

THE RELEVANCE OF POLITICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION AND SITUATION IN FRIEDRICH RATZEL

A relevância da posição e da situação político-geográfica em Friedrich Ratzel

La relevancia de la posición y la situación político-geográfica en Friedrich Ratzel



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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to revisit a concept proposed by Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) during his academic career. As the author of "*Anthropogeographie*" and "*Politische Geographie*," Friedrich Ratzel developed an extensive theoretical and methodological framework that significantly advanced and consolidated geographical science. The focus of this study is to evaluate the dialectical pair found in the concepts of position (*Stellung*) and political-geographical situation (*Politisch-geographische Lage*) as presented in Ratzel's works, which highlight the enduring relationship between society and nature, revealing the core of studies in Geography, Political Geography, and Geopolitics. These concepts are primarily found in *Kleine Schriften von Friedrich Ratzel* (Small Writings of Friedrich Ratzel), a posthumous work organized by Hans Helmolt in 1906. Themes such as the interactions between humans and the environment, State, society, and territory, as well as the formulation of the principle of territorial extension at different scales of analysis, stand out as some of Ratzel's main contributions and guide the discussion of this article. His works offer broader approaches than the mere location of a territory, and Ratzel's reflections remain relevant and essential for contemporary geographical studies, making the revival of his ideas critical for understanding the very essence of Geography. Through readings, bibliographical consultations, and hermeneutic interpretation, it was concluded that geographical position and situation concepts can serve as tools for developing public policies, logistical strategies, and transportation planning, contributing to better territorial organization.

Keywords: Friedrich Ratzel; Situation; Position; Territory.

Article History

Received: 04 february, 2025

Accepted: 06 may, 2025

Published: 06 June, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.33237/2236-255X.2025.6830>



RESUMO

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo fazer a releitura acerca de um estudo proposto por Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) durante sua carreira acadêmica. Autor de obras como "Anthropogeographie" e "Politische Geographie", Friedrich Ratzel desenvolveu um extenso conjunto teórico e metodológico que desempenhou um papel importante no avanço e consolidação da ciência geográfica. Desse modo, este estudo propõe fazer um balanço acerca do par dialético encontrado nos conceitos de posição (*Stellung*) e situação político-geográfica (*Politisch-geographische Lage*) que estão presentes nas obras de Ratzel, e que demonstram a relação persistente entre a sociedade e natureza, revelando o cerne dos estudos da Geografia, Geografia Política e a Geopolítica. Trata-se de conceitos que estão presentes principalmente em *Kleine Schriften von Friedrich Ratzel* (Pequenos Escritos de Friedrich Ratzel), obra póstuma organizada por Hans Helmolt em 1906. Temas como as interações entre ser-humano e meio, Estado, sociedade e território, além da formulação do princípio da extensão territorial em diferentes escalas de análise, destacam-se como algumas das principais contribuições de Ratzel, norteando a discussão deste artigo. Suas obras oferecem abordagens mais abrangentes do que a mera localização de um território e as reflexões de Ratzel continuam relevantes e fundamentais para os estudos geográficos contemporâneos, tornando o resgate de suas ideias essencial para a compreensão da própria essência da Geografia. A partir de leituras, consultas bibliográficas e interpretação hermenêutica, foi possível concluir que os conceitos de situação e posição geográfica podem ser utilizados como ferramentas para o desenvolvimento de políticas públicas, estratégias logísticas e de transporte, contribuindo para um melhor ordenamento territorial.

Palavras-chave: Friedrich Ratzel; Situação; Posição; Território.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo realizar una relectura de un estudio propuesto por Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) durante su carrera académica. Autor de obras como *Anthropogeographie* y *Politische Geographie*, Friedrich Ratzel desarrolló un amplio conjunto teórico y metodológico que desempeñó un papel importante en el avance y la consolidación de la ciencia geográfica. Este estudio propone un análisis del par dialéctico presente en los conceptos de posición (*Stellung*) y situación político-geográfica (*Politisch-geographische Lage*) en las obras de Ratzel, los cuales evidencian la relación persistente entre sociedad y naturaleza, revelando el núcleo de los estudios de Geografía, Geografía Política y Geopolítica. Se trata de conceptos que aparecen principalmente en *Kleine Schriften von Friedrich Ratzel* (Pequeños Escritos de Friedrich Ratzel), obra póstuma organizada por Hans Helmolt en 1906. Las interacciones entre el ser humano y el medio, el Estado, la sociedad y el territorio, además de la formulación del principio de expansión territorial en diferentes escalas de análisis, se destacan como algunas de las contribuciones de Ratzel, orientando la discusión de este artículo. Sus obras ofrecen enfoques amplios de la simple localización de un territorio, y sus reflexiones siguen siendo relevantes y fundamentales para los estudios geográficos contemporáneos, haciendo que la recuperación de sus ideas sea esencial para comprender la propia esencia de la Geografía. A partir de lecturas, consultas bibliográficas e interpretación hermenéutica, se concluye que los conceptos de situación y posición geográfica pueden utilizarse como herramientas para el desarrollo de políticas públicas, estrategias logísticas y de transporte, contribuyendo a un mejor ordenamiento territorial.

Palabras clave: Friedrich Ratzel; Situación; Posición; Territorio.



1 INTRODUCTION

The period from the early 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by an intense and complex dynamic. It was marked by numerous advances in both scientific and philosophical domains, which fostered significant transformations in our understanding of the world.

In this context, an analysis of the 19th century reveals it to have been a time of intellectual effervescence, playing a crucial role in developing geographical science. Von Humboldt and Ritter's theories of classical geography left a lasting legacy, shaping how geographic space is perceived and studied today.

In this context, Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) advocated studying human beings in their geographic environment. In his theories, he recognized the mutual influence between societies and their surroundings, emphasizing the interaction between human communities and the geographical space they inhabit. Accordingly, Ratzel believed that understanding human beings could not be separated from their geographic context, as factors such as climate, topography, natural resources, and geographic location played a fundamental role in forming and developing human societies (Ratzel, 1897). Furthermore, he argued that geographic characteristics shaped human activities, modes of subsistence, migration patterns, and even political organization. In doing so, he expanded the frontiers of geographic knowledge by exploring the complexities of spatial relationships and their influence on the formation of human societies.

The concept of Territory within the scientific field of geography dates back to its early foundations, first developed by Friedrich Ratzel, who lived during the 19th and early 20th centuries. As a contemporary of the Classical Geography school of thought, Ratzel played a significant role in shaping Geography as a formal academic discipline (Ratzel, 1906). His contributions to the conceptualization of Territory remain influential today, as it is widely recognized that the interactions between human beings and the physical environment are essential to comprehending territorial characteristics and dynamics. His studies emphasized the intrinsic relationship between geographic space, human societies, and the development of civilizations.

It is important to note that Ratzel's intellectual influence extended beyond Europe and reached the United States. Having spent a period in the U.S., where he worked as a journalist, Ratzel considerably impacted American geographical thought. One of the most



prominent figures influenced by his work was Ellen Churchill Semple, who was key in disseminating his ideas within the American geographical tradition.

In her 1911 work titled *The Influences of Geographic Environment: Based on Ratzel's System of Anthropogeography*, Semple adopted Ratzel's perspective, arguing that the influences of the geographic environment played a determining role in economic activities and human temperament.

Ratzel (1897) distinguishes the technical aspects of societies, classifying them into two distinct types. The first type consists of people who, to survive, must adapt to the environment according to their stage of development. The second type includes those with a more advanced level of technical development, which enables them to neutralize the natural environment to organize their social and political life.

If, according to Ratzel, social impasses were determined by nature, a critical question arises: how could societies resolve these impasses if they themselves were conditioned by it? This reflects a broader concern within the determinist approach, which limits human capacity for agency and transformation by suggesting that societies are rigidly bound to natural conditions, leaving little room for human autonomy in overcoming social challenges.

Based on readings and bibliographic research, it is possible to conclude that the concepts of situation (*Lage*) and position (*Stellung*) (Ratzel, 1906) can be used as tools for the development of local, regional, or national policies, as well as for logistical and transportation strategies, contributing to more effective territorial planning. These concepts become even more relevant in the current context, in which the efficiency of transportation systems is one of the key pillars for economic development, regional integration, and the reduction of territorial inequalities.

The geographical situation analysis allows for identifying potential and actual connections between different regions, helping to plan transportation corridors that maximize connectivity and minimize logistical costs. In turn, geographic position can be explored to determine strategic points for establishing logistics hubs, cargo terminals, and other infrastructure facilities that meet the demands of goods and people movement.

Moreover, understanding a territory's position and geographic situation can significantly contribute to the formulation of public policies aimed at sustainability. This understanding enables the promotion of cleaner and more efficient transportation modes, such as railways and waterways, in accordance with each region's specific characteristics. In doing so, not only is the mobility of people and goods improved, but environmental

impacts are also reduced, enhancing economic competitiveness and promoting a more balanced and rational territorial distribution.

Therefore, this study proposes a balance regarding the dialectical pair present in the concepts political-geographical position and situation in Ratzel, highlighting the persistent relationship between society and nature, a central element in Geography studies.

To achieve this objective, the article is structured into different sections. First, the methodological approaches are presented, detailing the procedures adopted for data collection. Next, an analysis of the stigmas and epistemology present in Ratzel's thought is provided. Subsequently, the definition and application of the concepts of position and situation are discussed. Finally, an attempt is made to understand how these concepts can be applied in light of the transportation system, demonstrating their relevance for understanding spatial organization and territorial dynamics.

2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The approach proposed in this work, inspired by Friedrich Ratzel's broad and integrative methodology, seeks to incorporate deeper and subtler aspects of his texts, capable of expanding our understanding of his motivations, sensitivities, meanings, methods, as well as the historical context and particularities of his time. Investigating Ratzel without considering such nuances would result in a limited analysis, confined to current scientific paradigms, often marked by hasty judgments and one-sided interpretations.

Thus, this work revisits the posthumous publication *Kleine Schriften* ("Small Writings") (1906), a collection of over a thousand pages organized by Hans Helmont (1865-1929). This material gathers reflections and notes on various topics, from before his entry into academia (1867) until his death (1904). In Brazil, authors such as Luciana Martins (1993), Seeman and Pedrosa (2019), and Oliveira and Seeman (2021) have analyzed this work, revealing a Ratzel more free from academic formalities and less bound to the disciplinary rigidity of his time, offering new perspectives on his geographical thought.

Moreover, understanding position and situation can guide public policies aimed at sustainability. It can encourage the use of more efficient and less polluting transportation modes, such as railways and waterways, depending on territorial characteristics. This not only improves the circulation of goods and people but also reduces environmental impacts, increases economic competitiveness, and promotes a more balanced territorial occupation.



3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The epistemology and the stigma surrounding Ratzel

In his works, Ratzel (2011) brings to light essential issues related to the sovereignty of Nation-States and the expansion of territories. When addressing natural resources, such as water and land, he emphasizes their importance for use and, particularly, for ownership by the States. For this author, the primary scale of analysis is that of the State, which has established a significant relationship with land since the 19th century. Indeed, Ratzel:

[...] is a thinker whose work was produced precisely in Germany during this period, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Both in his education and in his work, he incorporated the various epistemological foundations and horizons that were being debated at the time. He was trained as a naturalist, like many others, drawn by the fascination with Darwinian evolutionism that captivated science in the final decades of the 1800s. However, his main works stem from the pen of a thinker who, having turned to the humanities, dedicated himself to investigating civilizational processes and the relationships between the history of populations and the history of the Earth itself (Carvalho, 1997, p. 4).

This means that Ratzel began to explore the biological aspect of evolution and the social interactions that shaped civilizations over time, suggesting that the theorist underwent a transformation in his thinking and field of study. His main works reflect this shift by exploring civilizational processes and the relationships between human populations' history and the Earth's history

The author makes it clear that:

Since the State is inconceivable without Territory and borders, political geography was quickly established. Even though in political science in general, the importance of the spatial factor—of location, etc.- has often been overlooked, it is nonetheless considered beyond doubt that a state cannot exist without land (Ratzel, 2011, p. 93).

Ratzel (2011) points out that, although political science has often neglected the importance of the spatial aspect—such as geographical location—it is widely accepted that a state cannot exist without land, without a territorial material base. Land is considered an essential condition for a State's existence and Sustainability.

It is worth adding here how Ratzel's concepts were received in North America and by his precursors. Researchers' engagement with the classics of human geography,



combined with the general momentum of research in political geography, led to a proliferation of works by Anglo-Saxon geographers. These studies established the analysis of philosophical and geographical foundations of possibilism and determinism, but also offered a more nuanced and contextualized approach to these frameworks.

A prominent figure mediated this willingness to revisit and reinterpret the classics. Ellen Semple played an essential role in facilitating and articulating these debates, influencing how researchers approached and interpreted the possibilist and determinist approaches in geography:

Anglo-Saxon geographers, relying on the work of Miss Semple, did not make an effort to consult the original German texts of Ratzel's work. As his disciple, she translated only the first volume of Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie* into English. In paying tribute to her mentor, enthusiastic about the pragmatic potential of his work, Miss Semple became, probably unintentionally, one of those responsible for the distortions of Ratzelian concepts in American geography (Martins, 1993, p. 109).

After carefully considering Ellen Semple's detailed work (1911), we should reflect on whether the initial interpretation of her statements truly captures the complexity of her intentions, or those of Ratzel, as Martins (1993) makes clear in the cited passage.

When addressing the relationship between humans and the Earth's surface, Semple (1911) may have introduced nuances in her perspective that go beyond a strictly determinist view. It is essential to contextualize her statements within the academic setting and the geographical debates of her time, considering the subtle distinctions she may have incorporated in her analyses. In doing so, we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of her approach and avoid excessive or exaggerated simplifications through interpretations of Semple's work.

Moraes (1990) presents an ambivalent position regarding so-called geographical determinism. On one hand, he argues that in Friedrich Ratzel's perspective, human phenomena tend to be stripped of their distinctiveness, understood merely as responses to external conditions. In this view, society appears as a passive element, reacting to environmental causes, and human beings are conceived as products of the natural environment. On the other hand, Moraes acknowledges that Ratzel should not be categorized among the truly determinist authors, such as Ellen Semple, since the German geographer, according to him, was a critic of the more simplistic determinist interpretations.



The complexity of Ratzel's work is also highlighted by Carvalho (2010). The author points out that the concept of nature in Ratzel's writings is not limited to a strictly scientific definition. On the contrary, it also carries a subjective and sensitive dimension. The expression *Natureindruck* ("impression of nature"), used by Ratzel, does not refer merely to an objective imprint of the environment on society, but rather to an emotional and momentary experience—a kind of poetic materialization of nature in the observer's spirit. This reveals that, far from being confined to determinism, Ratzel understood the interaction between society and the environment more sophisticatedly and multifacetedly.

One of the main arguments used by critics of Ratzel's work is the alleged neglect of the role of culture. For these critics, such an omission would reinforce the idea that, in his approach, human capacity is subordinated to absolute natural determinations. However, as early as the introduction to his work *Völkerkunde*, Ratzel (1888 [1885], p. 3) states, among other things, that "[...] Culture is the emancipation from nature — not through complete detachment, but through a broader, more diverse alliance that frees us only from certain accidents of its course." According to the author, human beings do not become completely independent of natural rhythms and contingencies, but expand their possibilities of adaptation by diversifying their bonds with the environment.

Ratzel explicitly rejected two extreme positions: both the view that treated the natural environment as an isolated and determining factor in human life, and the one that denied any influence of natural conditions on societies: "The obscure and exaggerated assertion that humans are the product of their environment is followed by a corresponding unconditional and myopic contradiction" (Ratzel, 1909 [1898-1899], p. 26).

However, to understand how Ratzel's concepts reverberated after the 1950s, we can take as an example the establishment of the journal *Heródoto* in 1976, which is highlighted as a landmark in the history of critical geography (Dussoy, 2000). Ratzel's theories were addressed in diverse ways in the various publications of this journal. In some cases, they were seen as inconvenient and even dangerous foundations. At the same time, in other instances, they were considered notions that deserved, and should be subject to, criticism, though in a restricted manner, within the scientific parameters of analysis (Dussoy, 2000).

This approach reflects the complexity of the debate within critical geography regarding Ratzel's contributions. On one hand, there is an acknowledgment of the problematic implications of his theories, perhaps related to geographical determinism and

its associations with imperialism. On the other hand, Ratzel's ideas suggest an attempt to reinterpret or reformulate specific aspects of his theories (Stogiannos, 2019).

For Ratzel, geographical configurations were fundamental, influenced by a complexity of communicative factors such as commercial traffic, demographic evolution, and social and political organization. These considerations should guide state policy. This reflects the author's view that geographical space was not just a passive backdrop but a dynamic element that both shaped and was shaped by human interactions (Ratzel, 1906).

In Brazil, Ratzel's approach by authors, either Brazilian or foreign nationals living in the country, generated various interpretations within the academic context. Authors such as Backheuser (1933), Travassos (1938), Rodrigues (1947), Golbery do Couto e Silva (1967), Sodré (1976), Moraes (1995), Andrade (1987), Ruy Moreira (1989), among others, explored Ratzel's theories and often incorporated the notion of geographical determinism into their analyses

Regarding the texts and articles published by Ratzel during his lifetime, they underwent "retranslations" and adaptations. However, the difficulty in translating the romantic spirit of the era into a more rational and scientific language, especially in the context of German, highlights the challenges of transferring cultural and linguistic nuances between different periods and styles of thought. The duplicity of phrases and words, which may be characteristic of the romantic style, can be perceived as strange or challenging for readers accustomed to the linearity and objectivity of more pragmatic scientific texts in Brazilian Portuguese. Nonetheless, each author brought their perspectives and adaptations of Ratzel's theories, contributing to a complex discussion on the influence of the environment on social and cultural dynamics.

It is essential to emphasize the need to understand the inseparable link between political power and geographic space, as Ratzel recognizes that political geography plays a crucial role in understanding the relationships between states, territorial organization, and the significance of borders. This suggests that for a complete and accurate analysis of political issues, it is necessary to consider the spatial factor, the political-geographical situation, and the intrinsic relationship between the State and Territory (Ratzel, 2011).

Ratzel (2011) describes land (*Boden*) as a determining factor, capable of either fostering or limiting the development and expansion of social entities, meaning that the availability and quality of land influenced the ability of human communities to sustain and grow. Therefore, nature, represented by land, exercised supremacy over humans, social institutions, and even political structures:



The ultimate elements of the state organism are social groups. Individuals hold significance for the State only exceptionally. It is sporadic for individuals to be sovereign and owners of the State's land (Ratzel, 2011, p. 55).

Ratzel conceives territory as land, soil, as it is on the land that a society is organized, with the aim of constituting a Modern State:

Without territory, one could not understand the increase in the power and solidity of the state [...] Now, in the face of so much uncertainty, is it not much better to focus on the study of a real element, which is the territory, the one under our feet? On this territory, we can clearly see the repetition of the development of social and political forms, which tend to occupy ever larger spaces (Ratzel, 1914 apud Moraes, 1990, p. 81).

This conception demonstrates that the characteristics of natural resources, especially the land, impact human development, conditioning the growth of nation-states, families, and individuals. In this way, Ratzel (2011) highlights the dependence and interaction between humans and the natural environment, addressing issues of nature, where the author emphasizes the importance of understanding and managing natural resources sustainably, recognizing their central role in human life and social structures.

Edgar Morin (2005) describes the complexity of social behaviors, arguing that a multiplicity of interconnected factors determines them. Morin emphasizes the difficulty of tracking all aspects due to their complexity and considerable number. However, he underscores that the inability to identify all causes does not invalidate their determination, which is continuously reconfigured as the individual interacts with the world.

Contrary to what one might think, considering determinations leads to complexity, whereas determinism leads to analytical reductionism. This suggests that understanding the determination of social behaviors involves recognizing the multiplicity of factors involved, and complexity increases as more elements come into play (Morin, 2005). It thus highlights the dynamic and interconnected nature of the influences shaping social behaviors.

Returning to the conceptual framework, Ratzel (1906) recognizes that the wealth and vicissitudes of Territory are essential for understanding a country's political and social history. The author argues that a region's physical and geographical characteristics are important in the formation and evolution of human societies.

Thus, Ratzel (2021 [1906], p. 03) describes the extent of Territory:

An essential part of the geographical situation is size, or more precisely, the extent of the surface. Any change in size will cause a change in the situation.



If the situation is defined by fixed lines—such as geographical zones—each change in extent will consequently lead to a new delimitation of the situation.

The change in size causes a change in the situation. The phrase suggests that alterations in geographical extent have significant consequences on how a place is perceived and on the dynamics that occur within it. For example, if a geographic area expands due to the annexation of neighboring territories, it may lead to changes in political borders, interactions with other states, cultural diversity, and other relevant aspects for that territory.

According to Ratzel apud Moraes (1990), the territory was conceived similarly to an integrated vision, reflecting its importance as a central element for the existence and prosperity of a nation. For the author, territory is the material basis on which the nation-state establishes itself, consolidates its sovereignty, and seeks its growth:

People decline when they suffer territorial losses. They may decrease in number but still maintain the Territory in which their resources are concentrated; however, if they begin to lose part of their Territory, this is undoubtedly the beginning of their future decline (Ratzel, 1914 apud Moraes, 1990, p. 74).

This conception highlights the strategic importance of Territory and resources in a state's pursuit of power and prosperity while reinforcing the notion that the acquisition and proper management of areas and resources are determining factors for a nation's success.

Ratzel viewed the nation-state's growth and prosperity as intrinsically linked to the acquisition and suppression of areas and resources. From this perspective, territorial control and expansion were considered essential for a state's economic and political development. Acquiring new areas and resources enabled a state's strengthening and expansion of its influence, while the loss or suppression of these elements could lead to the nation's deterioration or weakening (Stogiannos, 2019).

Moraes (1995, p. 70) states that:

For Ratzel, territory represents the conditions for the work and existence of a society. The loss of territory would be the greatest proof of a society's decline. On the other hand, progress would imply the need to expand territory, thus to conquer new areas.

This perspective suggests that the State exerts absolute control over the Territory, using its resources to strengthen its dominance and ensure economic and political

development. In this context, political-geographical position and situation concepts become essential for formulating territorial strategies. However, it is crucial to understand that reading Ratzel's works requires attention to their nuances and the subtleties of his thinking. Reducing him to a purely deterministic author overlooks the depth with which he articulated nature, culture, environment, and human action. His works are not based on simplifying dichotomies, but on an attempt to understand the complex network of interactions between society and the environment. Thus, hasty interpretations risk obscuring his intellectual legacy's more subtle and rich contributions.

3.2 The political-geographical position and situation

Ratzel (2011) describes that the connection between a society and the land is determined by the intensity and permanence with which it utilizes the soil. If the land use is only temporary, its connection will also be temporary. However, when a society's basic needs, such as housing and food, are strongly tied to the land, an urgent need to maintain it arises. From this necessity, the State derives its power and most valuable resources, being responsible for regulating and managing the land to meet the demands of society, thereby ensuring its own stability (Ratzel, 2011).

In this context, the concepts of situation and position are introduced, which Ratzel addresses throughout his studies and publications. In doing so, he clearly distinguished the terms "situation" (*Lage*) and "position" (*Stellung*), where situation is based on the apparent fact that states are not isolated and are constantly subject to pressures from their neighbors, as well as the political and military impacts of this condition. The author related the notion of situation to considerations about civilization, natural resources, and the wealth of neighboring political bodies, which would act in close collaboration (Ratzel, 2019).

The Earth's internal properties interact with the stars' influences to maintain the telluric conditions of life in continuous undulations. The vastness of life space, the position, and the extent of the climatic regions, lands, and seas are constantly changing, and with them, the altitudes and depths of the Earth. In other words, the mutability of the life substrate constantly recreates the external conditions of life. When changes in the Earth's surface are widely spread and frequently repeated in the soil, waters, and climate in a manner strong enough to intervene in the realm of life, they must have a significant effect on both the triggering and, at the same time, the direction of the mutability of the animated world (Ratzel, 2019, p. 109).

The importance of physical changes on the Earth's surface is highlighted, as these changes can shape the conditions of the living environment, influencing human themes and interactions between nations. Understanding these dynamic relationships is essential to grasp the interdependence between physical geography and the ever-evolving geopolitical phenomenon:

Under these spatial conditions, life's development becomes a process of accumulation. The Earth's life consists of the telluric, solar, and cosmic influences that have accumulated, interpenetrated, fought among themselves, and intensified from the moment of life's first germination to the present (Ratzel, 2019, p. 109).

In this context, Ratzel (2021 [1906], p. 03) defines the geographic situation.

This permanence is summarized in the movement, which is part of the planet's soil and is expressed in any form of life on the Earth's surface. The situation also determines the soil, climate, boundaries, extent, and quantity, thus translating into all manifestations of life.

Ratzel (2021 [1906]) emphasizes the importance of this concept regarding interactions between different places, as he highlights that each thing, in a specific location, receives impulses and stimuli from its neighbors and, in turn, returns them. These interactions occur both with the closest neighbors and the more distant ones. Clearly, the geographical situation determines the "how?" and the "how much?" of these interactions, meaning that the geographical situation influences the nature and intensity of contacts. The participation of a broader area adds a dimension to the representation of the situation that goes beyond the simple question "where?", as the political-geographical situation is not limited to topographical characteristics, but also encompasses the interactions and influences occurring in the broader area, with greater detail.

Ratzel highlights the essential dependence of life on the soil, which acts as the primary basis for vital transformations. For him, Territory directly influences how life adapts and develops. Additionally, a state's geographical situation is crucial for understanding its relationships with others, affecting political, military, and civilizational aspects. The interaction between neighboring states occurs through cooperation and the mutual use of resources. This territorial interdependence reinforces the strategic importance of location (Ratzel, 2011; 2019).

According to Korinam (1983), Ratzel viewed Political Geography as a fundamental element for understanding and exercising state power, functioning as a spatial technology.

It provides tools and knowledge that rulers can use to achieve their strategic objectives, and by mastering Political Geography, leaders would learn to manipulate it for their benefit. Through studying and mastering Political Geography, one can learn how to conquer and control territories, understanding the spatial dynamics that influence power relations. In this way, it becomes a powerful strategic tool for leaders, allowing them to take control of the land to achieve power effectively.

Ratzel (1906) associates the notion of "situation" with the geographic position of the State concerning the physical environment and other states, highlighting factors such as borders, climate, resources, and strategic location. He also links the way the land is occupied to the social and political organization: agriculture strengthens the connection with the Territory, and the way land is distributed influences the type of political regime — an equal distribution tends to favor democracy, while an unequal one fosters oligarchic structures (Ratzel, 1906; 2011).

According to Ratzel (2011), the growth of the State is linked to economic conditions and the incorporation of new spaces. The State is responsible for ensuring its Territory's protection through appropriate territorial policies. These territorial policies may involve security measures, border control, establishment of diplomatic relations, and even the acquisition of new territories. In short, the State must ensure the preservation and expansion of its territorial space as part of its function and development over time (Ratzel, 1897).

The territorial extent of a state affects both its greatness in terms of population and resources, as well as its situation with regard to other nations, as it directly influences its relations and interactions with the rest of the world:

The most important aspect to retain here is the concern, since *Anthropogeographie*, in distinguishing "situation" (*Lage*, as previously mentioned) from "position" (*Stellung*, also applicable to place). Through an organicist metaphor, Ratzel will find a didactic way to justify his preference for "situation" over the second term (Pereira, 2021, p. 06).

Therefore, it is possible to interpret space as a relational perspective by considering the situation, as it goes beyond merely taking position into account. In this case, Ratzel (1906) adds something more to the position, i.e., other relevant elements in the analysis. In addition to characteristics such as the size and shape of a region, the relational perspective also incorporates the concept of "belonging" (*Zugehörigkeit*), meaning the relationship of belonging to a particular territory and its connection with the land. These elements and the

perspective imply a condition of mutual dependence between neighboring areas, which can be understood as interaction or exchange (*Wechselwirkung*) between them (Pereira, 2021).

The elements that are part of these two concepts are intertwined with the settlement of territories, and Ratzel (1975) describes them as geographical conditions related to their position, as the area where people transit or settle influences their economic vocation, defense needs, and the relationships they establish with maritime regions. In this sense:

Each part of the Earth grants countries and peoples specific characteristics and – in the same way – each part of that part, according to its location. Included in this are the climate, plants, culture, and political situation; in all these factors reside the effects that arise from belonging to a particular continent, part of it, an ocean, or from the proximity of a river or mountain. (Ratzel, 1975, p. 15).

This implies that geographical analysis is not limited to just economic and commercial aspects but also incorporates an understanding of the military dimension and the importance of Geography in the formulation of strategies. This factor is essential for analyzing geopolitical relations, recognizing that Geography is used in determining courses of action and in strategic planning.

However, Ratzel (1906) considers the concept of situation one of the most significant and comprehensive geographic concepts, as it encompasses both the interactional dimension and the physical and positional aspects of places. The author believes that a place's geographic situation is fundamental to understanding its interaction with other places and its relationship with the surrounding physical environment. By bringing these elements together, the situation becomes a broad geographic concept, enabling a more complete and meaningful understanding of a place's Geography.

This relationship between territorial protection and commerce leads Ratzel (1906) to argue that customs laws and trade treaties often serve the purpose of protecting the Territory, boosting the economy, and consolidating sovereignty. For Stogiannos (2019), Ratzelian approaches also suggest that measures related to trade are implemented not only to promote commerce itself but also to safeguard and protect the country's Territory. This indicates that protecting Territory is a central concern that permeates both commercial and economic issues.

[...] we see, therefore, how even in the most advanced stages of political development, the same subdivision of labor between society, which uses the

territory for housing and food, and the State, which ensures the protection of it through collective force, is always observed (Moraes, 1990, p. 79).

However, Ratzel (1906) bases his arguments on a vision of Territory grounded in a paradigm that emphasizes a linear and unidirectional progression of evolution, requiring the analysis of Territory while considering the historical transformations and contradictions in its formation and development.

It should be emphasized that the consolidation of the political-geographical situation (*politisch-geographische Lage*) marks a turning point in Ratzel's thinking toward his theoretical maturity, especially regarding recognizing the relational dimension of space.

This distinction becomes even clearer when contrasting the situation (*Lage*) with that of Territory (*Boden*). While Territory is understood by Ratzel as the material base of the State — the physical land on which its existence and expansion are projected — the situation refers to the relational quality of that Territory in the broader geographical space. Therefore, the *Boden* is the concrete support of political life; *Lage*, in turn, represents how this support interacts with the surrounding spaces, revealing degrees of belonging, mutual dependence, and possibilities for exchange (Ratzel, 1906).

In this sense, the situation (*Lage*) appears more comprehensive and dynamic. It does not replace Territory (*Boden*) but transcends it by including space's strategic and interactive dimension, something essential in Ratzel's political geography. By opting for the organicist metaphor to explain this preference, Ratzel signals that, just as in a living organism, the value of a part is not only in its form or size, but in how it relates to others, and it is precisely this principle that underpins his emphasis on situation. Therefore, while Territory represents "where" the State is, the situation reveals "how" it is positioned and connected within a broader territorial system (Ratzel, 1906).

Regarding communication lines and infrastructure networks, Ratzel (1897) argued that the "distances to resources" could exhaust a nation's forces, suggesting that the availability and access to natural resources are crucial for a nation's power and capacity. If resources are distant or limited, it can affect a country's strength and sustainability.

However, even with globalization's advancements in various aspects such as economy, technology, culture, and language, one fundamental element has not been completely affected: the political and military perspective of territorial states. This statement highlights that, despite global integration, territorial states continue to be significant authorities in terms of politics and military power (Cataia, 2001).

According to Cataia (2017), all entities exercise control over specific portions of space, leading to the territories' constitution. These territories can be understood both in a political and symbolic sense. Therefore, the need for control over Territory drives the emergence of the concept of borders, which are spatial elements of the political use of Territory. These borders are established to demarcate and define the limits and sovereignty of a political or social entity, implying the exercise of power and governance.

In this sense, it becomes essential to reflect on the relationship between the concepts of position and situation within the transportation system context. A state's geographical position (analyzed at different scales) determines its logistical possibilities and natural advantages or challenges, while its geographical situation influences its integration into global and regional circulation networks. This discussion can be analyzed in the next section.

3.3 Situation and position of transportation

Friedrich Ratzel, as one of the founders of modern geography, directly contributed to studies related to transportation by developing fundamental concepts on the interaction between space, society, and Territory. For him, Territory was not just a physical space but a network of interactions and flows that connected different points, with transportation being one of the main forces that integrated and developed this network (Carvalho, 2004).

Ratzel recognized that transportation infrastructures, such as roads and trade routes, were extensions of geographical space that allowed for the expansion of human activities, facilitating the circulation of goods, people, and ideas, while promoting social and economic cohesion (Ratzel, 1906).

Geographic position played a central role in his analysis. He argued that territories strategically located near rivers, ports, or other natural routes held intrinsic advantages for trade and transportation, directly influencing a state's economic development and political power (Ratzel, 1906).

Ratzel (1906) emphasized transportation as a fundamental element in the organization of expanding cities, essential for connecting central and peripheral areas and overcoming natural barriers. Although he did not address transportation in isolation, his concepts of *Lebensraum* (living space), geographic position, and territorial organization provide a theoretical foundation for current analyses of logistics and planning. His integrated

perspective reinforces the role of transportation in territorial development, economic integration, and connectivity between regions.

Ratzel (1906, p. 446) writes that:

[...] in this context, the city resembles an organism whose growth, externally manifested by an increase in mass and size, triggers changes in its internal structure. This internal development initially occurs under the influence of internal relations and can be called the segregation of internal traffic, also known as coiling. As the city expands, the need to overcome internal distances grows, resulting in curved or angled streets, road interruption, and new straight diagonal streets. Simultaneously, this expansion breaks the residents' barriers to one another.

Thus, the core issues regarding a municipality's location and position depend on the regional context in which it is situated. A municipality may have a central and territorial function for neighboring municipalities, but in a broader, state-level context, it may lose relevance compared to other municipalities within the State. Sometimes, municipalities far from major urban centers play a more significant role in their context than large municipalities located near metropolises, for instance (Ratzel, 1906; Ratzel, 1897).

Once again, Ratzel (1906) emphasizes the need to consider not only the local geography but also the connectivity with surrounding areas and the transportation networks that facilitate interaction and mobility:

For the development of a large city, attention should be focused on its general location or its relation to the larger neighboring areas. In this context, the topographical or special location is merely a complement, whose fortunate alignment with a significant traffic situation can yield remarkable effects [...] (Ratzel, 1906, p. 447).

The topographical or special location as a complement highlights that, while these elements are relevant, the true importance lies in the favorable coincidence with a significant traffic situation. This implies that a geographically well-located municipality can enhance its growth by strategically aligning with major traffic flows. The 'significant traffic situation' mentioned encompasses various aspects such as highways, railways, ports, airports, and other transportation infrastructures (Ratzel, 1906, p. 447). The fortunate alignment with these elements can drive the economic development and accessibility of this municipality.

Ratzel (1906, p. 451) supports this point, where:

The distinction between geographic location in the strict sense and traffic situation lies in the fact that geographic location is determined by nature, whereas the traffic situation only emerges when the movement of people, goods, or messages, referred to as traffic, is influenced by the geographic location, experiencing a local amplification. In this sense, the traffic situation is a geographic location with a positive significance for traffic flow. Therefore, the same type of situation can be both geographic and traffic situations.

By stating that the traffic situation can be considered a geographic location with positive significance for the flow of traffic, it can be interpreted that certain characteristics of a location may attract or amplify the movement of people and goods. This implies that the traffic situation, as an extension of the geographic location, can be seen as a factor influencing the dynamics of traffic in a given area (Ratzel, 1906).

Friedrich Ratzel (1906) describes the city as a growing organism, drawing an analogy between urban development and the natural processes of adaptation and structural reorganization. For him, the external growth of the city, visible in the increase of mass and size, is accompanied by fundamental internal changes that reflect the social and functional interactions of urban space.

As the city expands, there arises a need to adapt its infrastructure to overcome the internal distances created by its own growth. This includes urban interventions such as the construction of more direct diagonal streets that cut across previous patterns of curved or angular roads, and the restructuring of interrupted routes. These changes are driven by the search for efficiency in circulation and connectivity, essential to meet the new demands of the inhabitants. According to Ratzel (1906), a city depends on several factors to form and maintain its importance, as well as its dynamic because:

[...] the city grows more rapidly in some areas and more slowly in others, depending on the natural conditions in which it develops and the proximity it seeks in relation to traffic routes. This connection to transportation routes becomes even more crucial as the city becomes more modern and the importance of traffic for its functioning increases (Ratzel, 1906, p. 442).

Moreover, urban expansion breaks the physical and social barriers that residents establish between each other. This aspect demonstrates how the city's growth also affects social dynamics, fostering greater interaction and connectivity between individuals and neighborhoods. Thus, Ratzel suggests that the city's development is a physical and social process, shaped by the interdependence between urban space and human needs. The city transforms into a living entity, continuously adapting to internal and external changes.

Ratzel (1906, p. 446) further describes that:

Where paths intersect, people and accumulations emerge, taking on a permanent character. As these paths are constantly used and often long, the crossing points naturally transform into resting places after a long journey.

The above remains relevant, although the modern context has significantly expanded and complicated these concepts. Today, cities continue to function as connectivity centers on a scale and complexity that Ratzel may not have envisioned. The "paths" of the past, primarily land and river routes, now include a vast network of modern infrastructures, such as highways, railways, airports, and ports, as well as digital connections that link the world in real time.

Cities are the central nodes of this global network, where flows of people, goods, information, and capital concentrate and disperse. This expanded connectivity strengthens cities' role as economic and cultural engines but also presents unprecedented challenges, such as traffic management, pollution, and the need for infrastructure.

Silveira (2022) emphasizes that the recent economic restructuring, often referred to as "globalization" or, more precisely, "globalizations," as the term encompasses multiple definitions and perspectives, creates the necessary conditions for the emergence of new strategic territories, which manifest at subnational scales, such as regions and cities. These territories have become central in global competitiveness, affecting not only countries and businesses but also smaller scales, such as cities and regions.

Therefore, the State, although existing within a defined territorial base marked by power relations, can be interpreted more dynamically when considering the various manifestations of power at different scales and contexts. To stand out, these territories depend on efficient infrastructures, such as transport and logistics systems, which are essential for attracting investments, facilitating trade, and ensuring integration with global networks (Silveira, 2022).

Thus, Ratzel's (1906) idea of Territory as a consolidated material base marked by power relations resonates in the current context. While the State exists within a spatial delimitation, abstractions about Territory can be more dynamic, reflecting different scales and forms of power.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Friedrich Ratzel's ideas on situation and position reveals the significance of these concepts for urban studies, political geography, and transportation geography. Ratzel, one of the founders of modern geography, understood that the crossroads of pathways facilitate the movement of people and goods and transform into centers of permanent activity and development. The relevance of this perspective is undeniable in the contemporary context, where cities serve as essential nodes in complex infrastructure and global connectivity networks.

Ratzel is often subject to myths and prejudices that obscure his important contributions. However, by demystifying these perceptions, we can recognize that his ideas on territorial structure and its dynamics remain valid and applicable. The author should not be framed as a proponent of absolute geographical determinism or as an advocate of possibilism. Instead, he proposed a vision that acknowledges the existence of certain natural constraints without reducing human dynamics to total dependence on the environment.

It is vital to foster discussions on hegemonic structures within the theoretical tradition of geographic science to encourage encounters and debates within the geographic community. These discussions should not be limited to specific symposia on theory and methodology in geography and the history of geographic thought. Still, they should extend to major congresses involving geographers from various areas and specialties.

A central aspect of Ratzel's work is the emphasis on a territory's situation and geographic position. For him, the location of a state in geographical space — whether in coastal, inland, or island regions — directly influences its ability to relate to other states. In this context, transportation emerges as a crucial element, as it is the mechanism that enables the integration and control of the Territory. Transport networks, such as roads, railways, ports, and airports, not only facilitate the movement of people and goods but also strengthen internal cohesion and the State's capacity to project its power beyond its borders.

The relevance of transportation in Ratzelian geopolitics can be interpreted as an extension of the concept of Lebensraum (living space), as they expand a state's ability to explore and manage its Territory. Moreover, transportation plays a strategic role in military logistics and border defense, topics Ratzel considered vital for the security and expansion of states. In the contemporary world, with globalization and technological advancement, the importance of transportation has intensified, becoming a decisive factor in economic integration and international competitiveness.



In conclusion, it is essential to recognize that the concepts of situation and position, as outlined by Ratzel, offer valuable insights into the socioeconomic and territorial dynamics of both the past and contemporary contexts. Cities continue to be economic and cultural development engines within countries, facing challenges and opportunities that echo and expand Ratzel's ideas. These concepts provide a foundation for future studies in Transport Geography and Political Geography, highlighting the enduring relevance of Ratzel's contributions to understanding spatial relationships and their impact on development, connectivity, and power.

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