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# ***Integral Cooperative, socio-productive organicity and self-managed governance: exploring confluences, possibilities and limits for the construction of a self-management sustaining territory***

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## **Abstract**

The present article is inserted in the intersection between fields of territorial and organizational studies; thus, it explores the historical-geographical possibilities and the structural-systemic limits of emancipatory initiatives, notably from an extension program carried out in a traditional community. The aim of this article is to analyze the elements contributing to self-managed territorial governance implementation by articulating self-managed governance, socio-productive organicity and integral cooperative concepts. The construction of integral cooperative Quilombarras, in *quilombola* community Barra da Aroeira, Tocantins State, is the study's empirical field. It is a theoretical composition based on the echo of a case study, within a methodological path that has added action research from the critical-dialectical perspective. Based on the results, the self-managed territorial governance horizon requires the confluence of elements expanding the community's political governance in order to be achieved, as well as the construction of social relationships linked to productions backed up by a socio-productive organicity system in view of territory sustainability, together with the expansion and adequacy of productive forces constituting it.

**Keywords:** *Quilombola* community. Integral cooperative. Socio-productive organicity. Self-management governance. Self-sustaining territory.

**Cooperativa integral, organicidade socioprodutiva e governança autogestionária:  
explorando confluências, possibilidades e limites para a construção de um território  
sustentável**

**Resumo**

Inserido na interseção entre os campos de estudos territoriais e organizacionais, este artigo explora as possibilidades histórico-geográficas e os limites estruturais-sistêmicos de iniciativas emancipatórias, notadamente a partir de um programa de extensão realizado em uma comunidade tradicional. Ao articular os conceitos de governança autogestionária, organicidade socioprodutiva e cooperativa integral, o artigo objetivou analisar os elementos que contribuem para a instituição de uma governança territorial autogestionária. O campo empírico foi a construção da cooperativa integral Quilombarras, da comunidade quilombola Barra da Aroeira, localizada no estado do Tocantins. Trata-se de uma composição teórica a partir das reverberações de um estudo de caso, dentro de um percurso metodológico que agregou pesquisa-ação com a perspectiva crítico-dialética. Os resultados mostram que o horizonte da governança territorial autogestionária, para ser alcançado, requer a confluência de elementos que ampliem a governança política da comunidade, bem como, a construção de relações sociais de produção lastreadas em um sistema de organicidade socioprodutiva à vista da sustentabilidade do território, em conjunto com a ampliação e adequação das forças produtivas que o constituem.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunidade quilombola. Cooperativa integral. Organicidade socioprodutiva. Governança autogestionária. Território autossustentável.

**Organicidad cooperativa integral, socioprodutiva y gobernanza autogestionada:  
explorando confluencias, posibilidades y límites para la construcción de un territorio  
sostenible autogestionado**

**Resumen**

Insertado en la intersección entre los campos de los estudios territoriales y organizacionales, este artículo explora las posibilidades histórico-geográficas y los límites estructural-sistémicos de las iniciativas emancipatorias, en particular a partir de un programa de extensión realizado en una comunidad tradicional. Articulando los conceptos de gobernanza autogestionaria, organicidad socioprodutiva y cooperativa integral, el artículo tuvo como objetivo analizar los elementos que contribuyen a la institución de la gobernanza territorial autogestionaria. El campo empírico fue la construcción de la cooperativa integral Quilombarras, de la comunidad quilombola Barra da Aroeira, ubicada en el estado de Tocantins. Se trata de una composición teórica a partir de las reverberaciones de un estudio de caso, dentro de un recorrido metodológico que sumó la investigación-acción con una perspectiva crítico-dialéctica. Los resultados muestran que el horizonte de la gobernabilidad territorial autogestionaria, para ser alcanzado, requiere de la confluencia de elementos que amplíen la gobernabilidad política de la comunidad, así como la construcción de relaciones sociales de producción sustentadas en un sistema de organicidad productiva en vista de la sostenibilidad del territorio, junto con la expansión y adecuación de las fuerzas productivas que lo constituyen.

**Palabras clave:** Comunidad quilombola. Cooperativa completa. Organicidad socioprodutiva. Gobernanza autogestionada. Territorio autosuficiente.

## **1 Introduction**

If it is true that all social organizations need some sort of domination in order to keep the least cohesion possible, and to reproduce it (WEBER, 2012), but democracy itself can be featured as a way of domination (BENINI et al., 2019), when one has in mind the creation and reproduction of geographic and social

environments, as well as the creation of institutions forming it. Reflections are often driven by questioning about structuring factors of human and social behavior, in other words, about measurement ways that connect material production to the awareness of the social being.

If one weighs that the social production of space is a determining matrix of sustainability conditions and social well-being of a given society or territoriality, it is essential understanding the association, interaction and interdependence dynamics between practices and routines substantiated by both productive social relationships and institutional/ideological structures that set its conditions. Moreover, they aim significant objective practices for the ontological transformation of the social being, or even to establish it (SOUZA & SANTOS, 1986; SANTOS, 2005, 2006; HARVEY, 2005, 2012; HAESBAERT, 2007; MÉSZÁROS, 2006; DARDOT & LAVAL, 2017).

Because the macro-social dynamics of economic development, or the simple productive investment, do not necessarily lead to development in a particular territory due to the anarchic, fragmentary and despotic condition of both the market and its economic agents, and to the dissolution of economic production. The planned and regulated production of space stops synergic processes favorable to the effective sustainability of geographic space or territory development, and of social well-being promotion of its inhabitants, i.e., for transition to a more effective and advanced civility standard (POLANYI, 2000; SANTOS, 2003).

Accordingly, based on historical induction, and by observing the macro challenges of present times, such as unemployment, destruction of ecosystems, social inequality and the standardization/institutionalization of market logics and degenerative competition in several dimensions of social life (DARDOT & LAVAL, 2017), or, yet, the fragmentation process among production, distribution and control (MÉSZÁROS, 2006), the reversed process in this scenario points out structuring dissociation, which would be (although based on a logical-deductive and experimental feature) the construction of a radically new socio-production organicity that would emerge either as feasible, at present times, or from the temporal perspective of transition and transformation.

It is within this context that the present study rises as attempt of this community's residents to build a sustainable and self-managed territory as object of study and epistemic problem, in order to answer the question about what are the determining variables to build a given territory in a provisory and dialectic way, i.e., in compliance with concrete reality - it must link emancipatory to sustainable practices. Yet, what are the elements and practices necessary to move towards the self-managed governance horizon (or self-management, in a broader sense) of a territory?

Accordingly, the aim of the present article was to analyze (based on practices of an extension process in a territorial community) elements that contribute to the implementation of a self-management territorial governance that takes into account their concrete historical-geographic possibility and structural-systemic limits. The aim was to describe the main structuring elements identified in the community by having in mind its organizations and constitutive institutions, as well as the tension set by the concrete reality observed as necessary structures implemented by the program. It was done to achieve the effective capacity of controlling the socio-metabolic production and reproduction dynamics, in other

words, self-management sustainability as element to even make socio-environmental sustainability feasible.

The adopted methodology followed the analytical composition design known as research-action, where one finds participatory research in a particular case that is driven by the critical-dialectical epistemic perspective. The conduction of an extension project in a *quilombola* community in Tocantins State was the empirical field of this study, which was carried out from June 2017 to December 2019. Meetings, informal chats and documents produced by the community, such as meeting minutes and Statutes recorded in the Board of Trade of Tocantins State (which refers to a Cooperative of the integral type recently created in the community) are the main elements of the empirical field, and this is the expression of a two-year collective construction.

Article exposition is organized as follows: right after this introduction, one finds exposure to research procedures; then, we discuss theoretical issues that challenge and guide an extension program, a feasible practice of self-determination constitution of associated workers in a given territory; discussion about the case study applied to the extension project known as “Sunbeams”; and the final consideration, social production of space: socio-productive organicity, self-managed governance and the construction of self-management sustaining territory.

## 2 Methodological approach

The adopted methodological approach followed the association between research and action (Thiollent, 1997), mainly due to multiple interactions between researchers and empirical-field participants, given the due theoretical critical/dialectical dialogue. Based on a collaborative procedure, it was possible identifying a situation/problematic territory depending on diagnostic and planning actions; therefore, it was possible formulating an action strategy towards the development of a relatively self-sustainable territory.

Participatory research was the mediating procedure resulting from research-action; it allows observing the natural systematized and intentional observation linked to the university extension project of the Solidary Economy Center of Federal University of Tocantins, whose coordinator is the author of the current article. Although the project remains under surveillance, when it comes to this study, visitations carried out between 2017 and 2019 were taken into account.

Besides the participatory observation inserted in the research-action scope, the research was substantiated by the analysis of documents related to the conduction of the extension project, which covers the practices, experiences and evaluation of results. Meeting minutes and statutes stood out among documents recorded in the Board of Trade of Tocantins State; they concern the Cooperative that was recently created in the community – it is the expression of a two-year collective construction, as mentioned in the introduction section, which was featured by its integrality and by inputs in its social and statutory expectations, either production elements or social reproduction. It is synthesized in its own official name, namely: *Cooperativa Multissetorial de Produção Agroecológica, Distribuição Solidária e Serviços Comunitários Quilombarras* (Multi-sectoral Cooperative of Quilombarras Agro-ecological Production, Solidary Distribution and Community Services).



In addition, the dialectical utopia (HARVEY, 2012) is used as methodological resource and reasoning reference. It is adopted to seek a more questioning and transforming practice of an adverse social reality driven by the association of a historical process (innovations in social-organization ways) with a geographic process (innovations in the ways to produce space), which is composed of and supported by both the critical understanding and the political construction of social emancipation. Thus, the dialectic utopia allows shining light on pro-change political strength as alternative counter-point to the destructive logic linked to the capitalist production mode in place, in its globalized stage.

### 3 Historical and theoretical fundamentals

According to Harvey (2005, 2012), Souza and Santos (1986), the social production of space is a determining matrix of sustainability and social well-being conditions in a given society or territoriality. However, historically, it is possible observing a given social production process that sets fragmentation structure among social control, productive organizations and interchange ways. This process has been generating damaging effects on both nature and the growing contingents of communities and peoples, a fact that imposes growing alienation processes (SANTOS, 2003. SINGER, 2003; MÉSZÁROS, 2006).

From this theoretical-argumentative perspective of social fragmentation and structural separation between production and control, between creation and conduction, and between owners and non-owners, one finds the dissolution between economic productive development, and societal and territorial organization development itself. It stops synergic processes that favor the effective sustainability of development and the promotion of social well-being. In other words, it is the sedimentation of a pathway and of a more effective and sustainable standard of civility. On the other hand, there is a reversed process focused on denying, although partially, the described structuring dissociation, which would point towards the structuring and systematization of an alternative organicity (integrated and non-sectary) composed of elements that can set new social production and property relationships (MÉSZÁROS, 2006. BENINI, 2012). Yet, as advocated by Dardot & Laval (2017), these elements can implement what is 'common'.

'Common' is herein understood as the political principal that catalyzes and drives new practices of thinking and acting in a cooperated and reciprocal way – it has been the object of intense dispute in the capitalist production mode. It is so, because 'common' presents a regime of experiences, struggles, institutions and research that highlight a future based on non-intensive capital, as well as on resources, and broadly shared and collectively managed relationships. Thus, it is possible observing that the political rationality of 'common' has inspired the search for new democratic ways, such as self-management and cooperation experiences that (based on principles and rules, set at community and territorial levels) determine new arrangements disregarded from governance (DARDOT & LAVAL, 2017).

As theoretical argument (although of provisional and logical nature), one finds that the **transition/way**, or act of **implementing**<sup>1</sup> (applied to the emancipatory and sustainable production of territories) come from their combination to critical resources, such as territory use and aim, water and power issues, articulation among housing, mobility and economic activities, and (in the very core of socio-political relationships) the organization and socio-technical direction of labor, which includes all structuring technical and political processes of labor rationality and aim.

Thus, given the herein stressed cognitive and epistemic challenges, from the theoretical perspective, it is observed that some analytical-conceptual clarification is essential to contextualize founding aspects of the on-going theoretical framework. Actually, it drives a collective construction that connects direct demands of a community and of nowadays historical questions – it is expressed in theoretical critics.

We herein understand **socio-productive organicity** as an organized production system lacking fragmentation or individualization. In other words, this is an organic system featured by patrimonial, economic and material integration capable of providing a higher or amplified level of allocations and resources' combinations, strength and productive capacity, as **common aggregate**. According to Dardot & Laval (2017), it is often observed in communities, settlements and community territories linked to economic production aspects due to social reproduction (BENINI, 2012).

This organic integration process (which understands and gathers production, circulation and socialization) can be exemplified through some organization experiences of associated work, which can be developed in the constitution context and in that of a network of solidary economic ventures (MANCE, 1999). Their practices often give up broader collaborative productive, community and territorial organization processes to make some incipient or founding elements of a self-managed governance structure feasible (BENINI, 2012), even if such practices were not yet successful in satisfactorily overcoming trade interchanges or its insufficient for productive forces (PINHEIRO & PAULA, 2015; BENINI & BENINI, 2015).

Self-management governance can be, somehow, featured by broader, and self-organization and self-determination processes experienced outside the 'company', which are shaped by workers themselves. Such a governance gathers associated labor and cooperative production ideas (NOVAES, 2011). This governance model is supported by the existence (and broadening) of collective property, within interchange/opposition to the private property (fragmented) of production means. Based on this model, workers hold possession of production means; therefore, the whole decision-making process takes places under the logic of councils and direct democracy (BENINI, 2012).

If one has in mind the exposed scenario (which, at the moment, stands out as ideal typology), the theoretical-practical challenge to those who lean over studies on new governance arrangements, and on labor processes, consists in associating the use of common/shared resources with consumption and production dimensions. These dimensions are based on real societal experiments that, in their turn, forge these new arrangements from the perspective of building a self-

<sup>1</sup> Within this text, we did not adopt the term 'implement' as synonym of institutionalization, but as objective founding practice that carry along shared subjectivities.

management sustaining territory capable of problematizing a double struggle: protection of territories and the possibility of achieving emancipated and sustainable social production and reproduction, based on these territories.

Accordingly, the defense and self-determination of territories (which is the proposition emerging from the associated work) rises as the very practice to make elements capable of overcoming limitations of economic and material fragmentation of the current cooperatives and workers' associations feasible (BENINI & BENINI, 2015).

Therefore, the act of thinking about the effectiveness of labor within the associated work and solidary economy context (SINGER, 2003) means realizing about the economic and symbolic relevance of territories to build their mediating and viable processes applied to alternative governance arrangements; in this case, a self-management governance. The addition of active decision-making to effective socio-productive construction (which is supported by cooperation and labor self-organization) can be observed throughout the herein analyzed case study. It is expressed by the self-determination of the territory itself, when workers put into practice their social existence. This is a significantly strategic finding for those willing to reason about the features and/or dimensions of self-management territorial governance at the time to regulate their endogenous resources and interchanges with other territories/resources.

Besides an isolated practice, the present study shines light on features important for the construction and feasibility of a self-management governance proposition substantiated by ideas (or even by historical needs) about organic property, and social and productive self-organization (BENINI, 2012). These ideas are found in the very core of the territory and in the use of its symbolic and material resources. One gives birth to an agenda focused on 'construction' in order to formulate public policies in favor of such construction and of its boosters by addressing a propositional articulation among alternative governance arrangements, self-management and a socio-productive organicity system (BENINI, 2017).

It is worth highlighting some theoretical reflections that have already pointed out the relevance of territorial dimension as strategic element to give rise to an effective agenda of social transformation. By giving the classical contribution to substantive economies (those whose development results from a rooting system expressed by social relationships in their environments), Polanyi argues that:

Labor and land are nothing more than human beings themselves, and with them one finds all societies and the natural environment [...]. Including them in the market mechanism means subordinating the substance of society itself to market laws (2000, p. 93).

This excerpt helps pointing out most of the herein elaborated arguments, mainly when it comes to the construction of a self-sustaining territory.

Polanyi (2000) puts the possibility of thinking about an alternative production mode at perspective (and, with it, an alternative economy): "land is an unexplainable element entangled to the institutions of man" (p. 214). The concrete experience clarified by the case study, under the form of integral cooperative, gathers in different knowledge types and in the associated-work and self-organized process. These features result from the very territorial process, in which cultural, social and productive relationships get connected to each other.



Besides its functional and geographic dimension (HARVEY, 2012), the territory can also emerge as resistance space due to the global logic of technical progress, which is regulated by a technicality centered in capital valuing. This process is associated with new precarious forms of labor relationships in its very core; from this perspective, one can observe that:

The territory is the ground and the population, i.e., it is an identity, a fact and the sense of belonging to what belongs to us. The territory is the basis of labor, resistance, material and spiritual exchanges, and life; and it has influence over them (SANTOS, 2003, p. 47).

Similarly, there is theoretical articulation aimed at understanding strategic processes to classify on-going labor intentions based on experiences lived in, and with, the territory

It concerns [...] the local productions of a slid integration gotten from internal horizontal solidarities whose nature is either economic, social and cultural, or geographic. The survival of the whole set, it does not matter whether different agents had different interests, depends on this exercise of solidarity, which is essential for labor and gives visibility to common interest (SANTOS, 2000, p. 109-110).

Oftentimes, excerpts linked to on-going work acknowledge the importance of building more organic and socially fair structuring economic development processes based on the self-sustaining territory inserted in this horizon. The territory covers the sum of cultural identity to natural, cultural, historical and economic components. It is a becoming, since it is the product of human relationships' history. Territoriality, in its turn, is linked to interdependence specific of the economic life; it is the mere location of activities that cannot be defined

[...] territoriality, besides embodying a more strictly political dimension also concerns economic and cultural relationships, since it is closely linked to the way people use land, as they get organized in the space and as they give meaning to the place (HAESBAERT, 2007, p. 22).

Thus, if all 'becoming' has a through production system that is later materialized, it is possible identifying and symbolizing the territory. Moreover, it is closely linked to a broader sense that goes beyond the production sphere and other functional matters. It is linked to the symbolic need, itself: territory has a shape and a content, it is built from the human use in time and space (SANTOS, 2003).

Moreover, territory is multi-dimensional, because it sets several relationships among nature, economy, politics, culture, and others. Given such a configuration, territory determines the space; therefore, it interferes with other structures of society. Territory is a space for resistance where the institutional and managerial arrangements, based on subjects who build it, are shaped by an equally territorialized logic (HARVEY, 2011).

If one takes possession of a given territory, it is likely mobilizing natural and human resources in an organic and articulated way, for economic and political purposes (HARVEY, 2005). Thus, based on the herein proposed molds, the self-management sustaining territory exceeds the geographical-spatial dimension. It shines light on key structuring matters yet to be applied in order to think about a governance model that makes territorial autonomy and the construction of new

sociability spaces, based on self-management and organic production in the sphere of an effectively shared social richness (BENINI, 2012).

From the perspective of territory as result from power relationships, the sum of territoriality seems to set promising dialogues about the development of the present article: “people together create culture and, in parallel, [they] create a territorialized economy, a territorialized culture, a territorialized discourse, a territorialized politics” (SANTOS, 2000, p. 144).

The construction of a labor matrix, which is aggregated in an associated, equitable and self-managerial way (wherein there is no separation between the ownership of labor means), is a historical space also set as reaction to collateral and damaging effects of wage labor (alienation, precariousness and unemployment). Moreover, it is enriched by a new project or emancipatory perspective of sociability (SINGER, 2003. NOVAES, 2011. BENINI & BENINI, 2015).

According to Santos (2006, p.14), “territory is the fundamental of labor; the place of resistance, of material and spiritual exchanges, and of exercise of life”. In other words, production relationships are immersed in the daily life of individuals who form and give meaning to territory, based on mediations and complex significations that often need proper structures and organization adjusted to reality.

It is worth highlighting that it was in this very double movement – i.e., the decrease in the availability of wage labor positions and the search for alternatives to generate job positions and income – that the so-called solidary economy emerged (SINGER, 2003). This economy is formed by a set of social companies, such as cooperatives and formal and informal associations, which are often typically identified as Solidary Economic Enterprises (SEE) (GAIGER, 2003).

Its differential would actually lie on overcoming the wage-labor good condition, which is qualified as associated labor in distributive solidarity, in comparison to conventional companies. From this perspective, it is possible promoting (or, at least, pointing out such structuring purpose) productive processes focused on the value of use, since this is the condition from which consumers’ well-being and socio-environmental balance gains relevance (it also puts itself on the horizon of being a future associate).

However, SEE, based on Benini (2012), needs second-order mediations typical of, and adjusted to, the emancipatory and agglutinated project of societal self-management. One finds the proposition of building new ownership, labor, production, distribution and socialization relationships, based on the application and gathering of a social self-management, or even societal (self-determination of society as an integrated set), project range (self-determination in social relationships) among a field of different criticisms, caveats, appointments and ideas for solidary economy.

By following the criticism elaborated by MÉSZÁROS (2002), who explains the historical need of a new socio-metabolism expressed as Organic Labor System (OLS), the basis for a communal system, which is a likely institutional and organizational matrix to make a OLS concrete (BENINI, 2012), would be formed from three founding mediations: a) societal-character self-management; b) legal control of production means through the organic or common property of these means by associated workers in significant equality; and c) parametrized allocation and distribution mechanisms based on systemic origin income and on equitable

destination by bonding workers' income definition to the global product made available for consumers.

Due to such a mid-range purposeful framework, one observes the emergence of its initial implementation, which has practical and experimental nature (NÚCLEO DE ECONOMIA SOLIDÁRIA, 2016). The development of a socio-productive organicity methodology was used because of this search (BENINI et al., 2015), and it led to the elaboration of an organic, solidary and self-management development project linked to a university extension project, the so-called Sunbeam Project (NÚCLEO DE ECONOMIA SOLIDÁRIA, 2016).

#### **4 The trajectory to seek territorial self-management in a *quilombola* community**

At first, the Sunbeam Project emerged as the demand from the Landless Rural Workers Movement, also known as MST, in Tocantins State, to implement OLS based on a new rural agrarian-reform settlement. There were, at least, five meetings with the movement, and with its members, to design project details in 2015 and 2016. These meetings were the opportunity to elaborate a handbook about the methodology adopted in the Sunbeam Project (CENTRO DE FORMAÇÃO EM ECONOMIA SOLIDÁRIA, 2016). However, due to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, back in 2016, there was no political scenario favorable for the implementation of such a proposition in the agrarian reform context and on that of the respective governmental bureaus.

Subsequently, the proposition of building OLS through the Sunbeam project was debated at several meetings and activities proposed by the solidary economy movement in Tocantins State. The proposition reached a *quilombola* community in Barra do Aroeira due to its informal outspread during the meeting. The president of its association invited project managers to introduce the idea in the community, since some of its members were interested in it – it happened in February 2017. There were three workshops in the following months. At the end of this project, the community voted to join the project during an Assembly of its association, in June 2017.

The Sunbeam Project extension (which is managed by the Solidary Economy Center (2016) of Federal University of Tocantins) left the preliminary stage of elaborating a socio-productive organicity methodology to seek the means to the effective and experimental implementation of OLS in a territorialized community after its insertion in the community.

Accordingly, the program's actions have set partnerships with Tocantins' state government, with other universities and solidary-economy support and funding entities, as well as with family farmers to make the project feasible in the community. Chart 1 synthesizes the formed groups of workers and their respective aims.

Chart 1. Groups of workers in the Sunbeam Project

| Groups of work           | Aims                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legal                    | Elaborating the minute of an integral cooperative, based on options allowed by the legislation in force, but that can also be capable of embodying the measurements taken of an OLS                                                             |
| Management and logistics | Elaborating a complete project (construction and implementation) of the integral cooperative headquarters, as well as its basic management procedures.                                                                                          |
| Agro-ecology             | Diagnosing the productive potential and the elaboration of projects for the agro-ecological production in Barra do Aroeira Quilombo.                                                                                                            |
| Bio-construction         | Valuing, enriching and consolidating construction techniques to be applied to crude land in the community, as sustainable technology.                                                                                                           |
| Capture of resources     | Generating financial resources for the necessary investments (getting the production means) to implement and consolidate the integral cooperative.                                                                                              |
| Cultural formation       | Potentiating and enriching cooperation values and solidarity in the community, besides its symbolic resources, as well as broadening the concept and the practice of a collaborative and integrated labor mode, in other words, an organic one. |
| Territorial organization | Elaborating a sustainable direction plan for the territory based on detailed technical soil, biome, water resources, relief and anthropophytic interference                                                                                     |

Source: Elaborated by the authors

From this point onwards, several workshops, meetings and encounters with the technical team of the Project took place in the *quilombola* community of Barra do Aroeira. A socio-economic diagnostic of the community was elaborated at the stage to plan and form the groups. On average, during the monthly activities in the community, the work teams gathered the needs and ideas within a proposition to capture resources in order to get to a minimally acceptable level of necessary productive forces for both the territory and the cooperative's functioning.

Members of the solidary economy movement recommended the possibility of requesting investments in the project by the State Fund to Fight and Eradicate Poverty in Tocantins (FECOEP) due to this critical demand. It was a proposition by both Tocantins Secretariat of Agriculture and Agrarian Development (SEAGRO) and the Solidary Economy Center/UFT (its technical agent in charge). Moreover, a matrix of productive investments (also known as "Sunbeam Project") was elaborated on

March 8, 2018; it was presented to and approved by FECOEP council. These investments were seen as essential for removing the community from its vulnerability or direct submission imposed by the dominant socio-metabolism. The project's technical team has weighed that its weakest point would lie on getting the production means for associated workers; this is an essential factor for the exercise of a socio-productive organicity structure based on all its potential.

The Sunbeam Project was divided into four axes: management, logistics, agro-ecology and bio-construction. Its initial budgetary prediction was close to R\$3.5 million based on the version approved by FECOEP. It aimed at potentiating a 1000-ha *quilombola* territory to implement a territorial self-managed governance in transition to sustainability.

The project predicted a set of structuring investments focused on means of work to make such a governance viable. These means were shared in an articulated complex of constructions, vehicles, machines, equipment and in the construction of a certified flour house, i.e., it was supposed to cover all sanitation standards and demands. Moreover, it would also be the first social currency of Tocantins State; all of it would be seen in work flows and in the destruction of an organic socio-metabolic system that, in its turn, is organized and managed by the integral cooperative.

After such an approval, three new demands concerned the 2018/2019 biennium, so that investments financed by a public fund could benefit the community as long as this funding is well used. There was a direction plan for sustainable territory use and occupation, for the construction (in legal terms) of the integral cooperative, as well as for the embodiment of the logic of the integral cooperative by the community, and for the detailing of items to be acquired through public bidding.

A broad network of volunteer attorneys and experts in cooperativism was mobilized to build the integral cooperative, including the formation of a study team of scholars, and the support and guidance of two professors of UFT's Law School. It was possible getting to the minute of the cooperative's Social Statute after the search for different legal and institutional solutions capable of making OLS feasible through an integral cooperative (July 2018). Process' corollary took place in November 2018, when *Cooperativa Multissetorial de Produção Agroecológica, Distribuição Solidária e Serviços Comunitários QUILOMBARRAS* was launched in the *quilombo*. It was registered in the Board of Trade of Tocantins State in February 2019 after the process to make bureaucratic adjustments, which lasted few months, was concluded.

FECOEP resources were initially budged in an aggregated way; they were distributed into project intervention axes. Because the Brazilian bidding law demands deep detailing, it was also necessary counting on the volunteer work of project partners, with emphasis on the following axes: agro-ecology (purchase of permanent material and inputs), bio-construction (equipment and inputs), and management (building and equipping the headquarter of the cooperative and a distribution center). However, the new state government took office in 2019; but, it was only in July of this same year that the SEAGRO team started to develop a detailed application plan to, later on, provide the bidding process. Back on August 2019, details of the Agro-ecology and bio-construction axes had already been sent



to be bidding<sup>2</sup>. Details about the flour house (architectonic, hydraulic and electric project) depended on its geographic allocation in the territory in order to be concluded – such an allocation happened in March 2020. Constructions predicted in the project (400m<sup>2</sup> of constructed area in the managerial center and 20 bio-construction houses for members) depends on the hiring/bidding of elaboration services and on the follow-up of construction projects at the time to write this article<sup>3</sup>.

The Project counted on the volunteer work of approximately ten researchers and five scholars for *quilombola* territory planning, who have proceeded with the detailed analysis of water resources, soil, biome, environmental preservation areas, as well as work, housing and conviviality places, which are all aggregated in an urban center. It was a deep technical and participatory work, which lasted almost two and a half years.

It is worth highlighting the articulation of a socio-technical agenda adopted by the project along with the *quilombola* community. This process has contributed to the performance of strategic activities focused on organic and self-management production to create collective synergies and forces, besides valuing the territorial dimension as founding/structuring property of conducted activities. Actually, it was possible observing the concretization of a research-action that relevant theoretical issues run to (new socio-productive system), of immediate technical issues (adjustments in the current legislation, solutions to punctual water and power issues, among others) and of demands and needs of community residents who slowly embody the future condition of organically associated workers.

Different activities were carefully planned and prepared by technicians and partners of the extension program for QUILOMBARRAS cooperative to start fully operating. Everybody's expectation (team and community) lied on FECOEP investments, since, without this new productive and socio-metabolic configuration, the cooperative has been used to help trading the local production. It is also estimated that such a temporal distention helps the bidding process, which tends to exhaust all the conquered synergy and commitment. Thus, it is featured by the disruption and disregard of qualification and cultural formation actions taken in the community; therefore, it potentially tends to emerge as a new problem.

Accordingly, it is possible observing the community's political mobilization to struggle for the effective application of FECOEP resources approved in March 2018, which qualifies the very fight for the defense of its territory, based on self-knowledge of both its potential and effective demands for better life conditions.

As already addressed in this text, or, yet, as already outspread through OLS, the possibility of recovering the historical struggle for social and territorial emancipation based on power and effectiveness would lie on the collective construction of a socio-productive organicity and self-managed governance carried out by a given community in a common territory. It is highlighted that this collective construction process was organically qualified within a structuring fabric of **“political empowerment”**, based on observations the empirical field's sights and hands were guided to. It was done by placing the territory, over which one could observe the domination of the “common”, as the element founding and

<sup>2</sup> It did not happen until the time this article was written

<sup>3</sup> June 2020, up-dated in September 2022

implementing new routines and habits, as well as subjects from the clear perspective of autonomy and constructs of emancipatory alternatives.

Another fundamental point in OLS construction, which is also observed in concreteness, regards the recovery of productive forces and/or means necessary to be assessed by associated workers, when it comes to all limitations and functionality. Besides the essential concrete fact to start any material production, or yet, historical reparation to give the work its working conditions (snail's returning to its shell), it is also possible stressing a disrupted process of productive restructuring (although at micro level) from the clear perspective of socio-technical adequacy (NOVAES, 2011) along with the unique production in balance with the environment. It was based on the logics of seeking a circular economy to save natural resources and to generate well-being at work, in other words, the transition to sustainability. The construction of agendas and the technical detailing of items to be bid in FECOEP depict all richness of a joined construction between a broad theoretical knowledge (brought by the project's technical team) linked to the community's tacit and traditional knowledge.

Thus, when it comes to socio-technical elaboration, it is possible observing that OLS can embody a greater potential to generate work and income; in this case, associated work (at costs lower than that practiced by the market), it can be classified as social effectiveness. Yet, it would be possible, based on a socio-productive organicity structure, making it feasible to achieve the growing dynamics of both sharing resources and producing higher quality and/or longer life span goods (it would switch the market trend of obsolescence). This is a clear advance in sustainability (BENINI, 2012; BENINI et al., 2015; BENINI et al., 2017; NÚCLEO DE ECONOMIA SOLIDÁRIA, 2016; CENTRO DE FORMAÇÃO EM ECONOMIA SOLIDÁRIA, 2016), but such assumptions and perspectives would also need to have the opportunity to be put to the test through recovery due to public funding from productive forces.

## 5 Final considerations: from singular to universal?

The current article shone light on the possibility of building and applying precepts of an integrating societal self-management form through an experimental project of territorial-community organization, such as constructive strategy of new sociability structures and dynamics in favor of people's well-being and of the effectively rational use of natural resources.

It gathered deep theoretical knowledge on specific fields (such as agroecology, right, architecture, management and economy) and on the community's traditional knowledge. The Sunbeam project got to join relative consensus around a whole set of necessary institutions, including the construction of a new-type of social company expressed by an integral cooperative to the collective construction of a territory, which must be qualified as common good or shared resource for sustainable use and regulation.

In specific terms, and based on an extension project that includes several workshops, meetings, articulations and encounters of a technical team (in an innovative strategy of research-action in Barra da Aroeira *quilombola* community), it was possible making analyses as self-management territorial governance practices, even if at experimental stage. Potentially, they reinforce production emancipatory

processes, mainly based on socio-productive organicity, self-management governance and integral cooperative concepts.

Accordingly, the implementation of these self-management territorial governance practices in the herein assessed traditional community points towards an agenda that has in its horizon more sustainable labor processes that are in compliance with the preservation of local natural resources and with the solidary inclusion and collaborative production of its residents. Such intentions, demands and needs have formed a clear propositional agenda that shines light on the critical points to be claimed by society, in general, and by particular public policies.

Nevertheless, despite the possible projected rational and ideal development, the functionality issue and the structural limits imposed by the metabolic macro-system of the capital, which are observed in the herein described case and understood as structural limits, also highlight the need of articulating the associated work at higher political, and economic aggregation and intensification levels or, yet, as active resistance space and the possible libertarian subversion in multiple territories and productive dimensions.

If, somehow, the statement that the transition to sustainability depends on reorienting life material production aims – according to which accumulation is only for few people – is valid, it must be replaced by an equitable and fair distribution. In case the production logics heads to social well-being, the use of new technologies (along with new production and consumption standards) is articulated in a synergy that adds socio-political effectiveness, based on economic efficiency; i.e., on a new production and distribution mode.

If one takes into account the possibility and legitimacy of this trajectory, then, the transition to an effective sustainable existing standard is also a transition to a new socio-metabolism. It may require the composition of workers' integrated social inclusion and the recovery of self-management social control of labor means/resources. At this point, a social-transformation political process is rising.

Thus, political articulations, and support to entities and groups of interest, are featured as strategic to the accumulation of forces, to the maintenance and broadening of actions taken in the territory, or to an intra-territorial composition due to challenges imposed by structures of the capital's socio-metabolic system.

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