

"PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY" REVISITED, BY PAUL VIDAL DE LA BLACHE¹

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Abstract

This text seeks to accomplish a brief analysis and discussion of the importance of the book "Principles of Human Geography" by Paul Vidal de la Blache, published in 1922. For this, the reading of the main work and other texts was carried out dealing with contributions from La Blache to world geographical science, and more specifically, to the Brazilian Geography. Right now, it is important to recognize the role of this thinker about the geographical space and ways of life of the populations studied by him and, consequently, influence and stimulate the intellectual production of other exponents thinkers of the world's geography in ancient times until the present day.

Keywords: Paul Vidal de La Blache, Human Geography, Way of Life.

REVISITANDO "PRINCÍPIOS DE GEOGRAFIA HUMANA", DE PAUL VIDAL DE LA BLACHE

Resumo

Este texto busca realizar uma breve análise e discussão da importância da obra "Princípios de Geografia Humana", de Paul Vidal de La Blache, publicada em 1922. Para isso, foi realizada a leitura da obra principal e de outros textos que tratam das contribuições de La Blache para a ciência geográfica mundial e, mais especificamente, para a Geografia brasileira. Desde já, é importante reconhecer o papel deste pensador sobre o espaço geográfico e os modos de vida das populações estudadas por ele e que, conseqüentemente, influenciaram e estimulam a produção intelectual de outros pensadores expoentes da Geografia mundial em tempos passados e até os dias de hoje.

Palavras-chave: Paul Vidal de La Blache, Geografia Humana, Modo de Vida.

THE SPEECH, THE VISION AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF LA BLACHE

Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) made indelible contributions to the advancement and consolidation of Geography as a science that sought his claim on the other social sciences, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. He was deeply devoted to establishing and pointing out the importance of what he called Human Geography. To this end, he spared no effort and no spare time to leave marked its presence in the epistemology of the discipline which is greatly in debt to this great scientist for its consecration as a science.

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With French origin and formed a historian, La Blache launched himself in an attempt to observe the world, an attempt that only the great scientists make about what they are spying, particularly in Europe, to understand the relationships between men, their environment and their interactions. Sometimes turning them, sometimes adapting them. The empirical, the observation, the description regarding the study of the environment and then drawing conclusions undoubtedly are important aspects in his work, but this fact does not rule out but only enriches the observation and description the author builds his theoretical and methodological framework on. Paulo Cesar Gomes (2010), when analyzing, not specifically a single work, but several postulates of Vidal de la Blache as a whole and its way of understanding and doing science in his time, warns that this scientist was not restricted to describing the reality, he also created categories, interconnected general notions which are the very basis of his theoretical discourse. Among these categories stand out the way of life, the environment and human action.

His work here treated, is of great relevance to geography, not only for its historical dimension and its consolidating as a classic work, but also by the still lingering validity of its assumptions discussed in it, saved some inaccuracies, generalizations and vision the world from his time in his room, particularly the European and French.

According to Paul Claval in the preface of the book "Vidal, Vidais" organized by Haesbaert, Pereira and Ribeiro (2012), it was from him that the French school received its principles and guidelines, which reflected the great influence to the development of geography in Brazil consequently, Vidal de La Blache has directly and indirectly contributed to the formation and consolidation of geographical thought in this country.

After these brief considerations, we highlight one of his great systematization, which was never even by him completed and published, as only after his death "Principles of Human Geography" was published in 1922 by Emannel of Martonne, who warns that much of the work was constructed from manuscripts and the thought obtained from La Blache fragments. However, that formed a homogeneous whole, some incomplete, other topics were underdeveloped, but by no means invalidates the value of such work. To Martonne would be really unfortunate deny geographers advantage of efforts, hard long years were spent by the author in order to clarifying and defining the principles of Human Geography, which he studied.

The preface of "Principle of Human Geography" is signed by Fernandes Martins, who points out that:

(...) the march of humanity, march that has the cadence of a group of gymnasts on parade, before is characterized by rhythm variations, by pauses or sudden advances – and that, in space – here already guess a criterion geographical – and in time, causing varied nature of contingencies or reflecting influences as variables of the physical environment (LA BLACHE, 1954, p. 5).

In this fragment already stands out with what the work itself will deal with, that is, the reciprocal influences between the environment and man and man and the environment. The man seen as a means of transformation agent, whose object of study would be the earth. La Blache was not intended this work to explain the organization and even the evolution of human societies but men as the transformation of the agents.

The book is presented in three parts: "The distribution of men on the globe", "The forms of civilization" and "Circulation", and also contains a topic of text fragments that ends the work; and each chapter, preceded by an introduction in which the author deals with the meaning and purpose of the Human Geography, in which geographical work then would begin from the human intellect.

The general introduction of the work, La Blache already makes explicit the need for communication and the importance of the exchange of science. It criticizes the isolation to which far sciences are restricted. Another very relevant factor pointed out in this part of the book is the beginning of terrestrial unit that would be the guiding element of all his work, which for most historians and sociologists geography does not matter if not an advisory capacity. For the author, these professionals leave the man to get to the man; it represents Earth as the scene unfolds the activity of man, without reflecting that the scene itself has life.

In this sense, the author is emphatic that the central idea that should dominate in Geography is the ground unit, whose parts are coordinated and obey the laws. To this end, highlights the Geography Botany as the largest contributor to the notion of the environment was brought into focus at this point, we can see the influence in the Natural Sciences, when treating geography as such. The highlight would be for Alexander Von Humboldt in the study of physiognomy of the vegetation, the characteristics of a landscape, which is the most significant mark of a region. The evolution and adaptation would not be restricted to plants, but also to men, who are gifted with intelligence and react better against the adversities imposed by the environment.

When the author talks about the man and the environment, he affirms that even the most remote societies, not only were influenced, but exercised great changes also influencing the living world. Sometimes the environment was an obstacle, sometimes a potential

generator, never decisive. La Blache does not oppose man to his physical environment and vice versa, and does not distinguish between natural science and human science, the interdisciplinary character is a legacy of his contributions to Modern Geography.

The migrations, the contact between different people and the contribution of those people, according to the author, to better instrumentation of man. In this context, La Blache does not argue about aspects often impositions and destructive contacts, as were European settlements in the New World, only highlights the positive aspects that have contributed to greater heterogeneity of what he called solidarity needs, pointing Gypsies as an exception to such contact rule. It is evident on this aspect certain "congratulating" of the author on colonization and warns that if nature impose rigid frames the glory brought by colonization would not be possible.

In the first chapter, "The distribution of men on the globe," the author writes about the distribution of men on the globe and presents it as unequal and anomalous, given the characteristics of areas of concentration and dispersion. To these factors the actor assigns the combination of several variables, not just the physical, but also the very human contingencies overcome the adversities imposed by the physical environment, in this case, as well as the way of life⁵ is influenced by the environment, it also influence, wherein the bit technique to leave little more free of such influences, as the construction of residences (figure 01).



Figure 01: Housing on stilts (palafita) of New Guinea Papuans
Source: La Blache (1954)

⁵ Is necessary to emphasize that in the original text, in french, La Blache presents the category "genre de vie", but the translation into portuguese, Emmanuel De Martonne considered more convenient to adopt the term "way of life" without prejudice to understanding (LA BLACHE, 1954, p. 39; SILVA, 2006).

To Geography not fit to understand the beginning, but the end of the long human evolution. The man would be a geographical factor and, within these frameworks, La Blache reveals their evolution influences of Darwin. Also highlights the various differences between human groups around the globe, but are the similarities and convergences of remote areas that arouse his attention. There would be a common primitive background, and the highlight would be the use of fire. He claimed that even in ancient times man has never been fully servant of natural conditions, hence its propensity to modify it, with the domestication of animals and the planting of grains in the fires, which would be universal forms in primitive cultures.

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The geographical value of man would be in the group because it is through this that gives the work in the earth's surface. Thus, a load factor and density in very remote areas would be linked to the invasion and war states that pushed human groups to new areas, as happened with the Indians from the Amazon, which withdrew from the great river's edges, for it came to their depredations, occupying less accessible valleys. The density was then linked to the repression or concentration and this link would be the technical field which would facilitate the achievement of the soil and contribute to the overpopulation. But the overcrowding would generate migration, given the environmental conditions that could become limited. So the detachment of the people came to contribute to greater human occupation of space, breaking the isolation of many people who increasingly are exceptions, otherwise the fate of mankind would be paralysis.

The geographical location and the combination of imposed natural factors would be important factors for the emergence of large agglomerations such that the favorable climate of the number of plants quickly realize its cycle, abundant fresh water as in tropical and subtropical climates would be facilitators for human settlements. As large agglomerations La Blache highlights Africa, Asia and Europe (figure 02).

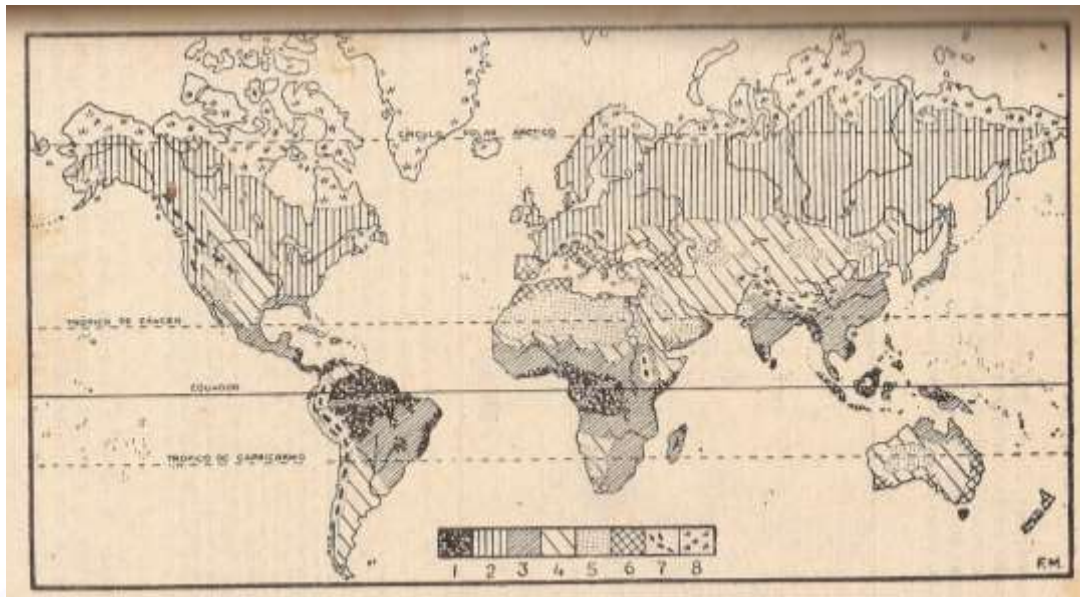


Figure 02: The conditions of the environment. (Phyto-geographical regions) - 1. Equatorial Forest. 2 - Temperate Rainforest. 3 - Savannah. 4 - Steppe. 5 - Desert. 6 - Mediterranean Vegetation. 7 - High Mountain Vegetation. 8 - Tundra

Source: La Blache (1954)

For each of these regions natural factors were added to human skills, related to fisheries, agriculture, good use of resources offered by the environment, overcoming adversity, also imposed by that same medium, added to the dexterity and human capacity that generated quite advanced and diversified ways of life. Thus, there were several factors that combined could interfere with the way of life of people, such that the progress and changes in economic relations, which resound directly in populations. Importantly, changes in economic relations would be linked to the development of trade between the different peoples.

In the second part of the book, Vidal de La Blache highlights to forms of civilization that would be linked to the solidarity that unites the things and beings, saying that man is part of a linkage between the men themselves and in their relations with what surrounds this sense, it is at the same time, active and passive, that is not easy to determine, in most cases, it will be the extent to which one or the other. Thus, the needs of the environment are imposed on the creative power of man, in which the natural conditions such as climate, latitude, altitude interfere in the physical and biological characteristics of the man himself, but also in their behavior, but never determine their actions. On the contrary, what prevails with the progress of civilization, which progresses, are the forms of social groupings outbound originally collaboration of nature and men, but increasingly emancipated from the direct influence of the media.

To La Blache, man has created for himself lifestyles with the help of materials and taken environmental elements and could not at once, but by a hereditary transfer of proceedings and inventions constitute anything from orderly to him ensure the existence and organized her a half for your use. In his analysis, the author notes that the man hunter, fisherman or farmer is all because of a combination of instruments that are his personal work, his achievement, that is, that which gathered for its initiative to creation.

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On these prospects, in addition to natural conditions, the author attributes the social factor to the formation of complex ethnic groups, and the imitation and contact with the neighborhood would work for the construction of new mentalities that even disrupt the ethnic incompatibility, making a forecast for what would become humanity, says the syncretism as future brand of societies.

The statement of ways of life would be linked to the construction of certain tools by different people, which La Blache called ethnographic museum and conditions of the environment where they live (physical and biological). Thus, the medium matters and provide natural conditions for the formation of life. In this case, the construction of houses was very important for humanity, which initially housed in caves to protect themselves from predators and the fact that initially the individuals were nomads. The beginning of vegetable cultivation and animal husbandry enabled the man to settle in one place for a longer period of time and with own resources found at the site were creating more complex dwellings, even if rudimentary to the present day, but that over time, improved. To this end, resorted to the use of various resources such that clay, wood, stone, metal and even ice. Obviously, these uses were directly linked to the natural conditions of the place, highlighting: the land - in Arid Zone; stone – in the Mediterranean region; wood and stone – in Central and Western Europe and; wood – in Northern Europe (figure 03).



Figure 03: A chalet pastors in Tatra (Central Europe)
Source: La Blache (1954)

Thus, for La Blache, offered through the circumstances contributed to the emergence of various kinds of cultural specialization and also the appearance of a great diversity of "races". These would be linked to insulation factors or miscegenation, where would some more than others, given their capacity to adapt to the environment, while other, more "inferior", did not have such facilities. To justify that conclusion the superiority of certain races, the author cites the example of black people that has greater advantage of adaptation to tropical climates. And, were thus differentiating people in its various aspects, such that the use of resources, different eating habits, utensils used for hunting, for fishing, their dwellings and tools, among other differentiating factors and condition superiority or inferiority of "races" (figure 04).

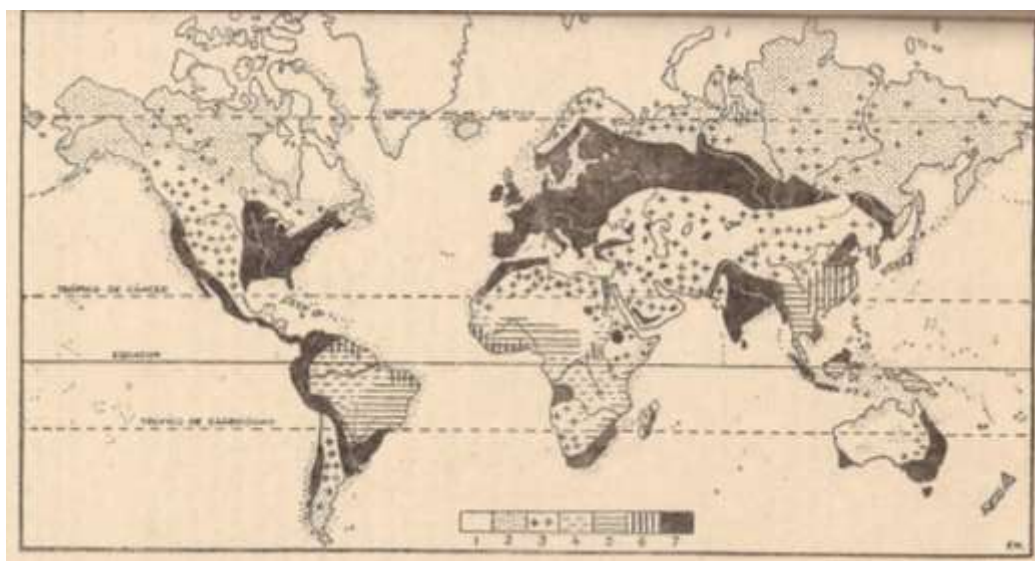


Figure 04: Distribution of way of lifes. 1 - Inhabited Regions. 2 - Fishermen and Hunters. 3 - Shepherds and Livestock Farmers. 4 - Collectors. 5 - Primitive Farmers (crop with the hoe). 6 - Horticulturists. 7 - Farmers (culture with the plow).

Source: La Blache (1954)

La Blache wanders about the various forms and materials used in different parts of the world and how these are linked to environmental conditions. According to the author the geographic significance of the buildings would be its duration which was not many people. He highlights the use of stone and how it prevented the name of many civilizations perished, highlighting the Maya in America, for example.

The occupation modes that man had throughout history are also important to understand the society we live in. Initially, humanity gathered in families (the man and his descendants), then other descendants, populating a certain region. Over time these families were branching and becoming more diverse, until reaching the point where the initial family becomes a set of family themed villages. La Blache explains that these villages will further increase in size and its residents will be specializing in different jobs and qualifications, for example, for hunting, the garden or the security of the village and the more diversified these specializations, more singular became the place. This evolution led to what is known as a village. At one point in history the occupation of the man reaches a point where two villages end up meeting and these communities will be adding even generate the embryo of what we know today as the cities. The evolution of displacement methods, including the navigation, was also crucial for societies, before distant, could have contact.

It is important to emphasize the great framework of knowledge of different people and places, as well as its natural conditions in which La Blache leaned to build their thinking and put forth its views. In many occasions he made use of archeology to investigate other

civilizations and their legacy, and Ethnography to view the creation of human records on earth. Then built its position on the intimate relationship between man and his environment, whose relations would always be reciprocal, for now man acts passively, now is an active subject in the transformation of the environment adapting it to their needs. This dialectic, man and environment emerged, evolved and diversified ways of life.

In the third part entitled "Circulation", Vidal de La Blache reflects on how the movement of people and things contributed to modify social relations and direct impact on social development. This, he said, was essential for the humanity that came in the modern era as it stands today.

The search for effective means of transport, which would enable greater mobility and speed are assets common to people around the earth's surface and they made use of the materials offered in the middle, to move around both by land routes, as rivers and seas, where the fauna and local flora provided the materials to make the means of locomotion (figure 05).

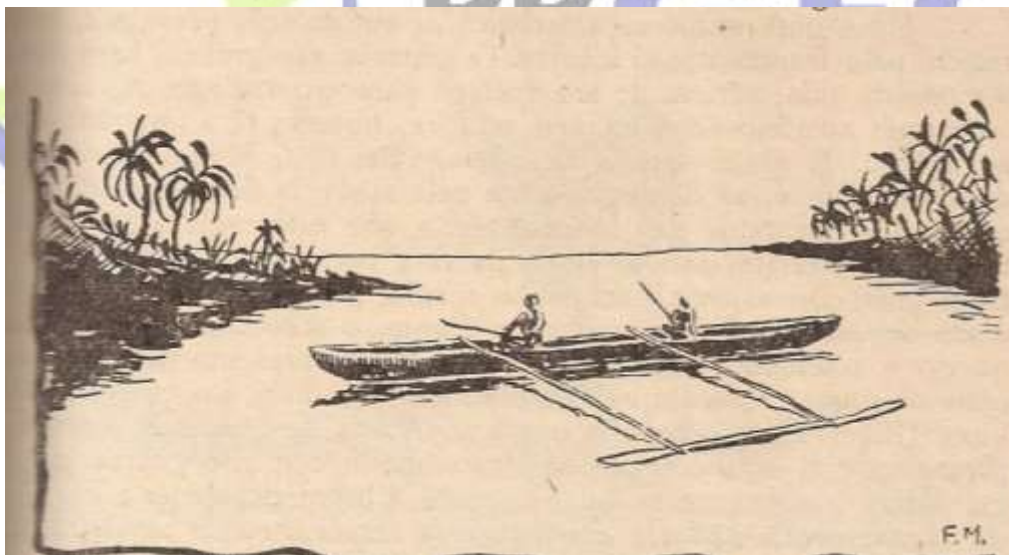


Figure 05: Balancim boat (New Guinea)

Source: La Blache (1954)

La Blache asserted that the evolution of the vehicles made available to different people were fruits of their ingenuity, combined with environmental conditions. They stood out, not only for its speed, but mainly for its transport capacity, thus the use of powerful animals went on to acquire great importance in human relations, in different parts of the globe. Another highlight in human locomotion was road construction, which began to print on the ground that La Blache called life germs such as: houses, hamlets, villages and towns. At this point it is evident the look of the geographer to the understand the spatial changes and the organization

or reorganization of space imposed by transport routes, that even rudimentary already showed their socio-spatial transformation capacity.

In some places it is the terrain that decides the best means of transport to be used, then the author highlights the action of the mule, given their strength and skill to break through obstacles and their importance to the transport industry. The presence of natural roads or socially constructed, as well as facilitate mobility, enabled the greater mobility of man and of things in space, affecting trade and even in the political parties. But La Blache is categorical in saying that it is with the road built by human action, as the Romans did, that comes to a decisive evolution of means of transport which puts the service of imperialism. The road network adopted in France, according to La Blache was the central state of expression, being the instrument employed by European colonization in their first steps.

But advances in relation to the speed and efficiency of means of transportation did not stop and the modern period, much associated with industry, saw the dawn of the "ways of the railroad," which has left large geographic revolutions and joined the traffic roads, being a primary factor transport things and raw materials in industrial regions. This factor marks not only France but also Europe and the United States, where the spread of railways favored the emergence and the affirmation of the great regional differences, but also became instrumental in areas of colonization between connected points between rails, as with the American West and in their own Europe.

The railway networks, given its importance in Europe, joined the national strategy statement of the territory and imposition of sovereignty, there were individualized in each country to meet the strategic needs of space occupation and to ensure the fact domain, given the vulnerability of these more remote areas of the central power. The author emphasizes that the basic idea at the time was national unity (figure 06).

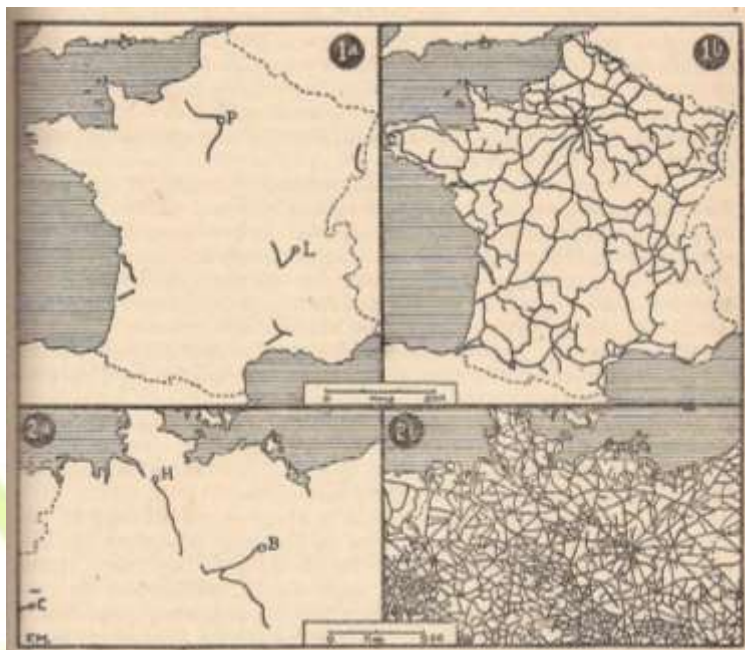


Figure 06: Different stages of the railway networks of some European regions
Source: La Blache (1954)

La Blache asserted that the movement transmitted to things, the transport of goods, more than the passenger, was the great progress brought by the railways. Also, their combination to other locomotion means, to overcome the geographical forces placed in men's way, allowed greater movement of persons and things, changing relationships and ways of life.

Another important factor to human locomotion, is due to large marine incursions, with the initial attempt to decrease the time, for example, to reach a route that previously could only be traveled by land. A classic example is the way to the East Indies, where the ground was too hard, and in some places had certain limitations, so the large vessels arrived on the scene; these were an evolution of primitive canoes and had to withstand large ocean waves which were very strong. Early in the navigation a safer method, but less trailblazer, consisted only of circling the mainland, without ever moving away too. This occurred in Africa and was responsible for the colonization and establishment of villages and port cities. With the improvement of inventions as the compass and the astrolabe knowledge of browsers has increased. There was also a higher quality of nautical charts, which allowed the knowledge of new areas around the world, before ever cleared by the European colonizers. The main instrument of this period to offset the sea was the wind that drove the boat, the man then not completely relinquished the nature of the interventions, it was still set the route by the wind force and the marine currents, to the creation of boats with motors. While the railways

allowed the colonization and effectiveness of sovereignties within states, the navigation was crucial, as building framework and consolidation of imperialism overseas.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the reflections that can raise the work of La Blache are the implications of technical development on society and the relationships of these with their environment. In the book, the author seeks to enumerate the evolution of the technique, whether agricultural, commercial or transport. Technical marked the landscapes and became an explanatory element of the environment and ways of life that have taken hold of them.

If today we live in a period of history marked by what Milton Santos called informational technical and scientific community (SANTOS, 1994) such a situation was preceded by the intervention of man on his environment that was appropriate and transformed to meet your needs. The work in question points to this stage of the technical field of humanity on their environment and their reciprocal influences in the formation of a middle manager, embryo of what we have today, and how it came to interfere in social organizations and hence in way of life established in each human group.

Today this classic author is revisited and re-read, despite the labels imposed on them because their contributions to geographical thought can not be neglected, since even many of his postulates, saved the adjustments that can be made to the current world, are valid.

Bringing their contributions to our days, it seems that globalization eventually gave him right, since, as explained, he defended the land unity and the chain of phenomena such as epistemological pillars of Geography. Currently, those who, in good conscience, attempt to explain the world out of this perspective? But that's not all: the face of a thought that never dichotomized man and nature; which highlighted the landscape as revealing of present and preterit dynamics of a given place; that always reflected the geography with the other sciences; and grifou the role of technical and circulation changes in the environment and in the organization of space, there is no doubt that La Blache influenced later generations much more than themselves admitted (HAESBAERT; PEREIRA; RIBEIRO, 2012).

In this sense, the work of La Blache should be revisited and better understood, not only for its value for geographical epistemology, but by their undeniable validity for understanding the world today. It's what Gomes (2010) ponders the fact that there are traditions in new and new in what is traditional.

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