

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN RESEARCH: MEANING, FUNCTIONS, STRUCTURE AND EXAMPLE FOR ITS DESIGN

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Acceptance date: November 12, 2022; Publication date: December 30, 2022

Abstract - The theoretical framework plays an important role in the design of knowledge by providing the necessary theoretical support for the formulated research problem. The aim of this article is to analyse the theoretical framework as a relevant tool in the planning and execution of research, reflecting on its meaning, functions and organisation and finally presenting an example for its design. The methodology addressed is directed from the parameters of the interpretative paradigm, the qualitative approach and the use of the hermeneutic method, which helps to interpret the arguments proposed by various authors such as Daros (2002), Ortiz and Del Pilar (2005), Hernández et al. (2007), Méndez (2007), Sautu (2009), Tamayo (2017), Gallego (2018) and Rivero (2021). These contributions help to understand that the theoretical framework is an element integrated by concepts, theories and background that facilitate the interpretation and contextualisation of the categories of analysis within the research.

Keywords: theoretical framework, tool, research, interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

The development of scientific research involves a sequence of components or stages that the researcher must consider when trying to deepen the understanding of a reality that is relevant to them. Within this process, the theoretical framework stands out as a crucial element.

The theoretical framework is usually referred to as the section of a study composed of a variety of references, concepts, theories, and background information that underpin the research. When writing this section, researchers must highlight the current of thought on which their work is based, that is, the theoretical and conceptual support that they have consulted to propose and develop the research.

This document presents a subjective analysis that begins with an initial reflection on the theoretical framework, detailing its meaning and functions. Then, a strategy for its development is proposed and, finally, the reader is offered an example of its design.

This document helps to understand that the theoretical framework is not only a compilation of theories

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and background, but an instrument that integrates theory, concepts and background, facilitating the understanding and contextualisation of the research. It also helps to identify innovative aspects and contributions in relation to existing literature and previous work.

1. Methodological aspects

The methodological framework adopted in this text is based on the principles of the interpretative paradigm and a qualitative approach, which is characterised by its orientation towards the subjective world and inductive logical reasoning in order to construct a more varied and complete understanding of the reality being studied. The hermeneutic method was also used as an essential instrument for the interpretation of the different arguments presented by authors who reflect on the theoretical framework, among which Daros (2002) stands out. Ortiz and Del Pilar (2005), Hernández et al. (2007), Méndez (2007), Sautu (2009), Tamayo (2017), Gallego Cortez (2018), Rivera (2019), Carlino (2021), Rivero (2021), and other important methodologists in documentary research studies.

The hermeneutic method used in the interpretation of the information that underpins this article is elementary to understand that the theoretical framework is not simply a collection of theories, but represents a dynamic element of the formulation and execution of the research, integrating theoretical reflection, different concepts and essential background to the problem studied, thus providing understanding and contextualisation of the research. It also allows for the identification, examination and exploration of innovative aspects and contributions in relation to existing literature and previous work in the area of study. In this way, the methodology adopted not only seeks to ground the hermeneutic research, but also to promote the advancement and development of knowledge in the design of the theoretical framework, all with the highest degree of ethical and professional responsibility possible.

The strategy used for the collection of information was based on a text file, carefully designed to identify the context of the contribution (author, date of publication, title of the document, place of publication, etc.), as well as the main ideas, the research question or objective of the document, the methodology used, the theoretical foundations, the results obtained, the discussions raised, the conclusions reached, the bibliography used and, finally, the contributions of the text to the research, in this case, to the theoretical framework.

The methodological approach adopted in this text is based on the principles of the interpretative paradigm and a qualitative approach, using the hermeneutic method as a fundamental tool to interpret the arguments presented by a number of authors, including Ortiz and Del Pilar (2005), Hernández, Fernández and Baptista (2007), Méndez (2007), Sautu (2009), Martínez (2010), Tamayo (2017), Gallego (2018), Rivero (2021), among others. This approach helps to understand that the theoretical framework is a tool that integrates theory, concepts and background, facilitating the understanding and contextualisation of the research, as well as the identification of innovative aspects and contributions in relation to existing literature and previous work.

3. Results and discussion

This section subjectively addresses the general objective formulated as follows: To analyse the relevance of the theoretical framework in the process of knowledge construction in scientific research, reflecting on its meaning, functions, structure and providing an example for its design. To achieve this, the following activities were carried out: we begin with an initial consideration of the theoretical framework, detailing its importance and functions within the context of research. Subsequently, a strategy for its development is suggested and, finally, the reader is provided with an illustrative example of how to structure this essential component of a scientific paper. This guide provides the researcher not only with an understanding of the importance of the theoretical framework, but also with practical tools for its construction.

3.1. Reflections (concepts and functions)

The theoretical framework is the section that encompasses the specific theoretical delimitation that logically supports a research topic. Its conceptual elements are intrinsically linked to the theories of study (Ortiz and Del Pilar, 2005).

The theoretical bases must be presented as a coherent and structured exposition of the theory that supports the work. The meticulousness, transparency and clarity in this section will allow the reader to develop a unified set of criteria to understand and analyze the problem raised, which will facilitate the appreciation of the innovative contributions that the research will offer.

The theoretical framework is based on two main aspects: The first involves locating the research topic within the context of existing theories, with the aim of defining which current of thought it falls under and how it contributes something new or complementary. The second aspect involves a detailed exposition of each of the theoretical elements that will be used directly in the development of the project.

The theoretical foundation provides scientists with a comprehensive understanding of the formulated theories that underpin scientific knowledge related to their topic of study. This framework plays a crucial role in the research process.

According to the contributions of experts in methodology such as Daros, (2002), Hernández et al. (2007), Gallego (2018), Rivera (2019), Carlino (2021), Rivero (2021), the theoretical segment performs various elementary functions intrinsic to a research, ranging from error prevention to the motivation of new lines of research. Among the most notable functions are the successive ones:

- ✓ They help avoid errors made in previous investigations.
- ✓ They provide guidance on conducting the study by reviewing background information, which allows you to understand how a specific research problem has been addressed, including the type of studies conducted, the subjects involved, the data collection methodology, the places where it was carried out. carried out the research and the designs used. Even if previous studies are discarded, they offer direction on what to look for and what to avoid in research.
- ✓ They expand the scope of the study or guide the researcher to conduct a more complete investigation.
- ✓ They facilitate the establishment of hypotheses or statements that will subsequently be tested, helping to avoid the formulation of hypotheses without a solid basis.
- ✓ They stimulate new lines and areas of research.
- ✓ They provide a framework for interpreting the results of the study.

The above functions highlight the importance of the theoretical segment in the scientific research process, pointing out its role in planning and design, as well as in the interpretation and contextualisation of the results achieved. These functions can be synthesised in that the primary purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide firmness, unity and coherence to theories.

According to (Ortiz and Del Pilar, 2005), the theoretical framework is the methodological conceptual tool that is constructed using information relevant to the research problem, specifically based on one or more theories that have supported other research. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a thorough search of the literature related to the object of study.

Authors such as Daros, (2002), Ortiz and Del Pilar, (2005), Hernández et al. (2007), Méndez (2007), Tamayo (2017) and Rivero (2021), recommend that after examining the literature and documents related to the research problem posed, it is possible to adopt the following basic criteria to develop a good theoretical framework:

1. If there is a fully developed theory that can describe, explain and predict the phenomenon in a logical and coherent manner, it should be used with caution not to initiate the investigation of a problem or fact that has already been sufficiently studied under the same parameters.
2. If there are two or more theories applicable to the research problem, you can choose to select one of them, take certain parts of several theories or even use them in their entirety to carry out a theoretical triangulation. However, it is crucial to consider that those aspects that are related to the object of study must be selected, avoiding falling into logical contradictions or inconsistencies with respect to the problem posed. In the event that the theories are mutually exclusive, one of them must be chosen or a new theory must be constructed through dialectical confrontation between both.
3. When there are pieces and fragments of theories supported by empirical evidence (microtheories), many disciplines in the field of science lack solidly founded and validated theories, relying only on empirical generalizations. These generalizations are propositions that have been tested and have yielded positive results in the majority of research carried out. In this scenario, the researcher can begin to build a theoretical perspective based on the results and conclusions obtained in previous studies, following a logical and coherent scheme.
4. When there are guidelines not yet researched and ideas vaguely related to the research problem, the scientist must look for literature that, although not focused on the research problem, at least helps him orient himself within it. You can also resort to theories borrowed from other related disciplines. For example, many theoretical concepts that originated in the sociology of education have been adapted from the sociological field to the field of business administration.

2.2. To begin developing the theoretical framework, certain fundamental steps must be followed:



a. Carry out a bibliographic balance: This first step involves carrying out an exhaustive review of the available literature. It is essential to use various sources, such as databases, search services in university libraries, and websites of academic institutions related to the research area. Selecting reliable sources is crucial at this stage. This process includes two main steps:

✓ Identify the works that address the research problem. This will allow us to understand what approaches and results other researchers have obtained on the subject. It is important to record relevant bibliographic data and analyze how it relates to our own research.

✓ Become familiar with the theoretical bases that support the research. Once the leading authors in the theoretical frameworks of previous research have been identified, as well as those essential for our work, their work must be consulted and documented to understand the authoritative perspectives in the field of interest.

b. Theoretical analysis. Once you have the theoretical information that will support the work, it is necessary to examine and study it by reflecting on certain questions:

✓ What are the fundamental concepts developed by these theorists?

✓ What categories of your research might be relevant to our study and what is the reason for their relevance?

✓ How do we anticipate that the influence of their work will be reflected in our own?

c. Preparation of the text. Once the pertinent information has been collected, the theoretical framework is drafted. It is recommended to start by dumping the information into tables or diagrams to organize the data hierarchically. During writing, it is essential to maintain focus on the problem under investigation, present the information in a clear and orderly manner, and ensure that verified sources are used. The theoretical framework is generally structured in two parts:

✓ Background: This section details the findings obtained during the initial literature review. Relevant background information is identified and its importance is justified, as well as the way in which our work contributes to the field of study is explored.

✓ Theory: This section presents the theories developed by key authors that have been used in the focus of our research.

2.3. Example of theoretical framework, analysis category "The city"

The city

The city has been the subject of study and reflection in various disciplines of the social and human sciences throughout history. Within this theoretical framework, the multiple dimensions of the city are explored from sociological, urbanistic and cultural perspectives in order to understand its complexity and dynamics. This theoretical framework on the city is based on broadly considering the contributions of classic and contemporary theorists such as Wirth (1938, 2005), Tuan (1974), Certeau (2000), Hevia and Tijoux (2008), Iracheta (2010), Arnet and Naranjo (2021), and other authors who reflect on the function, characteristics, organization and evolution of the city.

Reflecting on what the city is and its evolution is not a simple task. For example, in 1938 Louis Wirth published his sociological text entitled "Urbanism as a way of life", which was edited and published again in Spanish in 2005. In this text, Wirth defines the city as a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially diverse individuals. In it, heterogeneity, division of labor and a different way of life emerge mechanically and spontaneously, which contrasts with that found in small rural communities (Wirth, 2005). The contrast between urban and rural life is one of the central points of Wirth's reflection (2005). He highlights how the city is differentiated from small rural communities by its dynamism, its social complexity, and its ability to generate new forms of social interaction and organization. This view of the city as a constantly evolving environment, where multiple influences and social forces converge, offers a valuable perspective for understanding the crucial role that urbanization plays in shaping modern society. In the text by Tuan (1974), titled "Topophilia", translated by Flor Duran Zapata, the following concept is introduced:

The city is defined by the experiential perspective of its inhabitants, who have diverse ways of understanding and elaborating reality. In this way, the learning of space and its transformation into place is reconstructed, conceived as a focal point with cultural or individually determined meaning or intention (Yi Fu Tuan, 1974, p. 204).

From an external perspective, it can be interpreted that the definition of the city is intrinsically linked to the way its inhabitants experience and perceive their urban environment. These individuals bring a diversity of approaches and visions that influence the way urban space is constructed and shaped. According to Tuan (1974), a leading cultural geographer, this process of perceiving and understanding

urban space involves a constant reconstruction of urban space, transforming it into a uniquely meaningful place. This place, in turn, is conceived as a focal point that takes on a culturally or individually determined meaning, reflecting the diverse interpretations and experiences of those who inhabit it. In short, the city is defined not only by its physical structure, but also by the way its residents experience it and give it meaning.

In contemporary times, the city is interpreted as an urban environment that goes beyond its mere physical existence, due to the sudden irruption of new demands. It rapidly moves away from the human and adopts an inaccessible, bureaucratic, complex and alien nature, a centrality that Lefebvre identifies as a 'void', a point where diverse realities accumulate and coexist and need to be filled with content (Hevia and Tijoux, 2008).

The city is a macro urban space, organised by communes, localities, neighbourhoods, open and closed complexes; in the city, society builds its values, and in axiological practice, customs, traditions, identity, among other cultural manifestations, are built, but as man is a rational and conflictive being, he also creates a number of problems that produce and mediate in daily interaction.

Michel de Certeau (2000), in his work "The Invention of the Everyday", analyses the city as a space in constant change and appropriation, being both the object of interventions and a subject constantly enriched with new characteristics. The city is presented as the machine and the protagonist of modernity.

The city is configured as an urban macro-space, organised into communes, localities, neighbourhoods and open and closed complexes. In this environment, society forges its values, and through axiological practice, customs, traditions and identity, among other cultural manifestations, are moulded. However, since human beings are rational and prone to conflict, they also generate a multiplicity of problems that influence and condition daily interaction.

Certeau (2000), continues with his reflections by stating that:

The city serves as a totalizing and almost mythical sign of socioeconomic and political strategies; urban life increasingly stops making reappear what the urban project excluded. The language of power "urbanizes," but the city is at the mercy of contradictory movements that compensate and combine outside of panopticon power. The City becomes the dominant theme of legendary politicians, but it is no longer a field of programmed and controlled operations. Under the discourses that ideologize it, schemes and combinations of powers proliferate without legible identity, without handles, without rational transparency: impossible to manage. (Certeau (2000, P 107).

According to Certeau (2000), the city represents a totalising and almost mythical sign of socio-economic and political strategies. Although the urban project seeks to impose a controlled and planned vision, urban life constantly challenges these predefined structures. The author suggests that, despite attempts at control by power, the city is a space where contradictory movements intertwine and compensate each other, escaping the scrutiny of panoptic power.

In this sense, the city becomes the centre of legendary political discourses, but it is no longer simply a field of controlled and predictable operations. Rather, beneath the surface of ideologised discourses, strategies and combinations of power proliferate that lack a clear and transparent identity. These forces, according to Certeau, are difficult to control or manage due to their lack of cohesion and their elusive nature. In short, the city becomes a fertile ground for the multiplicity of forces and tensions, challenging established power structures and offering opportunities for resistance and subversion.

From various perspectives, the city is presented as a complex territorial environment that has been the subject of study and reflection by prominent authors such as Wirth (1938, 2005), Tuan (1974), Certeau (2000), Hevia and Tijoux (2008) and from our own analysis. These approaches converge in highlighting the city as an urban space of high population density, where multiple political, administrative, economic, social and cultural functions are intertwined and organised.

The city, in its essence, is characterised by its diversity and its capacity to adapt to the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants. On the one hand, it is homogeneously constructed, reflecting urban planning and government policies that seek to order and control its growth. On the other hand, it exhibits an intrinsic heterogeneity, manifested in the diversity of its neighbourhoods, the multiplicity of its cultural identities and the complexity of its social dynamics.

This complex urban fabric is constantly expanding and redefining itself, shaped by both internal and external forces, ranging from migration and globalisation to technological innovation and climate change. In this sense, the city is presented as a living and dynamic space, where diverse human

narratives and experiences converge and intertwine, generating a mosaic of interactions and interconnections that define its identity and historical trajectory.

Taking an intermediate city such as Valledupar as an example, it is possible to appreciate both its homogeneity and its heterogeneity in different aspects. In one sense, the city can be considered homogeneous because its inhabitants share a common language and engage in similar cultural practices, such as shared beliefs, customs and traditions. This creates a sense of identity and cohesion among the population.

However, a closer look at the urban reality also reveals the heterogeneity of Valledupar. Residents lead diverse and unequal lifestyles, influenced by a variety of factors. These differences can be marked by the individual experiences of each person, as well as by their relationships with the geographical and social environment of the city. In addition, the physical, socio-economic, political and cultural development of Valledupar contributes to the diversity of its population, creating a complex web of interactions and social dynamics within the city. In summary, Valledupar, like many other intermediate cities, represents a balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity, reflecting the diversity and complexity of the contemporary urban experience.

It can be argued that there are various ways of describing a city, but universally, a metropolis is characterised by a number of distinctive features:

- ✓ Be a concentration of people who live in homes organized in streets and blocks.
- ✓ Being an environment where nature has been displaced by human activity.
- ✓ Host a variety of functional activities driven by industries, commerce and services.
- ✓ Have a sedentary population that depends on provisions from the countryside for their food.
- ✓ Have a large concentration of inhabitants, generally more than 10,000 people.

These fundamental characteristics not only help to define and distinguish a city, but also reflect the complexity and diversity of urban life in different contexts around the world.

There is no doubt that urban space plays a significant role in the city. Therefore, it is important to reflect on it, even if it does not have a precise and unambiguous meaning; these reflections may be influenced by numerical or functional criteria. From this, it can be stated that urban space can be an area where more than 10,000 people live, as well as an area where a population engaged in industrial activity resides.

From a broader perspective, urban space is not only limited to its architectural and physical dimension, but can also be understood as a dynamic structure that constantly interacts with subjective social processes. It is through this interaction that urban space acquires an order, a function and a social meaning that distinguishes it.

Indeed, the spatial configuration and physical form of a city are the direct result of the complex interaction between the individuals who inhabit it and the surrounding environment. Every street, every building, every public space is the result of social decisions and actions that reflect the needs, values and aspirations of the community that inhabits them.

In this sense, urban space can be seen as a constantly evolving social product, shaped by the social interactions, cultural practices and economic dynamics that take place within it. This perspective highlights the importance of understanding urban space not only as a physical environment, but also as a setting where social relations and cultural identities of a community are developed and manifested, as Iracheta (2010) points out.

It can be affirmed that urban space is a city area constructed through collective exchange, with determining elements such as the number of inhabitants and the occupations of those who live there. Socialisation is the process of interaction that human beings have with their environment. Through this process, humanity learns norms, values, principles and behavioural patterns associated with culture and political participation within the context to which they belong.

Socialisation is a determined process in which the citizen relates to others, learns and develops a series of capacities to obtain a successful participation in the urban space. In other words, thanks to this process, the city inhabitant designs, develops and manages the neighbourhood where he or she develops as a social actor.

Arnet and Naranjo (2021). In their work "Ciudad Contemporánea. Urban Processes of the 21st Century City", the urban researchers propose how to build the city of the future within today's cities. Their approach focuses on the importance of implementing consensual urban development policies that address contemporary challenges from a sustainability perspective. According to the Leipzig Charter on

Sustainable European Cities (AA.VV., 2007), two main objectives are highlighted: first, to coordinate spatial and sectoral aspects through integrated planning that promotes unified approaches to urban development; second, to revitalise less favoured neighbourhoods within the city.

The first objective seeks to establish an integrated urban development policy that coordinates key spatial, sectoral and temporal aspects of urban policy. This initiative requires the crucial involvement of economic actors, stakeholders and the wider community to implement sustainable development strategies agreed by the European Union. These strategies include creating and strengthening high quality public spaces, upgrading infrastructure, improving energy efficiency in urban environments and innovation in education policies.

The second objective seeks to address the lack of social cohesion and integration in contemporary cities by designing adequate and affordable social housing policies for people of all ages, thus contributing to the stability of neighbourhoods.

In conclusion, the city is presented as a complex phenomenon encompassing a wide range of social, physical and cultural aspects, which are closely interrelated. Analysing the city from various theoretical perspectives provides a more complete and holistic view of its nature and dynamics.

By adopting a multidimensional approach, which considers sociological, urbanistic and cultural perspectives, the diversity and dynamics inherent in the city can be appreciated. Sociology examines the social interactions and power structures that influence urban life; urban planning examines the organisation and planning of urban space; and cultural perspectives explore the practices, representations and expressions that contribute to defining urban identity.

The integration of these different theoretical perspectives is crucial to understand the processes of change and transformation experienced by cities in contemporary society. By considering the complexity and interconnectedness of the social, physical and cultural aspects of the city, a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing cities in the 21st century can be gained.

CONCLUSIONS


In the conclusions, it is confirmed that the theoretical framework acts as the argumentative backbone that supports any investigation, providing a solid basis for the study and helping the scientist in the understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon studied.

The fundamental purpose of this work has been to provide detailed practical guidance to assist researchers in constructing their theoretical frameworks. This guide covers everything from the explanation of concepts to exemplification, including the functions and importance of the theoretical framework in research. It is expected that, through this guide, researchers will gain greater clarity on how the theoretical framework amalgamates theory, concepts and background, facilitating the understanding and contextualization of the research, and allowing them to identify innovative aspects and contributions in relation to existing literature and previous works.

Additionally, it seeks to provide readers with a deeper understanding and conceptual clarity that allows them to immerse themselves in the body of the research. This is achieved by explaining the reasons behind the choice of methodology applied in the formulated and executed project, which adds an additional level of understanding and appreciation of the work performed. Ultimately, this combination of practical guidance and conceptual clarity aims to enrich both the researcher's experience during the research process and the reader's understanding when interacting with the results and conclusions of the study.

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