
Knowledge: Typology and Construction

Hermes Emilio Martinez Barrios^{1*}, José Gregorio Castañeda Romero², Roberto A. Fernández Ramírez³

¹Universidad Popular del Cesar * Corresponding author

² Universidad Popular del Cesar

³ Universidad Popular del Cesar

Abstract: This article of reflection on knowledge arises from the academic experience acquired in the subjects of Research I and II, taught in the Sociology programme at the Universidad Popular del Cesar. This work synthesises and analyses the learning obtained in these subjects, with the aim of deepening the understanding of the various typologies and approaches to knowledge, as well as its role within the social and academic context.

Objectives: To analyse the historical evolution of knowledge, its various typologies and its social construction, with special emphasis on the theory of the social construction of reality proposed by Berger and Luckmann.

Method: The methodology used in this text falls within the parameters of the interpretative paradigm and resorts to the hermeneutic method to understand and interpret the arguments presented by various authors in relation to the category of knowledge.

Results: The analysis of the typologies of knowledge shows an evolution deeply influenced by the interaction between social needs and historical contexts. From empirical knowledge in ancient societies to the consolidation of scientific knowledge in modernity, each type has responded to the specific demands and priorities of its time. In the current context, we observe an even greater diversification of knowledge, driven by factors such as technology and globalisation, which have given rise to new forms of knowledge and different criteria for validation. According to Berger and Luckmann's (1986) theory of the social construction of reality, knowledge in all its dimensions is a construction that can only occur in a social context.

Conclusions: The historical evolution of knowledge reveals that its different typologies have emerged in response to the specific demands and contexts of each era, reflecting the adaptability of knowledge to social priorities. According to Berger and Luckmann's (1986) theory of the social construction of reality, knowledge acquires meaning as a function of collective interactions and agreements, making it an intrinsically social phenomenon. Thus, types of knowledge such as empirical, scientific or philosophical knowledge not only fulfil particular functions within society, but are also legitimised and transmitted on the basis of shared practices and consensus, consolidating themselves as essential tools for interpreting reality and guiding human behaviour in different communities and generations.

Keywords: Knowledge, typology of knowledge, knowledge construction and Berger and Luckmann.

1. Introduction

Knowledge is understood as an activity through which the certainty of the existence of a reality is achieved, or as a process that allows the verification and understanding of an object or phenomenon. Through this activity, the individual not only recognises the existence of what he or she perceives, but also acquires tools to validate and explain its characteristics, thus facilitating a deeper and more structured understanding of the world around him or her. This article of reflection on knowledge is derived from the academic experience obtained in the subjects of Research I and II, which are part of the Sociology programme at the

Universidad Popular del Cesar. In it, the learning acquired is synthesised and analysed, with the aim of deepening the understanding of the different typologies and approaches to knowledge, as well as its importance in the social and academic context. The methodology used in this work is inscribed within the principles of the interpretative paradigm and uses the hermeneutic method as a fundamental tool to understand and interpret the arguments of various authors related to the category of knowledge.

The analysis of the typologies of knowledge reveals an evolution that has been deeply influenced by the interaction between social needs and historical

contexts. From the empirical knowledge present in ancient societies to the consolidation of scientific knowledge in modernity, each type has emerged in response to the specific demands and priorities of its time. In the current context, there is an even more remarkable diversification of knowledge, driven by factors such as technological progress and globalisation, which have given rise to new forms of knowledge and different criteria of validation.

According to the theory of the social construction of reality proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1986), knowledge, in all its forms and dimensions, is essentially a construction that can only develop within a social context. This perspective emphasises that knowledge is not an isolated phenomenon, but is generated and transformed through social interactions and collective agreements. The historical evolution of knowledge illustrates how its different typologies have emerged as adaptive responses to societal priorities and needs, reflecting the capacity of knowledge to adjust to changing circumstances over time.

In this framework, Berger and Luckmann's theory argues that the meaning of knowledge is shaped by the social dynamics in which it is embedded, making it an intrinsically social phenomenon. Therefore, the various categories of knowledge, such as empirical, scientific and philosophical, not only fulfil specific functions in the social structure, but are also legitimised and transmitted through shared practices and consensus. This process of legitimisation and transmission consolidates these forms of knowledge as essential tools for the interpretation of reality and for guiding human behaviour in different communities and generations. In the end, the social construction of knowledge underlines its fundamental role in the way societies understand and make sense of their environment, thus promoting cultural cohesion and continuity.

2. Methods

The methodological approach of this reflection article is based on the principles of the interpretative paradigm, situated in a qualitative perspective. Within this framework, the hermeneutic method is used as an essential tool for interpreting the contributions of various authors who have addressed the issue of knowledge from different disciplines.

The methodology applied allowed us to understand that knowledge is configured as a set of abilities, skills, mental processes and information that the individual

incorporates and develops in his or her social context. This approach highlights how knowledge is not only an accumulation of data, but a dynamic process of learning and interpretation, influenced by interactions and the culture in which the individual is immersed. Thus, the hermeneutic method facilitates an in-depth understanding of how these social and cultural factors shape the ways in which knowledge is acquired, interpreted and applied in everyday life.

3. Results and discussion

Knowledge:

The concept of knowledge encompasses a broad and generalised use, associated with any situation in which information or understanding of something is accessed. According to authors such as Guarisma (2009) and Jaume, (2020), knowledge represents a key factor in the development and evolution of humanity. In recent times, what has undergone a significant change is the speed with which knowledge is transmitted, allowing it to circulate over great distances and in volumes previously unthinkable. This phenomenon has been made possible by the technological revolution, which has increased the opportunities for vast amounts of knowledge, regardless of its nature or provenance, to reach a much wider audience, immediately and effectively. This unprecedented access facilitates the use of knowledge in various social and economic activities, promoting its impact and usefulness in different fields.

Martínez (2013), on the other hand, defines knowledge as an activity through which certainty about the existence of a reality can be obtained. In addition, he considers it as a process that enables the verification of an object, by allowing its existence and properties to be verified. This perspective highlights the function of knowledge as a tool for the validation and understanding of the environment.

Authors such as Ramírez (2009), Lugo-Morin (2010), Acevedo et al. (2010), Martiez (2010), Viveros (2015) and Jaume (2020) argue that, in general terms, knowledge can be understood as a dynamic relationship between a cognising subject, who possesses the capacity to understand and assimilate information, and a knowable object, which represents that which can be known or explored. Within this conceptual framework, epistemology focuses on analysing the nature of knowledge from a scientific perspective, encompassing the structures, limits and

validation of knowledge. On the other hand, gnoseology studies knowledge in general, exploring its origin, nature and scope without limiting itself to specific scientific methods. Both fields, although diverse in their approach and scope, contribute to a deeper understanding of the processes of acquisition and validation of human knowledge.

Types of Knowledge.

Throughout history, various criteria for classifying knowledge have emerged, each with a particular focus on the nature and origin of knowledge. Plato proposed a typology that distinguishes four types of knowledge: conjecture, belief, rational knowledge and intuitive knowledge. Conjectures and beliefs are related to the sensible world, since they originate in faith and in the perception of material reality. Rational and intuitive knowledge, on the other hand, belong to the realm of the sciences and refer to the immutable beings of the intelligible world, which implies an understanding derived from the intellect and human reason (Chávez, 2003).

In contrast, Aristotle suggested a classification in which he distinguishes theoretical knowledge, focused on theory and contemplation of universal principles, and practical knowledge, which is generated from direct experience and applied to concrete situations. This distinction underlines the idea that knowledge can be both a form of abstract reflection and an applicable and tangible resource, depending on its purpose and method of acquisition.

According to Kant (1987), cited by Chávez (2003), knowledge can be classified into two fundamental categories based on its relation to experience: a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge. Kant defines a priori knowledge as knowledge that can be obtained solely through the use of reason, without recourse to empirical experience. This kind of knowledge includes universal and necessary truths that do not depend on observation or external evidence. In contrast, a posteriori knowledge is based exclusively on experience; that is, it can only be formulated and verified through direct interaction with the empirical world. This Kantian distinction has been fundamental in the field of philosophy and theory of knowledge, as it delimits the ways in which human beings access and validate their knowledge, marking a clear difference between what can be understood through abstract thought and what requires observational evidence to be confirmed.

A relevant classification of knowledge is based on the way in which it is acquired, which makes it possible to distinguish between intuitive knowledge and discursive knowledge. In the case of intuitive knowledge, there is a direct and immediate perception of the object, made possible only by natural logic or intuition without the need for complex analysis; it is a spontaneous apprehension of reality. On the other hand, discursive knowledge, according to the philosopher Bochenski (1976), occurs when the object of knowledge is not immediately present, so that in order to understand it it is necessary to carry out a process of reasoning that leads to a conclusion. In other words, discursive knowledge is obtained through an intellectual analysis that requires a logical succession of steps or inferences to approach the object of study. This distinction underlines how the ways of apprehending reality vary, from the instantaneous and natural to that which requires rational and methodical elaboration.

Today, several types of knowledge are identified, among which scientific, non-scientific and philosophical knowledge stand out. Scientific knowledge is characterised by its systematic and rigorous approach, aimed at explaining and predicting phenomena by means of empirical and verifiable methods. On the other hand, non-scientific knowledge groups together knowledge that, although significant in everyday or cultural understanding, does not necessarily follow formal methods or require empirical validation, as is the case with popular or intuitive knowledge. Finally, philosophical knowledge focuses on deep reflection on fundamental questions of existence, being, ethics and knowledge itself, promoting a critical and structured understanding of reality and the principles that govern human experience.

Scientific knowledge aims to formulate theoretical and practical propositions that explain reality in a systematic way. This type of knowledge is based on methodological tools grounded in logic and uses observation, description, explanation and prediction to develop a detailed understanding of phenomena. Its goal is to provide precise explanations and establish general laws that can be applied to the object of study. An essential characteristic of scientific knowledge is its accuracy and precision, as well as the rigour with which it qualifies for empirical testing. Due to its flexible nature, scientific knowledge is capable of adapting and modifying its approaches according to

new findings, which allows for informed conjectures and risk-taking in the creation of hypotheses. According to authors such as Chávez (2003) and Martínez (2013), this type of knowledge is constantly evolving through empirical validation, which reinforces its ability to explain and predict in different disciplines of knowledge.

In contemporary times, non-scientific knowledge also stands out, which encompasses knowledge that does not use scientific categories or methods. This category includes knowledge such as theological and poetic knowledge, among others. This type of knowledge is classified into three main groups: vulgar knowledge, superstition and empirical knowledge.

Vulgar knowledge refers to common knowledge possessed by people without advanced academic training; it is spontaneous, empirical, non-explanatory and lacks critical analysis, and is therefore also known as popular knowledge. This type of knowledge arises from everyday observation and does not follow a formal methodology. An example of vulgar knowledge is the belief that consuming honey with lemon relieves a sore throat. This knowledge is transmitted in the family and social environment without the need for scientific validation, and people apply it spontaneously and empirically, based on personal experiences or recommendations from others. Although it may be useful in some cases, this type of knowledge is not based on rigorous studies or critical analysis.

Superstition attempts to offer explanations for certain phenomena or control over aspects of nature. However, this knowledge is not scientific, as its explanations are not rational, but are based on beliefs and supposed magical powers. Superstition is not obtained through a rigorous method, and is generally intended to provide protection for a group or a healing effect at the individual level, which is far removed from the purpose of scientific knowledge. An example of superstitious knowledge is the belief that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck. This idea is based on ancient traditions and the attribution of magical powers or supernatural forces, without rational basis or scientific evidence. People who believe in this superstition often avoid breaking mirrors or performing 'rituals' to avoid supposed bad luck, even though there is no real proof of their effectiveness.

Empirical knowledge is knowledge acquired through accumulated experience and passed down from generation to generation, constituting a form of folk

wisdom based on tradition. Although this type of knowledge is significant in everyday life, it lacks rigour and reliability, as it is not based on formal studies or a structured method. An example of empirical knowledge is the use of medicinal herbs in traditional medicine. For example, many communities have used chamomile for generations to relieve digestive problems, based on experience accumulated over time. This knowledge is passed down orally and practically, and while it may be effective, it is not always based on rigorous scientific research and systematic method.

Philosophical knowledge is acquired through processes of critical and reflective reasoning. According to Chávez (2003), philosophical knowledge, in a strict sense, could be classified as part of scientific knowledge. However, due to its relevance and depth, it is considered to be a distinct and special category.

The categories that characterise philosophical knowledge are abstract in nature and often refer to entities beyond what the senses can grasp, such as essences, ideas, values and concepts like justice. This kind of knowledge is not limited to empirical observation, but seeks to understand complex and fundamental realities about human existence, morality and the nature of knowledge itself. Philosophical knowledge thus invites deep and critical reflection, promoting a broader understanding of reality and the place of the human being in it.

Knowledge and the social construction of reality

The social construction of reality is one of the most relevant and influential theoretical currents in contemporary sociology. This perspective was developed by the sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1986), who proposed a theoretical foundation for a sociology of knowledge, largely inspired by the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz. The central theses of their work hold that reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must examine the processes by which this construction occurs (Berger and Luckmann, 1986). In this context, reality is conceived as a set of phenomena that exist independently of subjects, while knowledge is defined

as information concerning the characteristics of these phenomena. Thus, reality and knowledge are intimately linked through the process by which a body

of knowledge about a specific phenomenon is socially established as an accepted reality.

The original notion was quite structural and envisaged the existence of processes of institutionalisation in society at a primary level, which allowed for the emergence of autonomous spheres of social interaction. For the participants in these spaces, these spheres were perceived as 'second nature'. The authors argue for the importance of social interaction and language in the construction of reality.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1986), society manifests itself as both an objective and a subjective reality, in a continuous dialectical process consisting of three moments: externalisation, objectification and internalisation. This process is also reflected in the individuals who are part of society; each person simultaneously externalises his or her own self and the social world, while internalising it as a subjective reality.

The starting point of this dialectical process is internalisation, which involves the immediate apprehension or interpretation of an objective event in terms of its meaning. This process is a manifestation of the subjective processes of others that acquire subjective relevance (Berger and Luckmann, 1986).

In relation to the process of internalisation, Berger and Luckmann (1986) state that it takes place through socialisation, which is divided into two characteristic types: primary socialisation and secondary socialisation. Primary socialisation occurs during childhood and takes place in an emotionally charged context. Each individual is born into an objective social structure where he or she encounters signifiers who assume responsibility for his or her socialisation and who are imposed on him or her. These signifiers mediate the world for the child and transform it in the process. The definitions that these signifiers offer about the individual's situation are presented as an objective reality.

Internalisation only occurs when the child identifies with the signifiers. By accepting the roles and attitudes of these signifiers, the child appropriates them, which allows him or her to develop a subjectively coherent and plausible identity. Primary socialisation creates in the child's consciousness a progressive abstraction from the roles and attitudes of specific individuals to roles and attitudes in general. This process of abstraction is known as the 'generalised other'. Its

formation in the individual's consciousness implies that he or she now identifies not only with specific others, but with a generality of others, i.e. with society as a whole. Primary socialisation culminates when the concept of the generalised other is established in the individual's consciousness, at which point he or she is considered an effective member of society, subjectively possessing a self and a world.

Secondary socialisation, on the other hand, involves the internalisation of institutional 'underworlds'. This refers to the appropriation of semantic fields that structure routine interpretations and behaviours within an institutional area. In this sense, it involves acquiring specific knowledge about roles and their appropriate norms. The underworlds internalised during secondary socialisation are usually partial realities that contrast with the 'base world' acquired in primary socialisation; however, they also constitute more or less coherent realities, characterised by normative, affective and cognitive components.

The formal processes of secondary socialisation raise the problem of coherence between original and new internalisations, since they always presuppose a previous process of primary socialisation, a previously formed self and an already internalised world. Some of the crises that arise after primary socialisation are due to the recognition that the world of one's own parents is not the only existing one, but has a very specific social location. During primary socialisation, the child understands his signified others as mediators of reality; in secondary socialisation, he tends to understand the institutional context and the generalised others as institutional functionaries. The 'roles' of secondary socialisation are easily separable from the individuals who play them, making them interchangeable (Berger and Luckmann, 1986).

The relationship between knowledge and the social construction of reality is fundamental in contemporary sociology, as both concepts mutually influence how individuals understand and make sense of their environment. Below are some of the key connections between these two concepts:

1. **Social Construction of Knowledge:** The social construction of reality posits that knowledge is not merely an objective representation of an external world, but is formed through social interactions, cultural processes, and historical contexts. Shared beliefs, norms, and values within a society influence what is considered valid knowledge.

2. Validation Process: Knowledge is established socially when certain bodies of knowledge are accepted and legitimised by a group. This implies that what is considered true or real may vary across different societies and contexts, depending on the prevailing social and cultural dynamics.

3. Interpretive Context: The way reality is interpreted is mediated by the accumulated knowledge within a society. For instance, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to understand social, political, or cultural phenomena are products of social constructions that reflect collective experiences and perspectives.

4. Power Dynamics: The social construction of reality is also related to power, as certain forms of knowledge may be privileged over others, influencing how reality is understood. This can lead to the marginalisation of alternative knowledge systems or groups that lack access to legitimisation channels.

5. Change and Evolution: As societies change and evolve, so too do the social constructions of reality and knowledge. New experiences, interactions, and contexts can lead to transformations in what is understood as reality and knowledge, reflecting the dynamic nature of both concepts.

In summary, knowledge and the social construction of reality are intrinsically linked, as knowledge is generated, validated, and transformed through social processes that shape individuals' and communities' perceptions and understandings of reality.

Conclusions

The historical evolution of knowledge demonstrates that its various typologies, including non-scientific knowledge (vulgar, superstitious, and empirical), scientific knowledge (based on theories and methods), and philosophical knowledge, have emerged and transformed in response to the demands and conditions of each social context, showcasing a remarkable capacity for adaptation to the priorities of each era. From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's (1986) theory of the social construction of reality, knowledge gains its meaning and validity from the agreements and interactions among individuals in a specific social environment, thus can be considered an essentially social phenomenon. Consequently, each

type of knowledge not only plays specific roles within society but also becomes legitimised and transmitted through collective practices and consensus, consolidating as an essential resource for interpreting reality, solving problems, and guiding human behaviour in diverse cultural and generational contexts.

References

- [1] Acevedo, A. O., Linares, C., & Cachay, O. (2010). Tipos de conocimiento y preferencias para la resolución de problemas. *Industrial Data*, 13(2), 25-37. Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima, Perú.
- [2] Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1989). **La construcción social de la realidad**. Amorrortu editores.
- [3] Bocheński, J. M. (1976). *Introducción al pensamiento filosófico*. (Trad. española). Barcelona: Herder.
- [4] Chávez, P. (2003). *Conocimiento, ciencias y método. Método de investigación*. México: Publicaciones culturales.
- [5] Hernández, Fernández y Baptista. (2007). *Fundamento de metodología de la investigación*. México.
- [6] Jaume, A. L. (2020). *Introducción a la teoría del conocimiento*. Universidad de Salamanca, España.
- [7] Ladrón de Guevara, L. (1978). *Metodología de la investigación científica*. Universidad Santo Tomás, Bogotá.
- [8] Lugo-Morín, D. R. (2010). La construcción del conocimiento: algunas reflexiones. *Límite*, 5(21), 59-75. Universidad de Tarapacá, Arica, Chile.
- [9] Martínez, H. E. (2010). *El proceso de investigación científica en la universidad*. E.D. Fundación Elite, Valledupar.
- [10] Martínez, H. E. (2013). *Fundamento de investigación*. *LEGERE IURIS*, Revista Programa de Derecho Universidad de Santander, Sede Valledupar, UDES.
- [11] Ramírez, A. (2009). La teoría del conocimiento en investigación científica: una visión actual. *An Fac med*, 70(3), 217-224.
- [12] Viveros Chavarría, E. F. (2015). Aproximación al sentido filosófico de la teoría del conocimiento. *Perseitas*, 3(1), 57-65. enero-junio 2015 | ISSN: 2346-1780 | Medellín, Colombia.