



New routes in the development of social representations theory

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RECEIVED
August 18, 2020

APPROVED
November 3, 2020

PUBLISHED
March 24, 2021

ABSTRACT: This writing has the purpose to present some routes that currently travel social representations studies, mainly in Latin America, based on a documentary review of the state of the art on the subject. There are traditional notions that remain unchanged, others that have been transformed, and new conceptualizations. There is a boom in these studies due to the processes of social change that demand a psychosocial understanding with a historical-cultural orientation. The fight against neoliberalism has imposed a positivist, individualistic model of social science, without social relevance, which stimulates the search for critical interpretations of representational phenomena. Interesting attempts for theoretical linking and relevant applications are observed in different fields of knowledge, such as communication, education and political science. Techniques of social analysis are presented from the procedural and product perspectives. Finally, the evolution of the theory initiated by Moscovici and some relevant aspects to take into account in the future are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Social representations; social psychology; social research; critical thinking.

Nuevas rutas en el desarrollo de la teoría de las representaciones sociales

RESUMEN: Este escrito tiene como propósito presentar algunas rutas que transitan, actualmente, los estudios de representaciones sociales, principalmente en América Latina, con base en una revisión documental del estado del arte sobre el tema. Se observan nociones tradicionales que permanecen inmutables, otras que se han transformado y conceptualizaciones novedosas. Se aprecia un auge de estos estudios debido a los procesos de cambio social que reclaman una comprensión psicosocial con orientación histórica-cultural. La lucha contra el neoliberalismo ha impuesto un modelo de hacer ciencia social positivista, individualista, sin relevancia social, que genera la búsqueda de interpretaciones críticas de los fenómenos representacionales. Se observan interesantes intentos de vinculación teórica y aplicaciones relevantes en campos del conocimiento diferentes, como la comunicación, la educación y la ciencia política. Se presentan las formas de análisis de las representaciones sociales desde las perspectivas procesual y de producto. Finalmente, se discute el devenir de la teoría iniciada por Moscovici y algunos aspectos relevantes para tomar en cuenta en el futuro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Representaciones sociales; psicología social; investigación social; pensamiento crítico.

HOW TO QUOTE

González M. (2021). New routes in the development of social representations theory. *Culturales*, 9, e560. <https://doi.org/10.22234/recu.20210901.e560>



TRANSLATION
OF SUMMARY
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On understanding social representations¹

Before starting this brief section on the definition of the social representations (SR), it is necessary to consider that, the worldwide predominance of neoliberalism, during the last 40 years, has negatively affected the development of critical social psychology in general and the theory of social representations, more specifically; as authors like Gjorgjioska and Tomicic (2019) say, it has established publication formats according with its positivist academy, it has determined research methods and it has privileged research that lacks values and an axiological stance committed to social transformation. Individualism over the social aspects, positivist hegemony, and atomization in the study of social phenomena brought by neoliberalism have had a disastrous effect on the study of SR in several regions of the planet.

In this same sense, Bettache and Chiu (2019) warn that during last the four decades an infected social psychology with neoliberal ideological biases has been constituted, reproducing social relations based on conformity with the authoritarian culture of the dominant groups. This uncritical neoliberal psychology is observed in psychological research and practice. Nevertheless, and despite of the above, the study of SR from Europe has expanded in Latin America since, as Guerrero Tapia (2006) argues, the ruptures (to a certain extent revolutionary) in individual subjectivities to generate collective subjectivities with new representations, occur, particularly in Mexico, in a context of conflict between the neoliberal model and collectivist social movements such as the one led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

Urbina and Ovalles (2018), claim that SR studies found fertile ground in Latin America, because it is a place with a vast cultural richness and a problematic social situation that demands a critical understanding of social phenomena. Studies in this area have increased and diversified in topics and methods. Regarding topics, first, there are studies oriented to the society-politics and economics with 30%, education 20%, health and

¹ Research funded by UNAM's project PAPIIT 302920.

disease 14%, human development 11%, human communities 9%, work 8% and science and academic knowledge 8%.

Definition of social representations

As it is well known, SR refer to the knowledge of common sense that is constructed as a group on a daily basis and that is completely different from scientific knowledge. According to Jodelet (2018), SR are a guide for action and interpretation of reality, thus providing a system of meanings that guide behaviors and the establishment of social relationships. These representations also define the type of relationship that the groups will maintain with other groups, taking care of their cohesion and self-expression.

The same author shows that SR are constructed on the basis of language and that, as a symbolic expression, they provide a decoding and categorization guide that is conveyed through the expression and exchange of discourses in the medium of social interaction.

Banchs (2004) synthesizes the importance of the social representations' theory, for the psychosocial discipline:

With social representations a new Social Psychology is unveiled. It is a critical discipline, with historical-social sense, in which this last adjective refers to a) the conditions of the production of the representations (social mass media, face to face interaction, communication, language); b) the conditions of circulation of social representations (exchange of knowledge and location of individuals in natural groups and of natural social groups in particular social contexts within a social structure); and c) social functions (social construction of reality in social exchange, development of a personal and social identity, search for meaning or construction of common sense knowledge) (p.53).

Regarding the construction of social representations, Jodelet (2018) expresses that it is important to consider that SR are created through a relationship between epistemic social subjects and an object that can be a phenomenon of interest, a human being, a social entity, or being part of the ideal or material universe. From the relationship between subjects of the same social group arise social representations that have the function of expressing group identity. By building a specific SR, it is given a symbolic status.

From a broader perspective, it can be understood that SR belong to a cultural dimension (values, systems of thought, group norms) that determines how they are produced and how they circulate; the language and its channels of social communication; the ideological context in which the social belonging of the subjects and the social practices of the group are shown. The above is clearly visible in the current situation of political polarization in Mexico, in which the objects of social representation that feed the discursive and media conflict (social support to minority groups, extinction of trusts, strategies to combat the pandemic, purchase of medicines, among others) are characteristic of social groups that share ideologies that socially construct their reality.

In approaching the construction of representations, as products, the language and symbols, the structure that integrates them, the information contents, their internal logic, their practical utility and the group experience that determines them stand out.

The study of SR is relevant since it constitutes a theoretical and methodological approach that allows, according to Sal (2016).

(...) to identify the way in which the members of a community construct, reconstruct and transform social reality, as it is a methodological tool that makes it possible to access the subjectivized or internalized forms of culture, the specific and well-defined spheres of beliefs, values and practices of the social actors (p. 39).

Sal (2016) conceives SR as linguistically constituted discourse representations, which means that it is the members of a specific community that construct their perception of reality by using language resources including semantics, syntax and lexicon. It is the discursive practice that, through conversations, using various media (and nowadays cybermedia) constructs the perception of the group's reality. This is how narratives, images, arguments and descriptions constitute SR.

Castorina (2016) argues that SR are not investigated inside the heads of the subjects or in their context, but rather a social group that shares them and a specific object of representation must be determined. Social representation, then, is conceptualized by integrating a system involving a social subject belonging to a group, a constituent object and a socio-historical-cultural context in which the social group acts.

Roussiau and Valence (2013) argue the existence of two types of social representations: the ones that are autonomous and have a broad consensus and internal coherence, and others that do not have that level of coherence and rely on other representations linked to it to be understood. They point out that subgroups of the same population may have different representations of an object if there are differences in psychosocial criteria. In order to study social representations of specific concepts, it is necessary to consider, from a holistic position, the existence of networks, since some representations are interdependent and linked to each other in symbolic and meaning terms. They can even have a common central core, despite being different SR. In this regard, it has been proven that there are representations that have central cores with openly contradictory elements, but that are stable despite this conflict. The social representation of Mexicans, in groups of their own, includes elements such as “hardworking” and “lazy”, “responsible” and “loud”. The same occurs with the social representation of politics, with elements like “democracy” and “corruption”.

Accorssi, Scarparo and Pizzinato (2014) point out that SR are not created in isolation and by themselves, but are always the result of the social relations of a given group, but that when they are structured and emancipated, they acquire a vitality of their own that causes them to approach, reject and encounter other SR, being able to create new representations.

Nowadays, Weisz says (2017), there are difficulties for the consolidation of collective subjects, since in current times permanent fluctuations in society predominate, there are mobile identities, frail social ties and changing links. That allows the existence of juxtaposed and conflicting social representations in the same social groups. The SR are thought, acted and spoken. These representations are reproduced in daily practice, in increasingly complex groups. In this sense, we can use as example the diversity of the collectives that make up the feminist movements around the world and the different conceptualizations that the subgroups have about their political strategy in their public demonstrations and rallying speech. It is evident that although there are conflicts in elements of their SR on feminism, all the subgroups share the same social identity.

Lo Monaco, Piermattéo, Rateau and Tavani (2016) point out that, since the beginning of SR studies, several approaches have been developed, the most relevant being the genetic-anthropological approach, the socio-dynamic approach, the discursive approach and the structural approach.

According to the authors mentioned above, SR have several functions. The generative function in charge of spreading its meaning, the organizational function that determines the nature of the relationships established between the elements of the representation and the function of giving meaning, based on the collective history of the group, to the representation itself and to the social practices related to it. This last function allows the representation to be strict and not very vulnerable to changes in the context.

The SR Theory (SRT) is a conceptual and methodological approach that accounts for the way in which the social thinking of members of specific groups is established and acted. Lombardo and Monchietti (2015) emphasize that Moscovici examined several aspects of such thinking such as the approach to common sense knowledge, the co-determination that comes from the interaction between the individual and the social group, and the processes of integration and change of these representations.

For these authors, social representations create a symbolic world of common codes that allow the communication and cohesion of groups and the social practice of a given group.

Rateau and Lo Monaco (2013) point out that social representations have the feature of providing stability and controlling the context in which group members move to ensure their permanence and coherence. They state that:

(...) we learn a reality already (re)constructed. It is our part of our social heritage. Then, our affiliation in social groups, whether they are associations, clubs, professional organizations, political parties or social networks, will lead us to shape our perception of the context (p. 24).

It is interesting to understand, as the authors above do, that SR not only strengthen the belonging and identity of the members of a group, but also lead them to distinguish themselves from other groups, which they consider to be different. This identity is not a

product of the present moment, but carries a history that has generated important meanings for the group itself and that is updated by the transformations that have occurred in the object of this representation. The above happens in ideological groups that have remained over time, but have had to update their own social representation due to social and cultural transformations. The Mexican left party is an example of how a group has assumed in its identity different notions such as Marxism, revolutionary nationalism, the struggle for democratic freedoms and the fight against corruption, as different axes of its own social representation.

According to Reyes-Sosa, Egilegor, and Dos Santos, *et al.* (2019) SR define a series of organizational principles for taking a position on the various inter-group relations established by social subjects. The groups interact, then, under common principles of understanding between them. SR lay the foundations of social thought through ideological knowledge. Torres (2017) states that SR empower subjects to power to change social reality through language, as this is how the social thinking that underlies social practices is manifested.

Maldonado, González and Cajigal (2019) argue, following Abric's approaches, that there are four functions of SR: a knowledge function, as it allows social subjects to resort to the contents of the representations shared by a group and build new ones in common knowledge frameworks; an identity function, since by having SR in common, they share values and social norms that strengthen the group's identity (the shared representations guide the collective interpretation before the reality presented to them, achieving a dialectical constitution relationship between identity and the shared representations); an orienting function, as it prescribes certain group behaviors, that is to say, the representations are established as guides for action; and a justifying function, which allows social subjects to explain and understand *a posteriori* the actions performed, by adjusting behavior to the normative frameworks of the representations. Contemplating SR as guides to action has led Roselli (2011) to establish that it is important to always keep in mind that this guide is also affective and that it has intuitive, pre-logical and iconic features. The

practical utility of the social representations, the author says, occurs through the social practices of the group members.

Theoretical integration of social representations

Next, we will discuss the theoretical and disciplinary development of SRT as it has been complemented and enriched by other social theories and by applying its analysis to problems traditionally studied by other disciplines. The above emerges since many SR researchers have found it necessary to integrate their theory with other conceptual positions in order to strengthen it from a theoretical or methodological point of view.

Among the psychologists or social scientists whose approaches have been recovered in psychosocial theory, we can mention Heider, Piaget, Vygotsky, Freud and Halbwachs. At present, as carried out in the research by De Alba (2016); Maldonado, González and Cajigal (2019); Pereira and Faria (2015); Accorssi, Scarparo and Pizzinato (2014) and Jiménez (2019), SR theories have been linked to Pierre Bordieu's concepts of *habitus*, Van Dijk's ideology, Fernández Rey's social subjectivity, Castoriadis' social imaginary, and Halbwachs' collective memory theory, among others.

Jiménez-Yañez (2019) proposes a really interesting theoretical integration between the concepts of collective imaginary, social representations and collective memory, in which he presents the three notions for shaping individuals as social subjects. He observes coincidences between them, since they recover the capacity of creation and transformation of the social by means of collective participation. The social imaginary would occupy the most general level, since it considers society as an organic, institutional, symbol-creating whole; SR symbolically and socially develop the real aspects and collective memory integrates social meanings that maintain group identity.

Another integration has taken place at an interdisciplinary level, since SR Theory, which was originally thought in the field of social psychology, has attracted the interest of various fields of study such as communication, pedagogy, marketing, political science, history, anthropology, design and system engineering. For theoretical integration to take place, Castorina (2016) argues that it must match with an epistemic framework based on

ontological and epistemological principles that support joint scientific approaches. Such framework has a historical socio-cultural basis that guides scientific practice and that should have similar and complementary notions.

Social representations and education

Marková (2017) highlights the importance of linking SR with education, as it recovers the process of knowledge creation in the triadic relationship between the Self-Other-Object of knowledge in which a semiotic function mediates. In this construction of knowledge, the student has two types of dialogue: with himself in regards to the object to be represented, based on the experience generated in his daily life, through his previous cultural knowledge; and the one that occurs in the formal academic learning process in the classroom.

Roselli (2011) links SR with the educational framework for collaborative learning. His approach is based on the fact that several socio-cognitive theoretical approaches, such as Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, Piaget's socio-constructivism and distributed cognition, tie in with the approach developed mainly by Moscovici, in the sense that it is focused on the construction of knowledge from social interaction.

According to Mazzitelli and Aparicio (2010), this allows the use of didactic techniques to support the identification of dominant SR (understood as prior knowledge) in order to start questioning, reflection and the social and shared construction of scientific notions.

Coming back to Vygotsky, Villamañan (2016) states that sociocultural theory in education complements SR Theory, since the former explicitly considers the determination of social class in the construction of representations. Moscovici's recognition of the historical, ideological, economic and cultural determination of these representations underlies the proposed theoretical link.

Another educational field that is linked with SR is the so-called B-Learning. In this sense, Padilla and Silva (2017) note that the technologies used in distance learning have become a space that builds and mediates SR. They highlight the fact that technologies

change constantly, producing permanent innovations that require new representational constructions for the role of the teacher and the student (and also of the mediation itself and its objects of knowledge).

In this same line of distance learning, Marchisotti, Oliveira and Lukosevicius (2017) point out that in Brazil a social representation of the distance learning model has been build, which has as its main key terms: ease, flexibility, convenience and practicality in taking courses. These authors conclude that the distance modality has been adopted as an opportunity for those who, being in the job market, can improve their skills and also for those who find it difficult to have face-to-face contact but have the discipline to learn by themselves. It is concluded that this SR facilitates the understanding of the distance modality as it helps to see the possibilities of learning using technology.

Accorssi, Scarparo and Pizzinato (2014) link two important theories: Paulo Freyre's pedagogy of liberation and Moscovici's SR. For these authors, both theoretical constructions share common elements: they are critical readings of society, have a transforming calling, present a dialectical posture, value the determination of social interactions in the construction of reality, establish routes for social change and focus on minorities that break with the social stability and reproduction promoted by dominant groups.

The authors Cuevas and Mireles (2016) point out that, in the educational field, research has been conducted to recognize the SR of students, teachers and the practices of both, but little research has been done regarding the representations of parents and educational institution administrators, who play a crucial role in the policies of educational centers.

By conducting an analysis of SR research in the educational field carried out in Mexico, Cuevas and Mireles (2016) conclude (and this may be applicable to SR research in general) that it is necessary to strengthen said studies in four aspects: 1. To make clear the link of the objects of representation as a construction of subjects involved in concrete social practices. 2. To establish a distinction between the product of social representations and the description of the social practices that generate them. 3. To make clear the method

used to analyze and interpret the specific information obtained in the research process and the analysis categories that were used, and 4. To go to the original sources in the language in which they were written, giving way to an expansion and greater theoretical base.

Social representations and culture

An interesting theoretical integration in SR research is brought up by cultural studies (an approach that Denise Jodelet has been leading for many years). Banchs (2004) says that it is important that SR studies have a hermeneutic and qualitative approach with links to philosophy, sociology and linguistics from a cultural and historical focus. The author proposes to study these representations more as an instituting phenomenon and less as an established product.

A similar reflection is presented by Marková (2017) when she points out the need to study culture from the human psyche, based on a psychosocial-cultural method of its own, and to consider the *alter* or cultural other as fundamental in the construction of representations. This effort is based on several characteristics of the SR Theory: the human being in dialogue with the other, the transforming and critical character in the construction of reality, the dialectical approach to generate social change, the broad social scope, the contradiction with dominant ideologies and the importance of minorities as generators of social change in its explanatory schemes.

Social representations and dialogic representations

Sal (2016) argues that the existence of communities of practice makes it possible to create dialogue and arguments that convey the SR of specific groups (with all their ideological load) and that they can be evidenced and assimilated. For this author, both discursive representations (originating from the so-called "linguistic turn" in social science) and SR that are constructed in the practice of sociocultural groups are reproduced and spread through both traditional and digital media. This ideology that determines which values and social norms are the right ones to be shared within the group.

On the same topic, Batel and Castro (2018) emphasize the relationships between SR Theory and discursive psychology, particularly on the importance of understanding the construction and transformation of meaning in social change. From discursive psychology, the interest lies in what happens to social subjects in interaction to turn the internal into external. This approach focuses on action rather than cognition. For the SRT, the concepts represented emerge from the relationship between the self and the others, from interaction and communication, and this is how the external is interioralized. For these reasons of similarity and complementarity, the authors argue that both theories can be linked in common studies.

Another interesting approach is the one that links the theoretical framework of social representations with communication theories such as *framing*. Reyes-Sosa, Egilegor, Dos Santos, *et al.* (2019) conduct a study on the news management of drug trafficking in Sonora, Mexico, and identify the analysis schemes imposed by the media for interpreting the news. In this case, the schemes of conflict, economic consequences, attributions of responsibility, morality and human interest are mentioned.

This discursive predominance of the media is rarely questioned in communication studies, so the authors relied on the news reception of the social subject, exploring their SR on drug trafficking, based on the fact that representations emerge and are shared by subjects who interact with each other in everyday life and that it is practical, critical and analytical knowledge as a product of rational dialogue that culminates in a construction full of meaning. Automatic assimilation of media content does not occur.

Method in the study of social representations

Practically, from its beginnings, there has been a debate on the research methods most in line with the premises of the theory. The cultural current holds that the appropriate methods are the comprehensive methods that are proper to qualitative research. There are other approaches that affirm that the use of standardized or lab research methods, of a quantitative nature, are the most pertinent.

An excellent summary of the methodological richness used in SR studies is presented by Banchs (2004), referring to the research work of Moscovici, who states:

It seems to follow the basic requirements of Modern Science but in a rather heterodox way: richness of bibliographical sources, supporting authors of classical tradition, multidisciplinary approach (anthropologists, psychologists, linguists, psychoanalysts), combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, use of metaphorical and, more often than not, poetic language, recognition of the relativity of scientific objectivity, that is to say, of the author's participation in the construction of the object of study, method, techniques and texts, critical stance (p. 40).

For her part, Weisz (2017) points out that representations cannot be recognized only by the social group studied, but must be considered a process of their co-construction involving the researcher and the social subjects, in which specific research instruments mediate.

Authors such as Mireles-Vargas (2015) state that, in order to recognize the extent of representations, it is necessary to establish a multi-methodological strategy with various research instruments. Ferrara and Friant (2016) developed a multi-methodological model with base in four strategies of data collection: closed-ended, open-ended and hierarchical recall questions; object recognition test; open-ended questions and blank substitution techniques. The authors point out that, for the analysis of the results, four types of techniques widely used in studies of social representation can be used: the substitution technique, in which members of one group respond as if they belonged to another group; verbalization in the graphic recognition of objects; open-ended questions and recall tests such as free word association.

For their part, Caillaud, Doumergue, Préau, Haas and Kalampalikis (2019) argue the importance of combining different methods with the purpose of counterbalancing the dominance of a single method in SR studies. This technique is known as triangulation. They state that the results emerging from the use of triangulation should be used to combine results rather than only collect them. This research team reflects on the fact that each research method poses a specific type of symbolic encounter between the observing party

and the observed party. In any research method, a relationship is established between researcher and research, and a specific type of communication is formalized between both parties.

Several research techniques have been developed in SR studies. The most outstanding, according to Mazzitelli and Aparicio (2010), are free word association techniques, hierarchical and recall techniques, content analysis, discourse analysis, analysis of media contents, use of Likert-type scales or semantic differentials, interviews and questionnaires.

The division of data collection techniques used in culturally oriented SR studies is grouped, according to Banchs (2004) in two major formulations: qualitative data collection and interpretation and triangulation that combines techniques, theoretical interpretations and data discussion, which guarantees the interpretative reliability of the researchers.

Process and product in the construction of social representations

One of the important characteristics of SR is that it is both the process of their creation and the objectified product of said process, that is to say, it is both the established representation and the instituting representation. Banchs (2004) calls them constitutive process thinking and constituted thinking, which has a structural materialization. SR, as a social construction of the knowledge of everyday life, study and describe the universe of objects with meaning that surround the inter-subjective world. That is through social interaction and concrete activities that the SR shared by a specific group are built.

These processes, as mentioned by Banchs (2004), can be of a social dimension where the contents are part of a means of inter-group or ideological interaction, or of an individual dimension in which the subject constructs their SR in terms of objectification and anchoring and which are manifested in structures conformed by a representational field or in a discursive expression.

Roselli (2011) points out that SR are, in essence, a constitutive process thinking that is mediated by social interaction. This characteristic of sociocultural construction of

thought is what distinguishes it from the cognitive approach that understands representation only as a product.

The differentiation between the process of constitution of SR and their objectification in a concrete product should not be understood as the existence of differentiated theoretical elements. Jodelet (2018) argues that, in order to recognize the integration of subjectivity to the historical sociocultural dimension, it is necessary to inquire into both elements that determine the interpretation of the way of life of the members of a certain social group.

According to Castorina (2016) there are three instances in psychosocial research that are based in SR Theory: an empirical level, a theoretical level and a meta-theoretical level. These instances include processes and products in each one of them. For González (2013) these instances would be included in the following levels of study of social representations: 1. SR Theory as a social theory of knowledge (meta-theoretical instance), 2. Social representation as a socio-cognitive process (theoretical instance) and 3. Social representation as a product (empirical instance).

On the first level, the communicative construction processes takes place and the product is the existing contents in the inter-subjective world. On the second level, the socio-cognitive processes are, fundamentally, objectification and anchoring, and the product is the theoretical approach of how a social representation acquires meaning when inserted in a network of previous concepts. Finally, on the third level, the process is to equip the object of representation with meaning for the use of social groups and the product is the structural characteristics of the object of representation (Central Core Theory).

Regarding theory building, the SR approach is based on the active construction of what Roussiau and Valence (2013) identify as base concepts: anchoring and objectification, which serve to make evident the processes involved in the construction of representations mediated by social relations, which give rise to the contents. On one hand, there would be, dialectically, processes of group identification and, on the other, products based on principles of cultural legitimacy.

In terms of process, Castorina (2016) takes up Moscovici and argues that representations are always co-constructed between the subject and the other (which could be another subject or a group member) in a context of interactive social communication. That would be Pierce's Triadic Scheme in which the subject, the *alter* and the object intervene in the construction of knowledge. In order to explore the process of creating a SR, it is necessary to start from the function of interpretation, the search for meaning, which every human being activates in their relations with others, in a context of symbolic cultural elements such as signs, symbols and language.

In terms of product, Accorssi, Scarparo and Pizzinato (2014) argue that all representation is referential and constructive, as it refers to concrete objects, taking their place and this possibility of substitution allows it to reconstruct reality from a cognitive plane, but dependent on the historical and social aspects.

One of the main characteristics of SR as a product is the existence of a structure with elements belonging to the central core and others, called peripheral, which surround it (Abric's Central Core Theory). SR will not change as long as the core elements remain valid. Lo Monaco, Piermattéo, Rateau, and Tavani (2016) point out that around the core, peripheral elements vary in importance according to the function assigned to them which can be to regulate the core, make it concrete and protect it. The importance of the existence of the central core is raised by Roselli (2011) since he argues that this instance materializes the representation, since it is the product of a process of objectification that makes abstract concepts existent and manageable, transforming them into images; it organizes the representational field, stabilizes and gives meaning to the representation.

Regarding the existence of the central core, Lombardo and Monchietti (2015) come back to the Moscovician concept of representational field and point out that, in their structure, SR possess cognitive polyphasia, which means that there is no total consensus among the belonging elements of a given representation, but that there are tensions of ideas, beliefs, attitudes between novel and current conceptualizations and those previously in force.

The formation of the central core is determined, in first instance, by the social practices of the members of groups that share a social representation. It is the activity in a particular social environment that defines the way in which the figurative scheme of representation is organized. But going even further, it is possible to argue that the cultural-historical footprint can be extracted from the structural integration with its central core and peripheral elements.

Final thoughts

This review shows that there is a strengthening of social studies using SRT in Latin America, due to the complex and conflictive situation of socio-political changes in the region, since many of its pressing problems such as education, food, authoritarianism, health and economic growth, need to be understood from a socio-cultural and historical perspective, and SR Theory can contribute in this sense. The weakening of critical psychosocial approaches in worldwide academia has been due to the predominance of a positivist and utilitarian neoliberal social science, which has distanced funding, publications, academic programs, etc., from critical approaches that tend to social transformation. In the south of the American continent, as has been mentioned, tensions and political transformations are taking place that call into question the neoliberal predominance of social science.

By assimilating SR as symbolic objects shared inter-subjectively in spaces of communication through language, they become notions that can sustain collective projects of social change. This is strengthened by the historical and identity dimension of the concepts represented, which are of a conventionalizing, prescriptive, attributional and justifying nature for all collective action. In other words, the SR shared by specific groups and determined by their social practices are vital in their ideological definition. Many minority movements such as environmentalism, sexual reproductive rights, LGBTQ+, feminism, among others, have built and shared social representations of their movements that determine content and forms of collective action.

The strengthening of the cultural current in the study of SR stands out, since in their research they conceive both the process of generation of such representations and their

concrete products. When the construction of the reality shared by the members of the groups is considered, thus we recover the important role of memory, history and collective activity that determines the content and structure of SR.

The link between discursive approaches and conversational analysis with SR Theory is relevant since the predominance of the structural study of representations is enriched by the symbolic and cultural study of the use of discourse and inter-group conversation. The joint analysis of SR with the important social theories led by Castoriadis, Vygotsky, Freud, Halbwachs and Bourdieu, among others, is also very promising.

Three fields of interest or application of SR Theory stand out: education in terms of the modality of technological mediation, the roles of social actors and the construction of knowledge in the classroom; cultural studies addressing broad phenomena such as migration, drug trafficking, national identity, appropriation of urban spaces, among others; and communication, analyzing phenomena of media impact, critical reception of the subject, *fake news* and social media.

Finally, the methods used by SR researchers have been enriched by assimilating new data collection techniques, assuming that the researcher is a constructor of meaning and that they need to triangulate their findings with other participants in the study through the use of various data collection tools. At this point it is important to recognize that there is a dominant position of using qualitative approaches that ensure a deeper and more complex understanding of the phenomena studied.

Almost 60 years after Serge Moscovici's inauguration of SRT in the academic world, there is a vigorous development of this approach in Mexico and Latin America.

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