LUMEN ET VIRTUS

Ontological and epistemological bases of the study of market constitution through practices

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ABSTRACT

Market practices provide a framework for exploring markets, which in turn require a better understanding of each other, because researchers and academics often approach markets more normatively. Recently, some scholars have begun to reconnect marketing/economics and markets, developing understandings based on the theories of practices. To contribute to this advance, the objective proposed by this work is to present the ontological and epistemological bases for studying market practices according to the seminal works of Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006/2007). In the end, it can be concluded that an approach to the constitution of markets based on practices assumes a

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relativistic ontological position. It is relativistic because it assumes that: what it is, is relative to the multiple associations that promote it. Therefore, it is a multiparadigmatic approach. Different contexts and social relations generate different meanings and actions due to the historical and cultural character of the production of these meanings. Researchers must be attentive to the ontology of the place in which relational realities are constructed, focusing their attention on the way people construct and organize reality.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Carlos Adrian Diaz Ruiz of the *Hanken School of Ecoomics* in Finland, who had his article "*Assembling market representations*" as the most relevant in the Scopus database on market practices (RUIZ, 2013), commented that the concept of "markets" is fundamental to marketing theory, but, however, the term market was not used with much seriousness or rigor. The concept of market is not clear because several facets are used to simplify a complex social reality, such as: knowledge structures grouping similar products (ROSA *et al*., 1999), calculations that allow the exchange of commodities (ARAUJO, 2007) and the forces that shape a competitive environment (PORTER, 2008).

There are several facets that explain why the concept of market is used both in academia and in everyday life. The familiarity of the term obscures that markets are no longer limited to a physical location where buyers and sellers trade (i.e., market); rather, markets are heterogeneous associations between human beings, materials, and signals whose purpose is to provide for society. Ruiz (2013) also exposes three reasons why markets are studied: first, market research is widely used in marketing and general management; second, market research is commissioned by many sectors, generating an estimated revenue of US$ 29 billion dollars annually (this in Europe alone); Third, the roots of market research can be traced to institutional economics as well as to market practices and research in the area of motivation (i.e., it is a rich field for study).

Therefore, market practices provide a framework for exploring markets by reconnecting them to marketing, which in turn requires a better understanding of markets because marketing scholars often approach markets more normatively. The absence of markets in marketing theory is elegantly summarized by Venkatesh *et al*. (2006, p. 252) when they argue: "Paradoxically, the term market is everywhere and nowhere in our literature". Recently, scholars have begun to reconnect marketing and markets, developing understandings based on theories of practices (NENONEN *et al*., 2019; KJELLBERG and OLSON, 2017), institutions (ARAUJO, 2007) and identity construction (TOMA *et al*., 2017; ELLIS *et al*., 2010). It should be noted that both the study of practices, institutions or the construction of identity are possible strands of study.

Thus, in order to contribute to the advancement of market studies, the objective proposed by this work is to present the ontological and epistemological bases for studying market practices

according to the seminal works of Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006; 2007). To achieve this objective, we sought to briefly rescue the endorsement of the studies of market practices by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007), as well as a brief review of the dichotomous view between subjectivity and objectivity of Burrel and Morgan (2005) on the sociological paradigms of study and finally, the discussion on the ontological and epistemological bases of the perspective of study on market practice.

A search in the Scopus database was used for theoretical foundation (the Scopus database was chosen, because according to Elsevier (2018) "Scopus is the largest database of citations and abstracts of peer-reviewed literature: journals, books and conferences"), and performing a query with the terms "*market*" and "*practices*" using the Boolean logical operator '*and*' in the keywords (*keywords*), filtering the works in the areas of Social Sciences and Management, the most relevant and most cited works were found, which, after reading and analysis, were selected to compose the *corpus* of this work. Articles and book chapters cited by these most relevant and most cited works were also used, in order to seek the primary sources of thoughts related to this foundation.

This work is justified, among other points, mainly because scientific research in Applied Social Sciences must comply with scientific rigor to bring greater reliability to its studies. This reliability must begin with a correct planning of the research. And for this correct planning, the ontological and epistemological foundations of research must be aligned. In other words, obeying the ontological assumptions proposed by a given approach should lead to certain research practices, and to certain methods of investigation, as will be assessed below.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

STARTING POINTS FOR STUDYING THE MARKET THROUGH PRACTICES

Theodore Schatzk comments that several thinkers have already dealt with the themes "structures", "systems", "meaning", "lifeworld" among other themes about the generic social element (SCHATZK, 2001, p. 10). For the author, many theorists would grant the "practices" an honor comparable to these previous efforts to study the social. Varied references to practices await contemporary scholars in diverse disciplines, from philosophy, cultural theory and history, sociology, anthropology, and science and technology studies. There are many references to such disciplines that propel them beyond the current problematic dualisms and ways of thinking. For example, the thinkers of philosophical practice, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, who maintain that practices discourse on subjects and objects, highlighting non-propositional knowledge and illuminating the conditions of comprehensiveness.

Social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens and ethnomethodologists such as Harold Garfinkel can also be cited. For them, conversations about practices reveal desires such as

those to free activity from the domain of objectified social structures and systems, and to question individual actions and their *status* as the building blocks of social phenomena and to pierce the rigid oppositions of the structure of action. And for cultural theorists, such as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, among others, dealing with practices is to describe language as a discursive activity that follows in opposition to structuralist, semiotic and post-structuralist conceptions, as being an abstract discourse, a discursive system (SCHATZK, 2001). Schatzk, (2001, p. 10 and 11) also comments that:

> By moving the above disciplines in such directions, practice theorists are making decisive contributions to the contemporary understanding of diverse issues. This includes the scientific, philosophical, and social significance of human activity; the nature of subjectivity, personification, rationality, meaning, and normativity; the character of language, science, and power; and the organization, reproduction and transformation of social life. In making these contributions, practical approaches oppose numerous current and recent paths of thought, including intellectualism, representationalism, individualisms (rational choice theory, methodological individualism, network analysis), structuralism, structure functionalism, systems theory, semiotics, and many efforts at thought, humanism, and poststructuralism.

Brown and Duguid (2001) complement this thought, stating that business organizations are undoubtedly a critical source of identity in modern society. However, the descriptions made by researchers can easily exaggerate and homogenize their contributions. The authors mention that in the thirties, business organization was seen as a mechanism to produce cultural homogeneity based on diversity. In the 1950s, there were "denunciations" of this homogenizing role of the company, but in spite of this, they accepted and even expanded the concept that ideas are capable of imposing a uniform identity on their members. Reaching the seventies, the analysis of the role of the company in the coordination of people and knowledge goes back to the thirties, introducing the company as a critical mediator between individuals and society; and in the eighties and nineties, research reaffirmed the idea of organizations as cultural units.

The focus on the organization as a cultural unit, therefore, tends to exaggerate the contribution of structures that are often quite distant to groups of people with very different practices. On the other hand, there are studies of individual identity that recognize other forces (external to the organization) that influence the identity of its members, promoting a resistance that is seen in individuals through the conflicts and pressures they experience.

When researchers define organizations with their corporate actors as monolithic (each one being unique and immutable), they overemphasize order and underestimate the elements of acculturation, starting to see the employee as a mere aggregate. While other researchers define organizations as cultural units, these others run the risk of overemphasizing the formation of organizational identity and uniformity. Observing organizational learning and individual identity through the lens of practice shifts attention and helps to reveal the identities developed by social

participation, which are dynamic according to organizational practice and community change, being cumulative over time and developing a history of practices (BROWN and DUGUID, 2001).

Based on Orlikowski (2000), the structuring of practices [Giddens and Pierson (2000), Giddens (2000)] proposes a notion of structure (or structural properties of social systems) as the set of rules and enacted resources that mediate social action through three dimensions or modalities: installations, norms, and interpretive schemes. In social life, agents do not promote structures in a vacuum. In their recurrent social practices, they invoke knowledge (tacit and explicit) of their previous actions and the situation at hand, of the facilities available to them (e.g., land, buildings, technology), and of the norms that inform their ongoing practices, and in this way apply these knowledge, facilities, and habits to "structure" their action.

When it comes to the market (more specifically goods), people are based on the properties that comprise the technological artifact - those provided by its constituent materiality, those inscribed by *the designers*, and those added by the customers through previous interactions. Agents also draw on their skills, power, knowledge, assumptions, and expectations about technology and its use (about a good and its use), typically influenced by training, communication, and previous experiences. This includes the emotional and intellectual meanings that customers associate with particular technologies and their use, shaped by their experiences and by their participation in various social and political communities.

Clients also draw on their knowledge and experiences with the institutional contexts in which they live and work and the social and cultural conventions associated with participating in such contexts. In this way, the goods produced by the agents are structured by these experiences, knowledge, meanings, habits, power relations, norms and available technological artifacts. This arrangement establishes a specific set of rules and resources in practice that serves to structure its recurring practices. Thus, over time, agents promote a distinct and distinctive practice (ORLIKOWSKI 2000).

But what is an approach based on market practices? Araújo *et al*. (2008) comment that the term 'practice' is often used to denote what marketers do. However, theories of practice have actually made few inroads into marketing. For the authors, the starting point for a practice-based approach to the market escapes from assumptions that one can (or should) seek comprehensive and accurate representations and typologies of markets. Instead, the practice-based market approach should direct attention to the emergent and deployable practices in which agents engage to construct and problematize markets. Thus, it should not be assumed that markets are simply given structures within which agents compete for predefined positions. Such an emphasis leaves behind the exhaustive debate about the gap between theory and practice and what are the best techniques to provide a panoramic representation of markets. The authors then define "market practices" as "the packages of

practices, including material arrangements that contribute to the realization of markets" (ARAUJO *et al*., 2008, p. 8).

This definition by the authors highlights the preference to study markets as ever-changing performances, rather than as stabilized entities. Thus, market practices should be taken as efforts to shape markets, as well as efforts to operate in markets as structures and the intended and unintended interactions between those practices. As an inquiry of empirical research, Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) suggest that markets are being constituted by three classes of interconnected practices, namely: (i) exchange practices that are involved in the consummation of individual transactions; (ii) normative practices that follow related to the formulation and reformulation of rules and norms related to market behavior; and (iii) representational practices that describe the structure and functioning of specific product markets.

Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006) further argue that markets encompass multiple and often conflicting efforts to shape them. Different agents can shape markets at the level of exchange, normalization, or representational practices. Take the rather obvious example of supermarket shelves in Slater (2002): the product shelves displayed are the result of categorizations that do not only involve manufacturers and retailers. Regulatory agencies, consultants, consumer associations, companies and trade groups all have a say in product formulations, how they are displayed, the inscriptions on packaging labels and more. In short, all of these constituents participate in different kinds of practices—exchange, normative, and representational—that help shape a given market form. The possibility of analyzing such conflicts is a crucial contribution from a perspective focused on market practices.

In the same vein, Hietanen and Rokka (2015) point out that there are three distinct theoretical approaches in the sociology of markets, which it uses: network perspectives, institutional perspectives, and performative perspectives. These authors comment that the analytical focus of these views is on the market change that occurs as an effect of the continuous involvement of market agents in a wide range of market practices (ANDERSSON *et al*., 2008; ARAUJO *et al*., 2008; KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2006; STORBACKA and NENONEN, 2011b). The authors give the example of the mass music industry that remains dominated by a relatively small number of major multinational record labels, media and publishers, as well as affiliated concert venues, festivals and clubs, magazines, websites, journalists and critics. All of these operate to collectively produce, shape, promote, and co-create musical experiences and performances aimed at global audiences. Together, they constitute the market as a configuration of agents (ANDERSSON *et al*., 2008; STORBACKA and NENONEN, 2011a), through which concrete actions – to sell, buy, promote and exchange music in various practical situations – are pre-configured and enacted, and through which agents use their relational power. Market agents here are seen in the broadest sense, including

humans and materials and "all parties that act in the market: suppliers, firms, customers, authorities, etc." (STORBACKA and NENONEN, 2011a, p. 242).

It is important to clarify how market practices shape markets. The term market practice refers to a broader set of "micro-level activities that contribute to constituting markets" (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007, p. 141) broadening the focus of more traditional marketing activities (such as marketing planning, *branding*, positioning, pricing, and distribution), usually conducted by brand managers and marketing departments.

Hietanen and Rokka (2015), supported by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) and taking up the example of the mass music industry, also suggest that it is necessary to understand and distinguish between three interconnected market practices: exchange, standardization and representational. Although exchange practices have as their main objective to carry out and facilitate economic exchanges, such as ticket sales for records or concerts, normative practices work to establish objectives and rules about how the market should function or how some group of market agents should act, and finally, representational practices contribute to the creation of semiotic systems of markets, exchange of agents and market objects/products, for example, in relation to different musical styles and tastes.

But the question that remains is, how to unfold these concepts of exchange, standardization and representational practices in a scientific research to know a certain market? To answer this question, we turn our eyes to the ontological and epistemological bases of the studies of market practice, according to the seminal work of Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006; 2007). To help understand these bases, the paradigmatic concepts presented by Burrel and Morgan (2005) and Burrel (1999) will be rescued at the beginning of the next section, and then the discussions of the bases of market studies through practices will be presented.

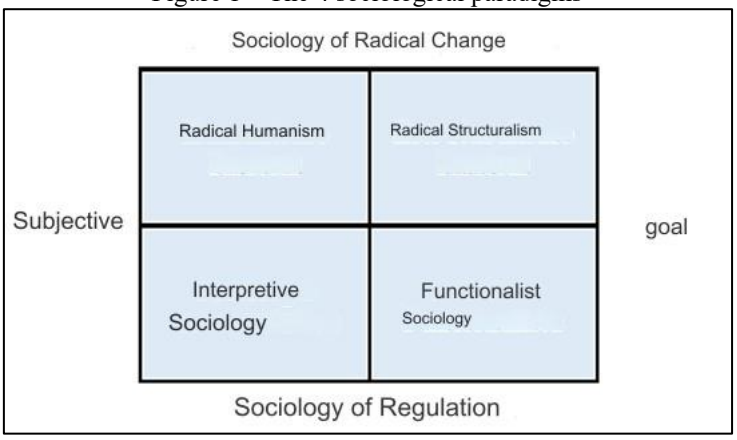
ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF THE PERSPECTIVE ON MARKET PRACTICE

The dichotomy of subjectivity *versus* objectivity and the dichotomy, social change *versus* social regulation are two aspects presented by Burrel and Morgan (2005) regarding the proposed classification of ontological paradigms for the social sciences. This classification is also recognized by the authors Gioia and Pitre (1990); Lima (2011); Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013); among others. Such an approach can be seen briefly in Figure 1.

Regarding the objective relationship (right side of the table), the research paradigms presented by the authors are two, the Radical Structuralist Paradigm based on Marxism and Russian social theory, and the Functionalist Paradigm that encompasses the theory of social systems, theory of social action, behaviorism, determinism and abstract empiricism. Regarding the subjective

relationship (right side of the table), there is the Interpretivist Paradigm with hermeneutics, ethnomethodology and phenomenological symbolic interactionism, and the Radical Humanist Paradigm with critical theory.

Figure 1 – The 4 sociological paradigms

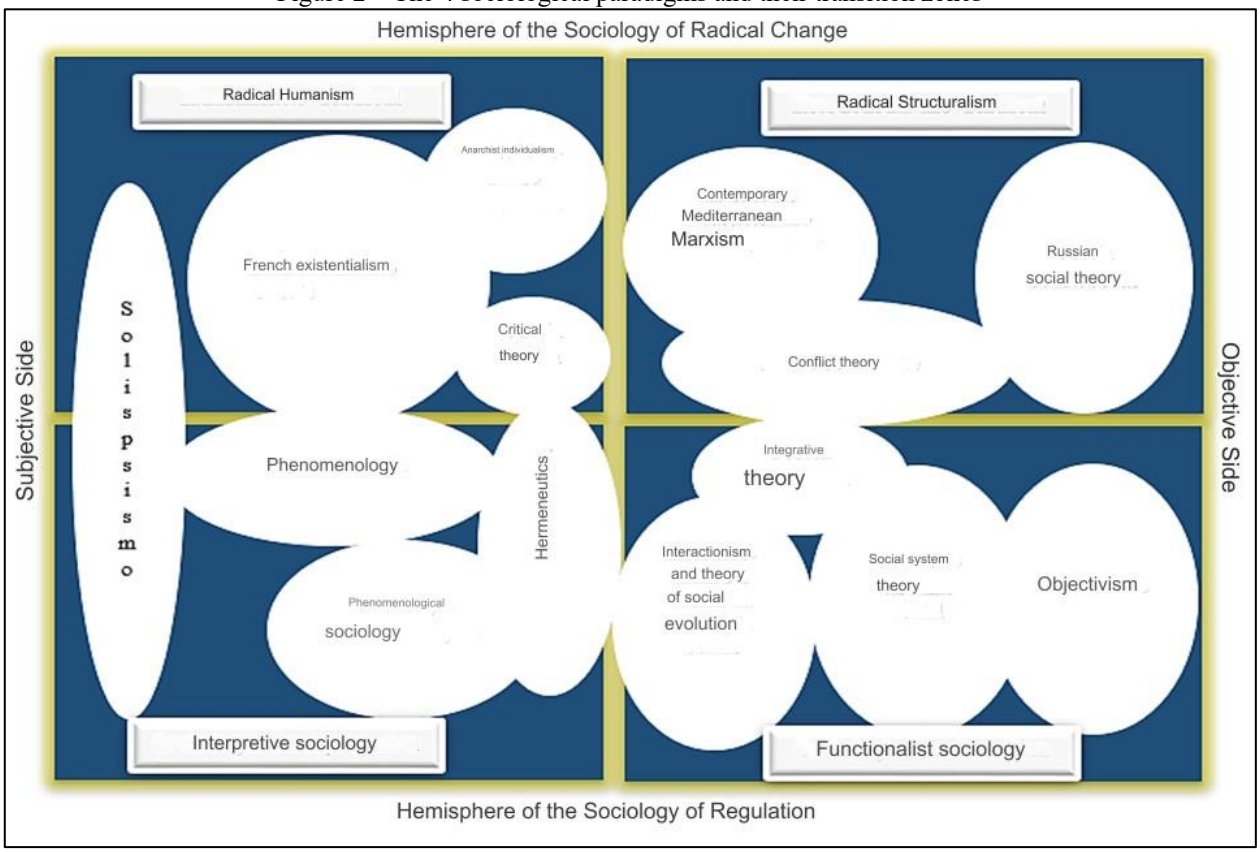


Source: Burrel and Morgan (2005) – adapted

From the perspective of Radical Change (upper part of the table), there are two radical fronts, one objective and the other subjective. The objective is the Radical Structuralist Paradigm and the subjective is the Radical Humanist Paradigm. From the less radical, more regulatory perspective (lower part of the picture), there is the Functionalist Paradigm on the objectivist side and the subjectivist Interpretive Paradigm.

In this presentation, the authors address the possibility of points of contact between the less radical, between functionalists and interpretivists, with the possibility of a multiparadigmatic approach in research. The "transition zones" between the objectivist paradigms (radical structuralism and functionalism) and between the subjectivist paradigms (radical humanism and interpretivists) are also presented. Burrel (1999) summarizes the approaches and these transition zones in Figure 2:

Figure 2 – The 4 sociological paradigms and their transition zones



Source: Burrel (1999) – adapted

This classification by Burrel and Morgan (2005) has been accepted by several scientists in the field of organizational studies, but it highlights an attempt at a reclassification or, as previously mentioned, a point of contact, a multiparadigmatic approach. Gioia and Pitre (1990) criticize the limitations of the proposition of the paradigms of Burrel and Morgan (2005), this criticism is based mainly on the understanding that organizations are multifaceted social phenomena, and, therefore, of complex full understanding and, according to the thesis defended by the authors, that the construction of theories is based on paradigms, which can limit the creativity of researchers. For this reason, Gioia and Pitre (1990) argue that multiparadigmatic approaches allow the construction of bridges between nebulous boundaries of two or more paradigms.

In this context, Lima (2011) asks whether the paradigms employed in organizational studies research – represented here by the positivist, interpretativist, and critical paradigm – admit polarized discussions, or the fact is that the problem has greater complexity than that sustained by the isolated views of each paradigm. In this sense, multiparadigmatism seems to be the best path for studies in administration. Because, because the object of research is an organization, the various relationships occur between agency and structure through complex relationships. Explaining better the points of contact of this multiparadigmatism, Godoi and Pitre (1990) explain:

- **Interpretivism-Functionalist Transition Zone**. In the interpretive paradigm, which presupposes a subjective reality, theoretical discourse often occurs in terms of structuring. If

any bridge must be drawn with functionalism, it presupposes an objective reality and, therefore, objective social structures.

- **Functionalist-Radical Structuralist Transition Zone**. A central issue has to do with the orientation of functionalism towards regulation (and thus with an implicit managerial focus), in contrast to the activism of radical structuralism (and advocacy of an underclass).
- **Radical Humanist Transition Zone** Radical structuralism and radical humanism share the value of activism and change. Its proponents differ (typically) in their levels of analysis and in their assumptions about the nature of reality, with the former assuming underlying objective economic and class structures and the latter assuming the subjective social construction of deep structures at a somewhat more micro level.
- **Radical Humanist-Interpretative Transition Zone**. Similar to the bridge between functionalism and radical structuralism, the bridge between radical humanism and interpretivism is easier to establish, again for reasons that have to do with the orientation towards change. Interpretative research generates theory to describe the structuring of the systems of meaning and the processes of organization of informants.

A multiple-perspective view is not a demand for integration of theories or resolution of disagreements or paradoxes, it is an attempt to explain many representations related to an area of study (e.g., organizational structure, culture, socialization) by linking theories across their common transition zones. The various knowledge claims thus gathered can constitute a multidimensional representation of the subject area. Comprehensive understanding occurs only when many relevant perspectives have been discovered, evaluated, and juxtaposed (GIOIA and PITRE, 1990).

DISCUSSION

Returning to the discussion of the study of market practices by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006), the question of how markets are shaped requires a clear ontological position. The authors see social reality as a continuous process of creation. This means emphasizing the emergent character of reality, and not whether it exists or not, regardless of the perception of it by researchers. They assume that social reality is constantly being shaped and reshaped through a repetitive process. "It is produced and stabilized in an interaction that is simultaneously material and social" (p. 840). Social reality, then, is conceived as a materially heterogeneous relational effect. And while this effect has the obstacle of the real, it is realized through ongoing practices and thus has the contingency of an artifact.

This proposal to overcome the dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism is at the root of the theoretical-methodological framework of analysis of social life formulated by Pierre Bourdieu. The

core is the dialectical relationship between individual conducts propelled by socially acquired dispositions and gathered in a *habitus* and objective structures or fields of relations between differentially positioned and empowered agents, on the other. Thus, it is observed that, in the architecture of Bourdieu's theoretical-methodological model, the collection of the most useful conceptual and explanatory tools bequeathed by the objectivist and subjectivist modes of analysis is used in a new frame of reference, which takes both forms of investigation as "moments" of a research method constructed precisely to capture the historical-dialectical relationship between the biographical trajectories of the individual agents and the historical reproduction/transformation of collective structures, as this relationship is embodied in social practices (HEREPATH, 2014).

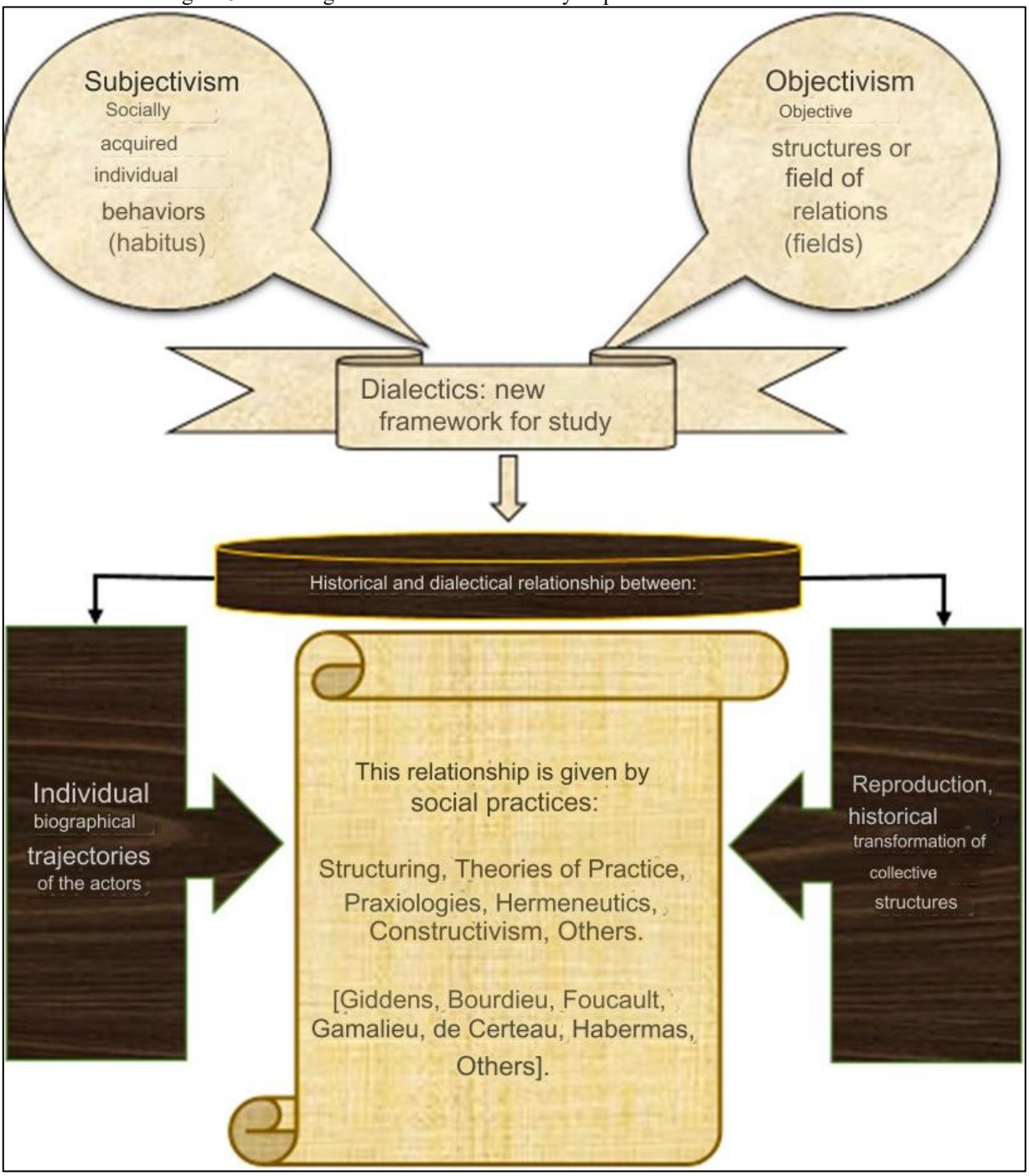
Bourdieu builds his theoretical-sociological scheme around this category, 'all social life is essentially practical', taken as the most characteristic mode of human social existence, in which the various phenomenal instances traditionally referred to by the classic dichotomies of social theory and philosophy are related and unified, such as individual/society, action/structure, material/ideal, mind/body, subject/object, among others. Bourdieu made creative use of a diversity of conceptual instruments and socio-theoretical insights gleaned from other approaches and embarked on a theoretical project that he characterized by the label of "constructivist structuralism" or "structuralist constructivism". Structuralism, or structuralistism, is understood as the social world itself and not only in symbolic systems – language, myth, etc. – objective structures, independent of the consciousness and will of the agents, which are capable of guiding or coercing their practices and representations. And by constructivism, Bourdieu means that there is, on the one hand, a social genesis of the schemes of perception, thought and action that are constitutive of what he calls *habitus* and, on the other, of social structures, in particular of what I call fields and groups, and particularly of what is usually called social classes.

It is in this context that studies of market practices adhere to a Bourdieusian approach and recognize the routine and recursive nature of the practice embedded in institutional structures (see Figure 3). However, Bourdieu's ontological position underestimates the role of conscious thought and, therefore, reflexivity (the regular exercise of the mental capacity, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their context – social – and vice versa), as appreciated by Easton (2010) and Martin and Wilson (2014).

Supported by Law and Urry (2004, p. 395): "while the 'real' is in fact 'real', it is also produced", Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006) comment that in practice, one cannot deny the possibility that (some part of) social reality can be constructed as existing independently of the researcher's perception of it, or that (some other part) it can be constructed as not having an independent existence. What the authors deny is that social reality is 'such a thing in principle' (see Latour, 1986[i]). Consequently, it is assumed that there is no definite social reality that can be discovered. Entities are

enacted. Depending on what they're used for, or more generally, how they're associated with other entities, "they become different things. This does not mean that anything can be used as anything. The realities produced are not arbitrary; some are easier to produce than others" (KJELLBERG and HELGESSON, 2006, p. 841).

Figure 3 – Ontological adherence of the study of practices with market studies



Source: Prepared by the authors

As appreciated by Latour (2012), researchers must allow the agents under study to define the constitutive elements of reality. He explains that one should not confuse 'constructivism' with 'social constructivism'. For the author,

> When we say that a fact is constructed, we simply mean that we explain the solid objective reality by mobilizing entities whose meeting could fail; *social constructivism* means, on the other hand, that *we replace* what this reality is made of by some *other material* – the social of which it is "really" made Latour (2012, p. 135). [author's italics].

For Hosking (2011), the adoption of the social constructivist approach implies avoiding dualistic scientific positions that separate subject from object, mind from body, theory from practice, micro context from macrosocial. By assuming the assumptions of this approach, it is reflexively admitted that both reality and knowledge are socially constructed. Brito *et al*. (2014, p. 4) add that this position implies "admitting the centrality of language in these processes, conceiving it as a discursive formation that cannot be apprehended as an entity separate from practice and social life". And that language, from this constructionist perspective, has a performative character, being considered a social practice, also serving as a mediating element in the process of construction of reality and knowledge whose origin is linked to hermeneutic processes and the production of meanings. "The recognition of these specificities of language implies understanding the interfaces between its performative aspects and the conditions of production, that is, the particularities of the social and interactional context".

Ontologically, Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) emphasize the emergent and plastic character of reality. The properties of the world are not natural facts or social constructions imposed on formless matter. They are, rather, the results of a continuous recursive process involving materially heterogeneous entities; "produced and stabilized in an interaction that is simultaneously material and social" (LAW and URRY, 2004, p. 395). A methodological consequence of assuming that the properties of the world are the result of a continuous recursive process involving materially heterogeneous entities, is that researchers, as inquirers, not in advance, and in place of agents, define what kind of building blocks the social world is made of. Thus, instead of assuming what the essence of reality is, one should treat the wide variety of ways in which reality is being constructed simultaneously as a topic for empirical inquiry.

To capture this basic ontological stance, it is necessary to redefine the object of investigation. For most definitions of markets are based on the assumption that it is possible, in principle, to discover and describe the properties that are typical of markets. As a consequence, attention is directed to the practical difficulties associated with the detection of such properties. In contrast, Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007, p. 141) assume that "it is impossible, in principle, to define the list of typical properties of markets, and instead to direct attention to how agents are able to do so in practice".

This redefinition has several methodological consequences. The most important suggests that it is necessary to study markets in their formation (plasticity), because it is in this formation that the definition of practice occurs repeatedly (LATOUR, 1987). This will make it possible to distinguish

between two contradictory explanations typically offered to an observed facet of reality. For example, to explain the emergence of a market: one approach would be to present it in retrospect as a form of description (to make sense of a result), and another approach would be to exhibit through the activities that were performed. Thus, the emphasis on practice should therefore be seen as an attempt to direct attention to the process rather than the outcome when studying economic organizations.

To summarize, Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006, p. 841) assume an ontological position for the studies of market practice, which, according to them, is relativistic. "It is relativistic because they assume that what it is, is relative to the multiple associations that promote it". Therefore, it is a multiparadigmatic approach. Different contexts and social relations generate different meanings and actions due to the historical and cultural character of the production of these meanings. Therefore, researchers must be aware of the ontology of the place where relational realities are constructed, focusing their attention on the way people construct and organize reality, including organizations, their worldview, social and discursive practices about their action strategies (HOSKING, 2011).

The seminal authors of the studies of market practice Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006, 2007) further explain that relativity is not a qualification of an otherwise independent notion of truth, but is the essential characteristic of truth. Relativity is the way in which representations become true, just as it is the way in which demand objects become values. Relativity does not mean - as is common - a diminution of truth, from which something more could be expected; rather, it is the positive realization and validation of the concept of truth. Truth is valid, notwithstanding its relativity, more precisely because of it.

As social reality is multiple, different truths can be established as part of the ongoing practices that constitute them. Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006, p. 841) believe that this view is more accurately labeled as realist epistemology. "It's realistic because we assume that what you know about something is a consequence of the durability of the mediated chain of associations between matter and form." Therefore, the authors use the label practical constructivism for this combination of ontological relativism and epistemological realism. The position should not be confused with social constructivism, which confers causal primacy to human beings in the process of constructing reality. This practical constructivism is based on the generalized principle of symmetry and treats the distinction between nature and society as a result of this process. In summary: "while social constructivism presupposes that reality is socially constructed, practical constructivism presupposes the social reality to be constructed".

Constructivism as research for market practices is a philosophical school of thought that argues that research is fundamentally dependent on theory. Therefore, theoretical research guides researchers to take a basic position on how to identify and interpret a research problem. Constructivists challenge the notion that research is conducted by impartial, value-neutral subjects.

On the contrary, they see researchers as artisans, manufacturers who are part of a network that creates knowledge.

It is the researchers who participate and guide the practice, as they play a role in the process, defining and choosing the structures that are more or less likely to be adopted, they are the ones who generate knowledge about the market and that such knowledge can reinforce or change the practices adopted. It is these same researchers who have their own theories arising from their training and studies (formal and informal) that make them (also) unique individuals and who, in turn, approach and interpret organizational phenomena in a unique way. For example, two researchers, using the same theoretical lens and studying the same organization, can arrive at distinct and unique considerations, in addition to similar considerations. But why were not all the considerations common? Because they are unique individuals endowed with a unique theoretical training and with unique personal and professional life experiences. For this reason (but not only for this), the constructivist approach rejects the notion that research can be conducted by impartial subjects, since the very choice of the research theme or the object or problem-question can be a personal and individual choice of the researcher.

However, it is good to clarify that constructivism does not question the existence of phenomena, but rather the ability of researchers to understand these phenomena in their entirety without a specific theoretical lens of knowledge that will promote the elucidation of the same phenomenon.

Another highlight that should be discussed at this point is the fact that there are different constructivist approaches with some unique peculiarities in each one. However, there are also some fundamental assumptions in all of them. These fundamental assumptions can be described in the form of six assumptions, which are shared by constructivists, which according to Mir and Watson (2000) are:

i. Knowledge is theory-driven, which means that every researcher must be clear about his or her theoretical position when dealing with a research problem. In this way, it will be clear to readers about which perspective the object was studied and based on which ontological assumptions the conclusions were raised;
ii. The separation between the researcher (subject) and the phenomena that are now under investigation (object) should not occur, it is unfeasible (according to the author), because the reality under study is socially constructed, therefore, the presence of a researcher or a research team, even in a position of observers, will be interacting with the environment, modifying it, constructing it socially;
iii. Just as there should be no separation between the subject (researcher) and the object under study, there should also be no separation between theory and practice. This is because theory

and practice are fundamentally intertwined, fused into a unique and socially inseparable symbiosis. Practice permeates theory, and can be found both before and after theory. There is always a theory that explains or leads to a given practice;

iv. The theoretical view of the researchers is never "objective", but rather "discursive", that is, loaded with judgment, power relations, politics. Theoretical perceptions are changeable and are considered within a space and time. For example, a practice that may have been considered viable and good in a certain time and geographic region may not be so in another;

v. For constructivists, research takes place within a community of scholarship, in which assumptions of mutual support are employed to create what they call "conversations." In this way, the very knowledge brought by a researcher about a given phenomenon under study is also socially constructed (I emphasize that these conversations can be intertemporal through access to previous studies or intratemporal, such as in a study group or laboratory);

vi. And yet, constructivism constitutes a methodology that can employ a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative.

With an eye on this sixth point of agreement, it can be observed that there are several research techniques that are suitable for constructivist investigation, that is, that lay the foundations for a constructivist research agenda in studies of market practices. In this instigation agenda, ethnography, institutional analysis, textual analysis, appreciative inquiry and historical analysis can be included. (MIR and WATSON, 2000; GRAND, VON ARX and RÜEGG-STÜRM, 2017; VAARA and LAMBERG 2006).

Of these approaches, Mir and Watson (2000) and Vaara and Lamberg (2006) highlight historical analysis as a precedent. Historical analysis plays a prominent role in research by proportional identification of the reasons for certain practices. It also collaborates so that the discourses that permeate the organization and its origins can be identified. Historical analysis is important because market practices study how markets are constituted, how they were formed, and how they can be shaped or stabilized through the different practices, practitioners (agents), and *praxis*[ii] throughout history.

So, when it comes to context, it is worth pointing out that there are two parallel worlds. A theoretical world that is composed of discourses of market practices based on economics and marketing books and accepted market concepts. And another world, practical, which is sometimes corporeal, complex, a living world, full of elaborations of market practices. In this sense, another very relevant point is raised, the epistemological question of how academic research is able to understand, or identify an objective framework for the formulation of the configuration of practices in a given market. Because, in several cases, what is said by market agents is not what was actually

observed in practice. In this sense, there seems to be a noise between the agents and the interlocutors of the research. Because some respond to a theoretical ideal that was not experienced in the company, and in another that presents the practices that actually happen.

For this, among other reasons, there are at least three points that lead to the epistemological interest of studying the market from the perspective of its practices. The first is that the focus on practice provides an opportunity to examine the micro level of social activity and its construction in a real social context or field. Secondly, the practical approach breaks with methodological individualism, emphasizing that activities need to be understood as enabled or restricted by the predominant practices in the field in question. And the third point is that the notion of practice allows us to deal with one of the most fundamental questions of contemporary social analysis, which is 'how social action is linked to structure and agency', putting an end to this dichotomy.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Scientific research in Applied Social Sciences, as well as in other sciences, must obey scientific rigor to bring greater reliability to its studies. This reliability must begin with a correct planning of the research. The ontological, epistemological and methodological alignments must corroborate each other. That is, obeying the ontological assumptions proposed by a certain approach should lead to certain research practices, and to certain methods of investigation.

Constructivism as research for market practices is a philosophical school of thought that argues that research is fundamentally dependent on theory. Therefore, theoretical research guides researchers to take a basic position on how to identify and interpret a research problem. Constructivists challenge the notion that research is conducted by impartial, value-neutral subjects. On the contrary, they see researchers as artisans, manufacturers who are part of a network that creates knowledge.

It is also worth considering that in this type of approach to market practices from the constructivist perspective, the researcher must be close to the phenomena of study. It is not imaginable to carry out a study of this ontological nature far from the field. And yet, researchers should focus on context and detail. Not only in detail and not only in context.

The understanding of practices occurs by understanding the arrangement of practices and the tangle of arrangements (networks of arrangements of practices). Understanding and knowledge should normally be produced as part of a dialogue with the participants of a study, not reproduced through an analysis (or distancing) of a situation. And that there is a problem of epistemological and methodological coherence when a research claims to be constructivist and presents the researcher as being outside the system of observation analyzing the object.

Finally, this work proposes a distancing from the assumptions of economic theory and classical theories of market management that produced a reductionist view of the constitution of markets, including some ontological and epistemological positions for the object of research in question (the market). It also contributes to the renewal of the theory of markets, taking into account the social construction of markets through their plasticity.

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[i] Latour (1986, p. 272) exposes four basic points: (i) it is possible to discover typical properties of life in society and explain the social bond and its evolution, although in practice they may be difficult to detect; (ii) the social actors, regardless of their size, are in the society defined above; even if they are active, as their name implies, their activity is restricted, as they are only parts of a larger society; (iii) the actors in society are useful informants for those who seek the principles that hold society together, but because they are simply parts of society, the actors are only informants and should not be believed too much because they never see the whole picture; (iv) with the proper methodology, social scientists can classify the opinions, beliefs, illusions, and behavior of actors to discover the typical properties of life in society and put the whole picture together.

[ii] *Praxis*: philosophical term that refers to human action in the natural and social world. Praxis emphasizes the transformative nature of action and the priority of action over thought (MARSHALL, 1998).