

The Brazilian Rural World: access to goods and services and countryside-city integration

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ABSTRACT

The rural world is a space of life, a place of residence for a large number of Brazilians, where they come from and where they experience the world. The theme of the paper will be the forms and social processes that assure the rural population access to the goods and services produced and available in Brazilian society. This access is assumed to be an indicator of the participation of the Brazilians living in the countryside in the results of the social progress obtained by society in general and the effective expression of the constitutional principle of equal opportunities for all citizens. The official definitions of the rural environment in Brazil always take it to be the area surrounding urban centers, many of which are small agglomerations. As a result offers of employment and services are not widely available locally, which results, on the one hand, in the precariousness that can be observed in many Brazilian rural areas and, on the other, in the need for local populations to have to travel, often covering large distances.

Keywords: rural world, access to services, countryside-city integration.

Introduction

Recent literature increasingly reaffirms the assumption that relations between the rural environment and cities cannot be understood as relations of opposition or antagonism, but rather are inscribed in a common space as relations of complementarity and interdependence. Taking rural and urban to be “particular modes of the use of space and social life” (KAYSER,1990: 13), the great challenge is to understand the social processes through which these realities are interconnected in depth, mutually reiterating each other. Without any intention of considering this problematic in its entirety, this paper intends to reflect in detail instead on some specific aspects.

Urban-industrial society seen from the rural world

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Some interpretations of these processes emphasize the effects of ‘external’ dynamics on rural structures and life. From this perspective rural-urban relations are the result of the more general processes that now shape Brazilian society as an urban-industrial society and which can be translated by what many authors consider to be the ‘industrialization of agriculture’ or the ‘urbanization of the countryside’. Seen from this angle the distinctions between rural and urban have progressively lost their significance and the rural environment has tended to be assimilated into the urban.

There is no doubt that the transformations observed in the Brazilian rural environment are, above all, the effect at the local level of more general processes in society. Nevertheless, these processes have to be understood in their particularities and contingencies as constructed historically in Brazilian society. At the same time this ‘external’ and unifocal perspective cannot ignore a dynamic that originates internally, resulting from the capacity to take the initiative, adaptation and the resistance of the countryside population.

Roughly speaking until the beginning of the twentieth century countryside-city relations were seen in a much broader context, understood – looking at it as a whole - as being an ‘agrarian civilization’. It is in this sense that Sergio Buarque de Holanda’s analysis can be understood, for whom:

The entire structure of our colonial society was based outside of urban environments. Although... the Portuguese did not build an agricultural civilization *a rigor* in Brazil, it was undoubtedly a civilization with rural roots. Effectively it was in rustic properties where the life of the colony was concentrated during the initial centuries of European occupation: cities were virtually, if not in fact, dependent on rural areas. Without much exaggeration, it can be said that this situation was not essentially modified until the abolition of slavery. (HOLANDA, 1995: 41).

He also adds:

The strength of the rural dominions when compared with urban pettiness, represents a phenomenon which was installed here with the Portuguese colonists as soon as they settled. (*idem*: 60).

Similarly, Florestan Fernandes believes that in traditional Brazilian society the *vila* and the city expressed the cultural standards of an “agrarian civilization.” (FERNANDES, 1975). He identifies in traditional cities a “cramming of urban functions” which, nevertheless, “did not contain within them the seeds of an urban revolution in the strict meaning of the word” (*idem*: 140). In this context “the socio-cultural environment never liberated this type of city from the chains that tied it to the direct or indirect tutelage of the countryside” (*idem*: 141).

Cities bound man to the rustic cultural horizon and to the proponent conservatism as a lifestyle. Nevertheless on the surface various demographic, economic and socio-cultural traits of urban life were evident. The urban congestion of the landscape, however, does not in itself indicate the new directions of their history. It only establishes an indication of how urban functions would be regionally committed to the interests and values of *vilas* plantations and small nuclear rustic communities” (*ibidem*).

More importantly than the dimensions of the rural and urban populations and going beyond the actual functions of the city and the countryside, two elements are fundamental for describing this agrarian civilization: the local power exercised by an

elite linked to the concentrated ownership of land and the disqualifying treatment that this elite used in relation to those who were not landowners. While the landholding elite often felt above the law, to the extent that the law was confused with their own local power, those who were not landowners were ignored as subjects of rights, policies for the rural environment rarely took into account the improvement of their material living conditions and nor were they recognized as workers.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century this general picture was progressively transformed – a transformation that is significantly expressed in the official statistics of IBGE, according to which the population that is considered rural, although remaining higher than the population defined as urban, lost its absolute and relative weight. The 1970 Census registered a change in this position, with the urban population surpassing the number of people living in rural areas. The latter, however, still amounted to 41,054,053 inhabitants, equivalent to 44.08% of the country's total population.

The question raised in this new context is how to understand the reproduction processes of rural world, now not from the perspective of agrarian civilization, but as part of an urban-industrial society.

This general conception, nevertheless, must not take into account industrialization and urbanization processes in an abstract form, disassociated from the concrete historical conditions that actually shaped them. In the specific case of Brazilian society at least three aspects have to be considered if we want to understand how the more general transformation took shape in social reality: Brazilian urbanization generated an enormous range of small and not very 'urban' municipalities; industrial and service sectors remain strongly concentrated in the large cities, despite the significant movement to the 'interior' of the country; and land ownership remains strongly concentrated.

Urbanization is without a doubt one of the general processes that transformed Brazilian society during the twentieth century, creating a new universalizing reference in function of which society as a whole is defined. Theoretically, the concept of urban is constructed on the assumption that a determined population size - number of inhabitants and demographic density – corresponds to a determined level of socio-economic complexity, which as a consequence makes the conglomeration in question apt to offer employment opportunities and access to goods and services to the population living in its area of influence. In these terms what fundamentally defines an area as urban is its centrality and its vocation for the rendering of services. As we can see in an interesting and illustrative study by IPARDES:

The city was born as a market, serving surrounding areas, its role as a central place and, thus, its urban level were measured not only by the number of people in the agglomeration, but by the functions it exercised for its taxation areas. Wherever there is a complexity of functions of exchange and services, in addition to production, there exists a city" (BERNARDES *et alii*, 1983).

Pimentel Neto *et alii* took a similar position in reference to a geographical perspective.

One of the classical theorists of German geography, Walter Christaller, dedicated himself to understanding urban dynamics through the key concepts of centrality, central location, region of influence of cities and polarization. Proposing an urban hierarchy based on the flows of goods and services, the

author suggested that the area of influence in a city is not only defined by the geographic position it occupies, but is associated with a set of functions of goods and services that the city offers” (PIMENTEL NETO *et alii*, 2007).

It is known, however, that the urbanization process is not uniform, to the contrary a rigid hierarchy of urban agglomerations has been created from large metropolitan cities to small municipal centers with less than 20,000 inhabitants and *vilas*, equivalent to small districts. In relation to the small cities and, with much greater reason, in relation to the districts it is often asked if it is relevant to consider them as urban or as effective members of the ‘city system.’

In fact, as has been exhaustively mentioned in the most recent debate on the question, in Brazil the majority of cities with a population lower than 20,000 – many specialists refer to those with less than 50,000 – do not meet the minimum conditions to assume this vocation, with their centrality only being attributed to their legal recognition as urban spaces. The criteria adopted for the characterization of cities emphasize the administrative functions that are attributed to agglomerations legally defined as urban, without taking into account their effective capacity for this, which ends up by reinforcing the precariousness of surrounding rural areas, which also results in many urban areas suffering from similar limitations.

This reality has been the subject of numerous studies and it is not necessary to return to the arguments made in this respect in recent years. It is sufficient to consider that the legal framework constructed over time has consecrated the principle of the autonomy of municipals to delimit the fiscal boundaries of urban zones, due to which it became legally and politically impossible to define objective criteria to distinguish between urban and rural areas and the hierarchical classification of these areas.

Decree no. 311, dated 2 March 1938,¹ imposed requirements that had to be complied with by municipal authorities in relation to the minimum sizes of cities and *vilas* (i.e., their urban areas), and the establishment of the physical limits of urban and suburban areas, as well as the need to prepare maps and charts that record these boundaries under the penalty of “the loss of its autonomy and having its territory annexed to a neighboring municipality...” (article 13, paragraph 2). However, the same decree undermined its own definitions by reiterating the urban condition of cities and districts authorized before the decree came into effect, irrespective of their size and complexity. Furthermore, in the name of autonomy the stipulated requirements were progressively annulled by subsequent legal texts.

What explains the creation of this concept in Brazilian legislation is fundamentally the fact that the main objective of the perspective adopted is the definition of the destination of the taxes collected in each of these areas. According to the National Taxation Code (Law no. 5172, dated 25 October 1966), municipal taxes are collected in urban areas and federal ones in rural areas. It is no wonder that municipalities are thus stimulated to artificially expand their urban areas, so much so that they have a legal basis for doing so, especially through the adoption in legislation of two important legal devices. The first associates the urban condition with the existence of improvement, but for an area to be considered as urban it is enough that this area:

¹ This decree is the one that José Eli da Veiga appropriately described as “*Varguista rubble*”, since it was signed during the dictatorial period of Getúlio Vargas (VEIGA, 2002).

Has at least two of the following, constructed or maintained by Public Authorities: I – curbs or paving, with drains to allow the runoff of rainwater; II – water supply; III – sewage systems; IV – a public lighting network, with or without lampposts for domiciliary distribution; V – a primary school or health center at a maximum distance of three kilometers from the property in question. (Law no. 5172, dated 25 October 1966 – article 32, paragraph 1).

The second device is expressed in the definition of the “area of urban expansion”, also contained in the same article in the Taxation Code, according to which the urban concept is definitively disassociated from the idea of complexity and the capacity to render services. According to the CTN:

municipal law can consider as urban areas susceptible to urbanization, or to urban expansion, appearing in the allotments approved by the relevant public bodies, meant for housing, industry or commerce, even if located outside the zones defined in accordance with the provision of the former paragraph (Law no. 5172, dated 25 October 1966 - article 32, paragraph 2).

We are facing a paradox: to be considered urban, a city does not need to prove its capacity to exercise urban functions, since the presence of infrastructure equipment and services are legally seen as the negation of the rural condition.

Current legislation, on which IBGE statistical classifications are based, maintains the distinction between urbanized and non-urbanized areas in cities and *vilas*, with the latter corresponding to areas “legally defined as urban, characterized by occupations that are predominantly of a rural type.” Two other spatial categories are also considered: “isolated urbanized areas”, areas “defined by municipal law and separated from the municipal or district urban area by a rural area or other legal limit”; and “rural agglomerates of the urban extension type”, which are defined as follows:

They are settlements located in areas outside the urban legal perimeter, but developed as a result of the expansion of a city or *vila*, or surrounded by these in their expansion. Since they constitute a simple extension of the effectively urbanized area, they are by definition attributed the urban character of the rural agglomerates of this type. These settlements can consist of allotments that are already inhabited, housing units, housing agglomerates classified as sub-normal, or areas developed around industrial, commercial or service establishments” (IBGE, 2000).

The only possible result of this is the “exaggerated extension of urban areas” and the consequent retraction and disqualification of rural areas, seen only as non-urban – or not yet urban - areas.

... the simple construction of a public school, linked to an extension in the public lighting network, allows these municipalities subject to local taxation considerable parts of their territories. The generality of this practice leads to the strange situation of large areas being considered as urban, not because of the urbanistic needs of municipalities, but rather as an artifice to increase local revenues” (BERNARDES *et alii*, 1983: 20).

Ricardo Abramovay reaches the same conclusions when he states that:

Access to infrastructure and basic services and a minimum of density are sufficient for the population to become urban. As a result the rural environment corresponds to the remnants not yet engulfed by cities and their emancipation

comes to be seen – in a distorted manner – as the ‘urbanization of the countryside’ (ABRAMOVAY, 2000: 2).

In relation to industrialization, it is now widely accepted that there exists a process involving the movement of industrial plants and service companies to the ‘interior’ of the country – historically concentrated, especially in São Paulo state and above all in its state capital and the surrounding metropolitan region – which has accompanied the growth of metropolitan regions around other state capitals and the emergence of large cities in the ‘interior’ of the country. Nevertheless specialists in the area recognize that this process is still quite timid and has not altered to any great extent the historical process of concentration. In an article about industry in São Paulo in the 1970s and 1980s Carlos A. Pacheco, Wilson Cano, Jorge B. Tapia and Aurílio Sérgio Costa Caiado highlighted the slow pace of industrial ‘interiorization’ in São Paulo state, referring to a:

...progressive loss of the weight of the metropolitan area of São Paulo as regards industry in the state as a whole and a continuity, albeit at quite a slow pace, of a process of spatial deconcentration which characterized the ‘interiorization’ of development” (PACHECO *et alii*, 1995, emphasis added).

The same authors added: “It is worth noting that the ‘interiorization’ of development which was the mainstay of the extraordinary economic growth for a large part of the interior of São Paulo has lost pace in recent years” (*idem*).

Expanding this analysis, Aurílio Sérgio Costa Caiado says that it involves “simultaneous movements of industry: deconcentration in a few sectors that are not very intensive in technology, and a reconcentration in sectors that are highly intensive”, and explains that

The distinct localization strategies in sectors cause more complex movements than the dichotomy of concentration *versus* deconcentration. There was a productive deconcentration, both real and with a statistical character, in certain segments and the displacement of plants in others. Some have adopted the dispersion of production with an expansion of the radius of localization and others have reconcentrated. Nevertheless, these movements cannot be generalized, since they did not occur in all regions and are much more perceptible when looked at from São Paulo” (CAIADO, 2004).

Therefore, even acknowledging the importance of the spatial deconcentration of industry and the multiplication of small services in nearby areas, including rural ones – transport services, lan houses, repair shops, amongst others – it appears evident that the large majority of municipalities, especially small ones, are excluded from the direct influence of this process and benefit little or not at all from its multiplier effects on the local economy.

It has to be accepted that the presence of industries in rural areas cannot be regarded as a panacea. In fact, while on the one hand the increase in labor positions is always something positive, on the other hand polluting factories, or a sector that has nothing to add to local potentialities, end up functioning as enclaves, either lacking multiplier effects or producing perverse effects on fragile social and environmental equilibriums. This also applies to agro-industries. Furthermore, the implementation of an industry in a rural area, especially if it attracts new inhabitants and services, can disfigure it, since according to current legislation this area can in the near future be defined as urban, as discussed above.

The social dynamics constructed in rural spaces are offshoots of this broader context of their relations with urban-industrial society, but also of the internal configurations of the rural environment, which are directly and profoundly associated with the modes of land use and the social use of land and other productive resources. As a result the modernization of agriculture, which began in the 1960s, reiterated the traditional concentrated control of the land, which continues to generate a large capacity for political domination and the production of various forms of social exclusion. (BRUNO, 1997 and 2002).

The first, and most striking, of these is rural poverty. According to Ângela Kageyama, “in 2004 the rural population accounted for 17.1% of the total, but 31.5% of the poor are in rural areas. While in urban areas 29.2% of the population can be considered poor, this reaches 65.1% in rural areas”. She also says that 2.8 million people in rural areas are living in situations of extreme poverty, understood as when “people have an income below the poverty line and living in domiciles that do not have running water in any room, nor a bathroom, toilet, or electricity” (KAGEYAMA, 2008: 206).

In second place, as a result of the confluence of the factors considered here, is the social clearance of vast areas of large cultivations due to the expulsion of a significant contingent of employed workers, who had previously been resident in the countryside and who although still continuing to work in agricultural companies now live on the peripheral fringes of cities. These are the people who to a large extent constitute the poor – and at times miserable – version of the areas of urban expansion mentioned above.

Finally, it is also worth considering for the same reasons the difficulties involved in the consolidation of agricultural sectors, especially those corresponding to family farming. Many of these difficulties, notably those referring, among other aspects, to the size and quality of available areas, access to credit, professional training, information, formal education and health, constitute profound blockages that directly affect the performance of producers and family quality of life.

The principal result of the modernization of agriculture, a project imposed on society as whole under the argument that it would result in progress for everyone, was the subordination of agriculture to industry through the action of distinct industrial sectors before, during and after the agricultural productive process, constituting what is called the agro-industrial complex. (KAGEYAMA, 1990). However, what characterizes this process in Brazil is above all the association established between progress and landholding size, meaning that only large landholders could benefit from the considerable public resources given to them, which, as in a spiral, actually reinforced the concentration of landholding. In these situations,

social relations are strongly significantly asymmetrical, marked by the economic, social and political domination of the large landholders, who in general were absentees, exercised directly over the ‘subordinate forms of the peasantry’ (NEVES, SILVA, 2008), predominant in these situations (WANDERLEY, 2009).

Therefore, less due to the introduction of the modern and more because it reproduced the traditional forms of domination, the modernization process resulted in the expulsion of the large majority of workers who did not own their land and in the undermining of the feasibility of the minimum conditions of reproduction of peasants in search of a space of stability. The so-called ‘industrialization’ of the countryside cannot

in these conditions be understood without introducing into the argument the fundamental consideration that this process did not revolutionize, as occurred in other historic situations, the landholding structure, and consequently the political predominance it produced. This fact continued to be constituted as a structuring element in the rural world. New approaches to rural development that have been formulated from time to time from the perspective of local development or territorial development cannot ignore or disconsider the profoundly asymmetrical relations of power that are thus reproduced, under the penalty of annulling their own transformative capacity.

Seen from the local rural perspective these are the three aspects that design the immediately perceptible and experienced face of urban-industrial society. Imagine the inhabitants of a rural zone of a small municipality with less than 20,000 inhabitants, of whom half live in the municipal town and the districts defined as urban. In a local context, constructed around landholding concentration, industrialization and urbanization are undoubtedly real references for these inhabitants, though the virtuous effects of these processes may seem to be distant, since having been implanted unequally at the national level, they are translated at the local level by a strong restriction of urban solidarity in terms of the offers of employment, goods and services, in such a way that all that is left is only the dilemma of precariousness *vs.* displacement, i.e., suffer the restrictions of local offer or travel more or less long distances in search of access.

Between the countryside and the city: relations of interdependence

In relation to what interests us more directly in this paper, perceiving the most general social dynamics through their concrete expressions in the rural world leads us to focus on their sociological particularities. This reflection is thus located in a dimension distinct from what is expressed in legislation – centered on fiscal objectives – for which, as was shown above, ‘rural’ ends up simply being what is not urban or what is ‘left over’ and is outside the physical limits of cities and *vilas*.

In the perspective adopted here, rural space can be defined by the predominance of unconstructed spaces (predominance of nature) and by the condition of a small agglomerate with a low population density in which relations of proximity predominate.

Like the urban space, the rural space is also associated with functions that valorize the characteristics indicated above, especially the productive, residential and heritage functions. It is worth noting that the effective implementation of these functions is of interest not only the rural population, but can also constitute services that the rural world has to offer to society as a whole.

This is what permits countryside-city relations to be understood as a two-way route, in which from the theoretical point of view asymmetries and discontinuities do not necessarily signify imbalances, but rather relations of complementarity through which reciprocal functions are supplied and are exchanged.

Naturally, not all the necessary services are located in the rural area, nor would it be reasonable to suppose this because they have a distinct nature, and can be considered ‘proximity’, ‘superior services’ and ‘intermediate’ (INSEE, 2003). The first correspond to those that meet the needs of daily life and express a greater or lesser dynamism in the local residentially based economy, examples of which include transport, small commerce and local means of communication. Examples of superior services are universities, theater shows and artistic exhibitions, rarely present in rural spaces.

Finally, among the principal intermediate services we can mention large scale commerce, banks and public services in general, which can be accessible to inhabitants.

The vocation of the centrality of municipalities would be more effective if they contained the highest possible density of services in their territories of influence – rural and urban – and the disposition of the municipal population as a whole. Therefore, irrespective of its size, a small municipality can become “a space of democracy and place for the management of nearby services” (BAGES; NEVERS, 1997). A particularly illustrative example of this type of relationship can be seen in the production of food for urban markets. While for the inhabitants of the city this proximity service is the means that assures them a healthy quality for the food that they consume, for the countryside the existence of this economy of proximity is frequently the mainstay for their remaining in the countryside and the affirmation of their identity. For both it is without a doubt a reinforcement of interpersonal relations, seen by many as the strengthening of the most human face of local life.

The interconnection between rural and urban spaces is equally affirmed in the way the spatial distribution of basic infrastructure is equated from the city. Far from being an urban prerogative, as was emphasized above, the installation of public equipment, such as electricity, means of communication, the building of drains for rainwater and sewage systems, should reflect the recognition of rights of citizens, irrespective of their place of residence.

The effective exercise of urban functions and the local existence of a service system is particularly important as a base for the preparation of a typology of various rural situations in the country, taking into account their intensity, the level of complexity and the distance – measured in terms of physical distance and time/conditions of dislocation – between the area of residence and the offer of services. It is certainly unnecessary to insist on the fact that urban capacity constitutes a central ingredient in the construction of this typology.

Its importance can also be perceived to the extent that it is this that determines to a large extent that the profile of the rural population and the relative weight of the various functions of the rural space. Therefore, for example, the presence of non-farming rural residents with an urban origin is naturally proportional to the capacity of this rural environment to offer comfortable living conditions, including the so-called modern ‘amenities’ and supposes another conception of the distinctions between rural and urban spaces. This is what happens in developed countries where the ‘valorization’ of countryside living motivates people of an urban origin or former rural immigrants to reside (or reside once again) in rural areas, while still maintaining intense contact with the city frequently including employment there. This urban-rural migration, which has been generating what is seen as a ‘rural renaissance’ (KAYSER, 1990), has been reinforced by the accelerated advances in virtual communication, which to a certain extent ‘de-localize’ individuals, in other words it disassociates their condition of being a resident in city from the benefits that the modern world increasingly offers to all.

In Brazil, although the large-scale investment in rural electrification, subsidiary roads, intra-municipal transport, health and education, amongst others areas, that strengthens contact between rural areas and the municipal towns is undeniable, there is also no question that the coverage of these services, as well as their quality, are profoundly insufficient and unsatisfactory. It is no wonder that rural areas do not

manage to attract more demanding urban migrants and remain inhabited, above all, by persons who relate in function of family property or community ties.²

The countryside population constructs an area of circulation – its living space – centered on its area of residence, through which it is mobilized to gain access to the necessary goods and services. This circulation area naturally presents distinct intensities, depending on the case, which express the objectives, the frequency, the time and the space of any displacements made. The living space, thus, comes to be “the smallest territory in which its inhabitants have access to the principal services and jobs” (INSEE, 2003). The concept of mobility becomes complementary to that of accessibility, not as a rupture with the rural world, but as an intrinsic dimension of the experience in which they live, as an expression of their process of integration in society as a whole (MENEZES, 2002).

It is necessary to take into account once again that the mobility observed in the majority of Brazilian rural areas is in many ways distinct from what now characterizes countryside-city relations in developed countries. In the latter the separation between workplace and place of residence predominates where the process of development of society occurred in a more decentralized form, directly affecting a wider territory than just the urban centers. Even knowing that the spread of the impacts of development is never complete and there are still areas that are relatively isolated and lacking, the choice of living in the countryside does not signify the renunciation of goods and services which in this case are no longer identified as the exclusive symbols of urban life.

Agriculture and farmers

To better understand the reproduction of the rural world inside Brazilian urban-industrial society, it is necessary to reflect on the place of agriculture and farmers in this context. It has been repeatedly stated that ‘rural’ should not be confused with ‘agricultural’. Despite fully agreeing with this statement, which in fact does not represent any novelty in the historical configuration of the rural world, it is nonetheless necessary to explain and assume its consequences.

On the one hand the association between the two categories constitutes one of the social justifications for the modernization of agriculture seen as a response to the needs for the transformation of the rural environment, something which is constantly repeated by the employer leaders who call themselves ‘*ruralistas*’. Therefore, questioning the assimilation of the rural in a sectorial perspective implies above all introducing in the debate, and in public interventions, other dimensions of rural development, which is particularly related to the living conditions of the countryside population and the valorization of natural and cultural resources. In this case the concentrated form of land distribution also loses its basis of legitimacy to the extent that it inhibits, as has already been seen, the social vitality of rural areas.

On the other hand, one cannot deduce from this argument the negation of the importance of agricultural activity in the rural environment. This is because the processes of the occupation and use of space are historically strongly associated with agricultural production and related activities (livestock rearing, forestry, extraction, etc), which have likewise become essential elements in landscapes. Especially where this

² The reference to family property and to belonging to the local community allows the Brazilian local community to be characterized in very broad terms, as well as for its internal diversity to be recognized, something which is not reduced to the classic forms of peasant and employee.

occupation results in the formation of multiple housing units and in the diversified exploitation of natural resources, farmers – workers on the land in general –, irrespective of their numerical importance in terms of the population as a whole, have become the bearers of accumulated knowledge about the local space regarding its physical conditions and cultural traditions. It is very true that traditionally agricultural production units – large and small establishments – increasingly tend to diversify their activities, incorporating tasks that are not directly agricultural, which aim to improve their products. However, in these cases, and likewise in those in which agriculture has come to be the initial stage in the production process of a good which is completed outside the establishment and even outside the rural environment, it seems obvious that what is modified is the relative weight of the contribution of agriculture to obtaining the final product, and it is not possible to ignore its importance as the indispensable base of the productive system constructed in this way. As stated by the French geographer Jean-Paul Diry,

all the countryside is agricultural. It is the product of generations of peasants who modeled the original landscapes and who made efforts to cultivate and to raise animals for their own consumption and/or to sell any eventual excess ... Nevertheless, this rural world should not be confused with the agriculture and many other activities that take place within it (DIRY, 1999: 10).

In relation to farmers two consequences arise out of the conception adopted here. First, a greater connection with the ‘urban’ cannot be understood necessarily as a ‘rural crisis’, as if the city inevitably were a path without return for the inhabitants of the countryside. Second, but no less important, access to employment, goods, and services within the actual rural areas and in their urban centers expresses a particular demand of farming families. In relation to this, it is also worth considering, in a special way, the access to goods that constitutes the indispensable basis for remaining in the countryside, such as housing and electricity and in the case of farmers, access to land and water. However, access to other services is increasingly valorized and demanded to the extent that their presence or absence can also affect local demographic dynamics, as is the case of services in the area of education and health (SOARES *et alii*, 2009).

Focusing more specifically on family farmers, the most significant group of countryside inhabitants, relations with the city is a constituent element of their reproduction strategies.

In relation to employment two aspects have to be taken into account. In first place are succession processes. As is commonly known the families of these farmers are in general large, with two or (many) more children. In these conditions it is usual for non-inheriting children to seek a professional alternative outside the family establishment. Therefore, it is common for this form of production and life to produce workers for the agricultural sector or for other non-agricultural activities, something which does not constitute a crisis in its reproduction.

This crisis, when it exists, is manifested in three forms: when the moment of succession is delayed in time –when retired many parents only give up running the establishment very late – creating a situation of instability for young inheritors in relation to their future; when the non-inheriting children do not find the occupations they seek in the nearest spaces, being compelled to migrate longer distances or simply to assume the condition of an unemployed person in the family; or, which is more serious, when the structural conditions of the production units are so precarious that

with there being no property to pass on, all the children are candidates for employment outside the family farm.

The second aspect to be considered in relation to employment is the search for complementary activities within the family establishment, configuring what is called the pluri-activity of farming families. As has been very well analyzed by Afrânio Garcia Jr., here too what is in question are the ascending or descending reproduction strategies for family production units (GARCIA JR., 1989). Much has already been said about this question, but it remains central in current research on the rural world. What appears most important to keep in mind is that pluri-activity, due to its own nature, supposes the permanence of agricultural activities. The fact that incomes from non-agricultural activities are higher than those obtained from the results of internal production cannot obscure the centrality of the family property; indeed the system of activities of family members is organized in the present and in the future to ensure the reproduction of this family property. (WANDERLEY, 1999 and 2003).

Pluri-activity is thus not necessarily a transition phase from a situation in which farmers solely work on the crop growing and animal rearing in their own establishments – the so-called and frequently idealized pure farmers – to another situation where agriculture loses economic and social importance. The latter effectively characterizes a crisis of agricultural activity for the family in question, however, in this case it no longer makes sense to speak of pluri-activity.

Finally, in third place the multiplication of non-agricultural activities in the rural environment also results from farmer strategies, where they are feasible, of expanding the scope of their productive initiatives. Rather than pluri-activity, since it is exercised within the family establishment, what is involved in this case is the search for versatility aimed at the aggregation of value to agricultural products and a more intensive use of the labor available within the family. According to Sergio Schneider,

The growth of non-agricultural activities in the rural space should not be interpreted rashly as a loss of importance of strictly agricultural activities. Actually what exists is a process of the productive diversification of these spaces, probably related to increasing economic and social mercantilization (SCHNEIDER, 2000).

The main difficulty of family farming results not from the presence, but rather the absence or fragility of the offer of non-agricultural activities in the local space. According to Angela Kageyama, “In Brazil as a whole pluri-activity has slowly increased: in 1995 16.6% of rural domiciles were pluri-active, in 2003 this proportion had grown to 17.2% and only 18.4% of rural domiciles were pluri-active in 2005” (KAGEYAMA, 2008: 200).

Moreover, it is also undisputable that the non-agricultural occupations offered locally to countryside inhabitants are rarely the type that can assure those obtaining them a new professional profile. An example of this is the case of numerous men from farming families in the municipality of Orobó, Pernambuco, who work in the civil construction sector in Recife, around 110 km away. Lacking employment in their own municipality, they circulate between the family domicile – which remains their own place of residence even though they only visit it once every 15 days – and the new workplace, in which they are unable to build a new career, due to the precariousness of working conditions, (WANDERLEY, 2006).

With the exception of some labor positions available in public services, such as teachers, health professionals and other municipal employees, the large majority of occupations remain precarious, unqualified and badly paid. This particularly occurs “in the less developed states, (where) rural occupations in industrial sectors tend to concentrate in agro-industrial activities” (KAGEYAMA, 2008: 198).

Conclusion

Integration in urban-industrial society has a socio-political dimension vis-à-vis the recognition of countryside inhabitants as subjects of rights. Therefore, access to goods and services becomes the concrete manifestation of the exercise of citizenship, and is constituted as an indicator of the participation of Brazilians living in the countryside in the results of the social progress obtained by society as a whole and the effective expression of the principle of equality of opportunity to all citizens, as stipulated in the Federal Constitution:

“Art. 6 Education, health, work, housing, leisure, security, social insurance, the protection of maternity and infancy, and the provision of aid to the needy are all social rights in accordance with this Constitution” (BRASIL, Constituição Federal, 1988).

As a part of Brazilian society the rural world has benefitted directly from the virtuous effects of its development. Among the effects deserving special attention are the results of municipal decentralization processes, reaffirmed and reinforced by the 1988 Federal Constitution, the consolidation of social movements resulting from the re-democratization of the country starting in the second half of the 1980s and the impacts of various public policies concerned with rural development with a territorial focus and with the improvement of the living conditions of the countryside population. Among these one consequence that appears evident is that they reinforce the identities of ‘subordinate’ social groups, expands the field of collective action, favor its protagonism and the capacity to formulate demands.

This certainly the feeling expressed by Octávio Guilherme Velho, who stated in an interview with the magazine *Carta Capital*:

People who felt threatened are feeling more secure. Their problems persist. Nonetheless, they feel that there are possibilities of resistance. Or, as they themselves say, of re-existence. (...) There are no longer isolated and uninformed people. (...) The *grotões* (hamlets) no longer exist. Our elite continues not to respect the forms of knowledge of the population, of the poorer sectors, who have the capacity to take account of their concrete interests” (VELHO, 2006).

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