact, begins to mistake it for a synonym of difference.

Admittedly, the concept of difference does not only concern human diversity in their ontological facets. It also falls within the scope of social relations and the changing character of areas. Many authors, like Ortis (1994) and Brah (2006), refer to cultural and social differences. Though, it is also true that the problem of relations between phenomena, mostly the social ones, often essentially concerns inequality and not necessarily difference. Difference and inequality, in this sense, are complex notions. Its usage is related to the researcher's viewpoint or political stand and, evidently, entails a reflection effort because many situations require even other concepts. But there can also be situations that demand the capacity to articulate them both, *difference* and *inequality*, like those which involve social segregation or even the issues emerging from territorial modernization. In these situations, some reasons actually permeate the mutual relations and connections between phenomena, but particularly through a dialectics that involves the relations between form and social processes.

As much as there is a variable character of areas due to the interrelationship between these phenomena and between these areas, the way how they are created and enhanced by individuals and/or social groups – e.g., through implementation of technical networks and technological and infrastructural elements – make these areas essentially unequal because “this is done in order to ensure progress to certain groups and, at the same time, to deny this same progress to other groups”(Castilho, 2014, p. 193). This fact allows us to say, as I have stressed in other work, that the development of technical networks necessarily create privileged spaces (or privileges of space) to meet the demands of certain groups that, because of this, also occupy privileged positions: “The formation of these spaces through technical networks, consequently, is the outcome of spatial inequality and not necessarily of spatial differentiation”(Castilho, 2014, p. 194).

As a result of a special type of relation, in the case of social relations of production, inequality is in fact constituted as a category of variation. But it cannot be conceived merely as a cognizable reality limited to the researcher's mental capacity. It is true that the path of analysis on the variable character of the earth surface proposed by Hartshorne –which is the result of the influence from German geographers but also of the progresses made by the author – enables interpreting fundamental

contradictions. However, this proposal did not aim at a theory to overcome them. It means that, from the theoretical and methodological point of view, the problem is not Hartshorne giving priority to this or that concept, but how his theory allows approaching a certain subject matter.

Hence, if there is integration of phenomena in the essential elements of difference, there also exist relations and social processes in the circumstantial elements of inequality. Some integration of phenomena is a real source of differentiation, although some social processes create inequality at a fundamental level, not only difference.

Final Considerations

The geographical thought is of those that are under construction. Limited as it is any other disciplinary field, it is impossible to imagine when and how it will be concluded. It is precisely this attribute that justifies the continuity of doubts and problems. Undoubtedly, Hartshorne was one of the thinkers who placed great emphasis on the evolutionary feature of geography, which is why his work is viewed by Capel (2012) as one of the obvious displays of the historicist conception of geography.

For Hartshorne, the construction of this knowledge cannot be accomplished without considering the nature that hails from its tradition. In addition to systematizing the notions created by classical geographers and proposing to overcome the dualism in this discipline, Hartshorne places emphasis on time in geography – on the contrary to what is assumed by the criticism that attributes negligence with the temporal dimension to his propositions. In the author's words, "the geographers study the past not just as a key to the present, but also due to its own geographic content" (Hartshorne, 1978, p. 90). What he notes, however, and from it may occur the confusion, is the fact that geography is interested in the studies of variable integrations since the center of the attention "remains to the character of the areas, which varies as a result of certain processes, in contrast to the historical interest for the methods themselves" (p. 114).

Even though the observations made in this article elicit questions about some concepts in Hartshorne's work, they do stress the importance of his theory and its undeniable contribution to the study of geographical thought. The advocacy for a geography defined by a method of its own,

carried out by authors very well assimilated and disseminated by Hartshorne, still attains significance at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As much as very expressive concepts and categories in the context of contemporary geographical studies are not exactly those proposed by Hartshorne, and as much as they are constructed by paths distinct from those which influenced the author, they do not fail to translate the strength of the method or the quest for its own point of view on geography. Furthermore, when I point out the two quite prominent notions in Hartshorne's *oeuvres*, relation and connection, I am drawing attention to the importance given to integration and to the fact that the reality envisioned by geography forms a whole. I hope this brief discussion is an invitation to the study of this author's works, above all considering their importance to geography, but also the need for their contextualization and overcoming, even because an investigation posture is developed in the tension between tradition and new questionings. If Hartshorne understands that "geography is what geographers do" (1978, p. 8), it is to say that it also means what of it continues to be done.

Endnotes

2 Because his studies were related to political geography, during World War II, Hartshorne served as director of the Geographical Division of the Department of Research and Analysis at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the US intelligence service in that period (Martin, 1994).

3 Uniqueness, in this sense, means the combination of phenomena – different, for instance, from the conception of French geographers (like Paul Vidal de La Blache) that are concerned with the unique character of areas, when referring to them as "individuals" (Hartshorne, 1951).

4 In the scope of this discussion, Wardenga and Harvey (1998) advocate that Hettner dealt more with the theory of geographic representation rather than necessarily with a methodology for geographical research. Therefore, stating that geography, in Hettner's conception, represents the science of areal differentiation is precipitous – even if he has indeed explored this concept in depth. That is because the aim of his chorological perspective is concerned with the character of the area, not the method.

5 This passage appears in Thomas F. Glick's report (1985) about the crisis of geography at Harvard University. On this occasion, a committee had been created to analyze the meaning and role of the discipline at the institution. Important scholars in American geography were invited to offer their contributions on the subject, including Hartshorne. However, of the eight members of the committee only one was a geographer, Edward Ullman, who furnished important reflections about geography. Glick (1985) noted that the context, debates, and positions from both Harvard professors and guests turned these committee internal documents into an important source for the study of the history of American geography.

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