Trends and matters in rural development studies in Brazil

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Abstract

Since the crises of traditional theoretical models which guided most of the rural sociology studies between the 1950s and the 1990s, the field of rural studies seems to be in a process of reinforcement in many countries. In countries like Brazil, discussions about rural development obtained importance during the last fifteen years because of the economic stabilisation and the consolidation of the democratic process. The role of the State started to be discussed and organisations and institutions of the civil society started to interact in a systematic way, having as a result a list of topics that highlights traditional issues such as rural poverty and inequality and agrarian reform, but also news matters, like the environmental sustainability, family farming and social rights (older people, women and black people). In this paper I would like to identify the main themes and analytic guidelines of the thinking and try to characterise theoretical approaches that have been used by rural development studies in Brazil in the recent years.

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Introduction

Writing a paper on rural development in a period in which the belief in the possibility of development *per se* is being questioned by important scholars (Gilbert Rist, 1996; Giovanni Arrighi, 1997 and more recently Gilberto Dupas, 2006 – without forgetting Celso Furtado, 1974) seems risky. Even Jose Eli da Veiga (2006) himself, one of the Brazilian authors most devoted to the rural development theme, has done several remarks and has emphasized some difficulties and limits about this controversial topic. His recent book comprises a wide revision of economic growth and wealth distribution theories in order to conclude that an adequate definition for development could be found through the convergence of the ideas by Ignacy Sachs, Amartya Sen and Celso Furtado. This union of ideas illustrates that development implies, in a condition of human well-being, a guarantee of individual freedoms and respect for the environment, which could be reached if the outputs of economic growth “prioritise the improvement of social conditions for populations” (Veiga, 2006, p.82)

The idea that development is a belief, a myth or a utopia should not be useful for leaving such a common expression without an interpretation. Social Sciences, and particularly, Sociology emerged for interpreting and understanding social facts and also for explaining them through their intrinsic nature. And as many notable scholars agree, development is a phenomenon of social nature, because it exists as such when it comes to be perceived as a situation involving a specific human group that carries out a set of actions which produce practical, normative, cognitive and symbolic relations and interactions.

This is not about using adjectives or categories for defining the type and nature of development. There is not much more to be added about it. Reviewing some literature would be enough (Nobre and Amazonas, 2002). Nevertheless, by the way this subject has been used and questioned, development is a political and ideological construction (in the genuine sense of the word) that brings with itself an intrinsic contingency historically conceived, because development as such only exists when its contrary, the “non-development” (or other future name for it), subsists. Since the dialectical theory teaches us that the antithesis of the thesis is not previous to or after the synthesis, because they are produced by a mutually determinant movement (the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*), it is possible to justify that development as such began existing when a classification or definition was socially and politically defined and legitimised, which determined that a
specific social situation, practical reality, region or country is considered as “developed” and the remaining as “non-developed” (under development, developing, etc).

Therefore, it is possible to agree with some scholars that development is indeed a myth, a belief or a utopia because it corresponds to mental constructions and representations of reality. However, these representations should be deconstructed and a meaning should be attributed to development. That is why it is essential to uncover the social, economic and political grounds (among others) that give support and offer infrastructure to those constructions or, from a different perspective (to avoid mentioning the old discussion on “culture and practical reason”), to realise and to recognise actions and practices that come from those values and cognitive understandings. Therefore, studying development involves analysing processes of social nature which occur through relations and interactions among human groups who are changing environments, delimitating the spaces and territories they inhabit, adapting and improving their means of production and transforming their culture and values.

In order to understand these processes it is essential to use theories, concepts and approaches that have been conceived and which are accessible to people who are interested in using and improving them. This is very important for the study of rural development, the core of this paper, which does not need to create new analytical references besides those which have already been created for understanding processes of social changes in general. For what rural development scholars and researchers, no matter from which field, look to discover and answer are the motives and causes that produce changes, understanding how they occur and showing who their benefactors are (the contrary is also truth, in this case, stagnation). In sum, they are interested in knowing which factors generate transformations of any character: economic, environmental, social, cultural, political, institutional, and ethical and moral or any other kind.

Having as a starting point this small digression, I will now attempt to elaborate the general focus of this paper which aims at thinking about the rural “side” or rural dimension of development. This implies understanding the processes of social change that occur in rural areas. The spatial delimitation has therefore no other reason for existing besides its practical feature, even though this decision carries an “arbitrary” sense and is easily delimitated because of its geophysical interface with other dimensions, such as the urban one. However, this does not mean ignoring any other existent interfaces, it only indicates the scope of understanding and interest that this paper tries to reach.
The main goal of this paper consists in a reflection about the most important trends and themes in the recent debate on rural development in Brazil. It is aimed at analysing in what way researchers and scholars have interpreted the recent social changes in Brazilian rural areas during the last years, as well as at characterising the main social actors, institutions and organisations that play an important role in this process. Thus, the historic period has a decisive importance since this paper intends to focus on the emerging discussions about the topic since the 1990s.

The writing of this paper has a much more didactic purpose than an inductive one. The proposal is to describe and characterise the historical context in which the debates on rural development in Brazil emerged, by presenting some elements coming from political, social and economic transformations that are implicit in its foundations. This referential will constitute the grounds supporting the hypothesis that current discussions surrounding rural development are political formulations and constructions that have been used for the “instrumentalisation” of specific actors of society, for the State and for scholars.

It is argued that the current debate on rural development in Brazil is different from the one that emphasized the compensatory policies of the 1970s, even though being informed by governmental actions and interventions occurring in the recent political scenario (policies on agrarian reform, family farming credit, support to rural territories, affirmative actions for women, retired people, and black people, etc.). Besides, it is argued that the rural development agenda, in which scholars, organisations and institutions actively participate, has been influenced by the State and by public policies implemented since the 1990s. Thus, the analytical and interpretative framework that has been used is relatively diffuse and polysemic, even though it might have been capable of playing an important role in the construction of the topic agenda.

Once the scope of analysis has been delimited and some actors have been identified, which take part in the debate, this paper aims at presenting some approaches that have been applied and cited by the literature on rural development during the last fifteen years. Moreover, it is necessary to mention that the references and authors referred to in the paper have been chosen arbitrarily, assuming risks about possible lacks of information concerning ways and manners of interpreting positions and ideas of the authors who will be analysed. In a conscious way, this paper does not mean to be exhaustive neither conclusive.

The idea of this article has been thought of for a long time, as a result of the review of the bibliography offered by the discipline of Development Theories, which is
taught at PGDR/UFRGS\textsuperscript{2} and also as an outcome of proficuous dialogues with some students and colleagues. However, the idea for the paper only became more elaborated since my decision of doing a Post-Doctoral Degree at Cardiff University and the need for writing a paper in order to start a debate with Terry Marsden (my supervisor and interlocutor) and other European scholars who are presently involved in projects about this issue. The final redaction could only be achieved thanks to Professor Alberto Arce who accepted this paper for discussion at the XXII Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology.

**Brief comment on the evolution of studies on rural development in Brazil**

Nowadays, there are people in Brazil who still associate rural development with the set of actions by the State or by international organisations (mainly the World Bank) destined to intervene in the poorest and more delayed regions of Brazil, mainly in the Northeast. According to Ellis and Bigs (2000), this conception of development corresponds to a period when it was believed that the State was the only agent capable of creating these processes in rural areas.

In Brazil and in other countries of Latin America, rural development programmes have targeted poor regions or peasant groups who have been considered as incapable or inapt for being transformed and integrated in the capitalist economy through technological progress and the substitution of production factors. This perspective, which has been articulated with the modernisation theory and the technological diffusion, promoted compensatory and social intervention actions guided and targeted as an alternative for farmers or for rural regions that could not become technologically modernised, neither be integrated in the economy through other sectors such as industry, commerce and services (Leite, 2005). In Brazil, the PDRI “integrated rural development policies” have been considered as a feasible solution. Take the example of settlements in the Amazon area with people from others regions and the combats against desertification in the Northeast, among others\textsuperscript{3}.

In contrast, an important part of the Brazilian rural studies comprised topics about agrarian, productive, socio-demographical and spatial modifications which have been caused by the so-called “conservative modernisation” of Brazilian agriculture.

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\textsuperscript{3} There are several examples and denominations for these programmes in Brazil. The most widely known are the Polonordeste, the PAAP, among others. An analysis of these programmes can be found in Wilkinson (1986).
Until the 1980s, two main lines of thinking were present in this debate. On the one hand, there was the literature that dealt with Marxism and mainly the theory of social differentiation by Lenin. Lenin’s theory pointed out that technological progress and subsequent transformations of labour relationships implied a growing process of decomposition of the poorest social categories in the rural world. Very few studies concerning rural development came out from this line of thinking, even though they have analysed the State’s actions and compensatory policies. On the other hand, there are some studies about rural communities and traditional populations, mainly small-scale farmers, peasants and other groups that reproduce themselves within rural areas. Central to these surveys was the understanding of livelihoods, reproduction strategies and issues concerning social identity. These are investigations that are not supported by a unique theoretical reference and that are not interested in focusing on the place or the role of these social groups in social change processes.

Since the mid-1980s, there is an important change in trend in this debate, with the emergence of social movements, mainly the MST (Landless Rural Workers' Movement) and others from groups such as the seringueiros (rubber tappers), people who are affected by dams, women, etc. (Navarro et. al., 1996; Scherer-Warren, 1999; Leite et. al, 2001). Another topic from this period concerns the articulation between farmers and agroindustries particularly due to increasing forms of subcontracting and integrated production through agricultural chains (Graziano da Silva, 1996).

Thus, it is possible to argue that until the first years of the 1990s, Brazilian rural studies, mainly the academic ones, did not focus on rural development *tout court*. This can be justified by the fact that the debates were focused on other themes or that rural development had a political and ideological sense and was strongly connected to governmental programmes with social and compensatory character (Navarro, 2001).

The change in focus and understanding about rural development in Brazil finally happened due to the general transformations in the State, civil society, and academic studies since the 1990s. The context and factors that have influenced this transformation are described below.

**The political, social and intellectual context of the 1990s**

The economic crisis during the 1980s left deep scars behind and awoke the main Brazilian political forces towards the awareness that the key challenge for a country in a process of opening up to the outside world and re-democratisation was a macro-
economical stabilisation, with a special attention to the inflationary problem. Although it is not the purpose of this paper to describe the general situation of the time, it is important to keep in mind that among the factors that influenced the “lost decade” (the 1980s) were problems concerning the external debt with the IMF (in 1983 and in 1987, when the decree of reprieve was declared), the hyperinflationary process at the end of Sarney’s government (1985 to 1989), the slow growth of economy and a growing popular dissatisfaction and frustration. Therefore, expectations of improvement and growth after the period of dictatorship could not be fulfilled and during the second half of the 1980s, Brazil went through a period of great economic instability.

Stabilisation would only arrive during the third year of the 1900s when the vice-president Itamar Franco became President after the impeachment of Fernando Collor de Mello (Brazil had held its first direct free elections after the dictatorship when Collor de Mello was elected President in 1989). Subsequently to that trauma and the intention of setting up a neo-liberal and radical model, the centre-right political groups regained strength and articulated a macro-economical stabilisation plan, known as “Plano Real” (“Royal Plan” - 1993). This plan proposed the introduction of a new currency called real (substituting the old cruzeiro) and set up its value as equal to 1 US dollar.

The sociologist and senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) at the time (who was Minister of Economy during Franco’s government) obtained political support and won the elections for Presidency in 1994, obtaining a smashing victory against his opponent, Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva (left-wing party). During his first government, FHC entailed a rigorous control over monetary stabilisation. His administration encouraged a process of privatisations and opened the national economy to foreign capital. Moreover, the emergence of regulatory agencies (communication, energy, transport) illustrated the new regulatory rather than interventionist role of the State. Even though this is not a space for evaluating this period, it is important to mention that, despite the fact that FHC’s administration reached monetary and economic stabilisation, the actions for opening economy (privatisations) and changes in the regulatory framework were not enough for galvanising economic growth. When FHC was re-elected in 1998, his monetary policy had to be changed due to the high external debt caused by its parity with the US dollar. As a result, the levels of economic growth remained extremely low until the end of his second mandate, in 2002.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the process of stabilisation of the economy (which began presenting low inflationary levels from 1995 on) during the FHC period created room for debate about the factors and possibilities of development in the
country\textsuperscript{4}. This context became prone to the emergence of innovative proposals, among which those connected to rural development. Moreover, during the 1990s, particularly from 1993/1994 on, several laws that had been set up in 1988 entered into force (Souza, 1996; Nunes, 1996). For example, one of them dealt with politico-financial decentralisation, because municipalities became “federate entities”, therefore being responsible for the execution of great part of the public policies (health, education, security, etc.). Other, perhaps more important, laws refer to the implementation of a set of actions promoting the social rights inscribed in the new Constitution, such as rural retirement (at 55 years old for women and 60 years old for men), demarcation of indigenous lands and remaining territories from quilombolas (descendants of former slaves), regulation of the use of public lands for extractivist activities, fight against child labour, among others. Therefore, besides the scenario of macro-economic stabilisation, a renovated legal and institutional environment is introduced in the 1990s, which preconises a planning based on the greatest decentralisation of the political power in the State\textsuperscript{5}.

A second aspect to be considered as part of the context in which the discussion on rural development in the 1990s emerges refers to the changes in the Brazilian civil society as a whole. In the 1980s, the social movements and organisation that had been repressed during the military dictatorship returned to the political scenario (Sader, 1988)\textsuperscript{6}. However, the difference of this decade to the next one is that, in the 1990s, the scope of action of these movements and organisations changed, since they no longer merely demanded and protested, they also gained a proactive and proposing character\textsuperscript{7}. Adding to this is the fact that several civil society organisations also acquired greater diversity and density, such as the emerging non-governmental organisations (NGOs), cooperatives, associations, among others. In general, one can say that civil society

\textsuperscript{4} During the second mandate of FHC there was a debate between “monetarists”, who defended the financial and monetary stability at any cost (led by the Minister of Finance Pedro Malan) and “developmentists”, who defended the inductor role of the State through an increase in public expenses even with some degree of inflation (whose sympathizers included the Minister of Health of the FHC government, José Serra and other economists of the President’s party, PSDB, such as Luis Carlos Mendonça de Barros, also reaching sympathizers from sectors of other political forces such as the PMDB and the PT, “at the time”).

\textsuperscript{5} Nowadays, there is a vast bibliography which has been developed in Brazil about decentralisation, the role of federate states and the new orientation of social policies such as Kugelmas and Sola (1999) and Baiochi (2003).

\textsuperscript{6} This does mean that institutions and organisations of civil society have ceased to exist or have been dismantled during the period of 1964 to 1984. The active role of the Church and of unions during these years is an example that contradicts that assertion.

\textsuperscript{7} There is a vast literature about this controversial topic. The purpose here is not to argue about the nature of social movements neither about their potentialities, but merely to indicate how they participate in the social process.
reacquired and widened the diversity of forms of expression of its political complexity which, without surprise, led to conflicts and disputes and, at times, revealed its contradictions.

Many of the organisations of the civil society arise, namely, due to the changes operating within the role of the State, assuming sometimes functions which were left uncovered by it (education, health, social welfare services, among others), or mediating the practical need of the population and the search for resources to meet them, via projects to raise state public funds. Besides that, these new social actors also acquire a role of surveillance and control over the actions of the State, having a much more effective and legitimate participation in the management and governance structures of public policies (Dagnino, 2002; Côrtes, 2005). For many scholars, and even for important institutions (the World Bank, for example) working with development, valuing the advocacy and participation of actors in public policies (developing or strengthening “social capital”) has become more important than the practical results of actions (Tendler, 1997). In the case of rural development in Brazil, there are several examples of this.

A third aspect to be considered as a part of the context in which the public discussion on rural development in Brazil is initiated deals with the incorporation of the notions of sustainability and environment. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro (1992), caused a political mobilisation that had important repercussions over institutions, the State and, mostly, over intellectuals. Although it can be argued that these repercussions did not have practical results (the implementation of Agenda 21 would be an example), it is true that from the 1990s on, the State created different organs of action for dealing with environmental issues, many of which involving regulations that deliberate the development of impact studies and forms of controlling economic activities. The development agenda started to slowly incorporate multiple dimensions and receiving diverse adjectives that do not need to be repeated (Veiga, 2006).

Anyhow, this paper merely attempts to highlight that the vertiginous growth in interest by scholars and by the public opinion (notice the attention the media begins dedicating to this topic) about environment and sustainability spread to the general public and started guiding political actions and moulding research and investigation. When topics and theoretical references by scholars to rural development are analysed, it is the current opinion that it is not possible to separate it from the environmental scope and multiple dimensions of sustainability.
The emergence of the debate on rural development in Brazil

Which were the decisive factors that contributed to the emergence of the current discussions concerning rural development and which conferred them that kind of projection and scale, and overall, legitimacy? Great part of these factors had a fundamental importance for the construction of a new perception or vision about the meaning of rural development. That is why it is important to know them.

The first factor (and probably the most important of all) to be pointed out is related to the trajectory of the discussions about family farming and its potential as a socio-economic and productive model for the Brazilian society. That family farming, as farmers which are today denominated like this, have always existed is no news for anyone. However, it is necessary to recognise that it was during the first half of the 1990s that this notion was acknowledged as a political category, having afterwards been assimilated by scholars and policy makers, which conferred an extraordinary legitimacy to it, such that it became a strong reference in opposition to other equally powerful notions, such as agribusiness.

As pointed out by other studies (Schneider, Mattei and Cazella, 2004), there are two main reasons for this legitimacy: firstly, the genesis of family farming is intimately related to the growth in political strength by the movement of unions of rural workers during the 1990s. Disputes for credit, better prices, differentiated forms of commercialisation, rural social welfare, protection and fight against unregulation and indiscriminate commercial overture (promoted by Mercosul) encouraged CONTAG (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers) to join other emerging movements such as the movement connected to the DNTR-CUT (National Department of Rural Workers - Workers Central Union). This resulted in forms of mobilisation and struggles which produced a significant political impact, such as the Jornadas Nacionais de Luta (one-day marches), which became the Cry of the Land Brazil (Grito da Terra Brasil), an annual movement that subsists until today.

Secondly, the early 1990s constituted a particularly proficuous period during which several studies, books and surveys emerged producing a theoretical and interpretative displacement regarding family farming. The work of Abramovay (1992),

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8 These "Jornadas Nacionais de Luta" were organised, at first, by CONTAG, Rural CUT and MST and also had the participation of other rural social movements. It is important to mention the intensive debates that occurred at the Agriculture Commission of the National Congress from 1988 to 1993, when the Agrarian Act was set up. This period was also characterised by discussions about the Agrarian Act, when rural workers' organisations became important actors and with a significant power over the public agenda regarding these two important topics.
Veiga (1991) and Lamarche’s compilation (1993, 1994) revealed that family forms of production were not only predominant in advanced capitalist countries, but they were also capable of producing surplus and of playing an important role in the economic development of these countries. The next step would come with the typology of Brazilian rural households, which was developed by a consulting group of researchers from the FAO/INCRA project (1994). This survey was important because it classified Brazilian rural households according the form of labour use (family labour vs. contracted labour), suggesting a typology that separated family farming (consolidated, in transition and peripheral) from large-scale farming and also because it presented a set of suggestions of agricultural and agrarian policies for this social category. Based on this survey, other studies came out with the aim of measuring the size and the role of family farming in Brazil, also based on the Agriculture and Livestock Breeding Census 1995/96 (Guaziroli et. al.; 2001).

The second important factor for the emergence of the debate on rural development in Brazil is the result of the growing influence and action of the State in rural areas through policies for family farming as well as actions related to the agrarian reform, food security, among others. Under the governments of Itamar Franco and FHC, the State was the one legitimising the claims by social movements and promoting actions in rural areas as a whole. Firstly, it legitimised the agrarian reform, which resulted in the sanction of the Agrarian Act and of the Interim Rite, in 1993, followed by the establishment of the Special Secretariat for Agrarian Issues which later became the MDA (Ministry of Agrarian Development). Secondly, the SDR-MAPA (Secretariat for Rural Development) was also created and then transferred to the MDA. Thirdly, the creation of PRONAF (National Programme for the Strengthening of Family Farming), in 1996, which became the main public policy for small-scale farmers in Brazil. Since then, its growth in resources and contracts has been vertiginous and deserves an emphasis:

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9 A significant part of these recommendations would be supported and used as reference by the rural workers union movement during the conception of the Rural Development Alternative Project (Santos, 2001).

10 The MDA arises in a context of social conflicts in the rural world and particularly, of a strengthening of the struggle for land in Brazil. On the one hand, there was pressure by small-scale family farmers connected to “CONTAG”, claiming specific compensatory policies for the so-called “green anchor” that agriculture created with the price stability in the Royal Plan during the first government of FHC. On the other hand, the MST widened its social foundations and extended its scope of action until São Paulo (Pontal do Paranapanema). However, the decisive political facts occurring in this period include the massacre of landless farmers in Corumbiara, Rondônia (August, 1995) and Eldorado de Carajás, in the South of Pará (April 1996), both followed by a “march” to Brasília (April, 1997), which culminated in a meeting gathering the estimated number of 100 thousand people. Given the national and international repercussion, the government created the Special Secretariat for Agrarian Issues that later became the Ministry of Agrarian Development – MDA (Carvalho, 2001).
only in 2005, the programme financed 1.530.600 contracts with a budget of R$ 5.579 billion (US$ 2.5 billions).  

The role of the State is growing and expanding since the mid-1990s, namely diversifying its focus. Nowadays, the State is no longer merely concerned about the agrarian reform settlements or the credit for family farming. This is the case, for instance, of food security policies and of support policies to actions that could be considered as affirmative for social rights. Regarding the latter, the policies against slave labour can be mentioned, through the creation of a specific Secretariat, the regulation and implementation of the remaining areas from quilombos (former African slave communities), social security policies for rural retired people, and more recently, actions for developing rural territories, among others.

The discussion on food security deserves a specific comment. This topic returned to the agenda at the beginning of the 1990s, firstly due to campaigns against hunger and poverty, led by the sociologist Herbert de Souza, known as “Betinho”. The impacts of the IPEA Hunger Map and the creation of the National Council for Food Security (Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar), both in 1993 should not be forgotten in a moment when food security became a part of the main social programme of the FHC government, entitled “Solidary Community” (“Comunidade Solidária”). In more recent years, during Lula’s government, these actions achieved more room and a perception was created in the Brazilian society about the need for social policies. Since then, the government developed alternatives for transferring income to poor social groups, such as the “Bolsa Escola” programme (school grant programme) and also of direct subsiding (Milk Distribution programme, Vale gás - the “cooking gas coupon”, etc). With the creation of the Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight against Hunger (MESA) in 2003, these programmes were altered and unified in the “Bolsa Família” Programme (family grant) which is nowadays the main social policy of the Brazilian State with a significant repercussion in the poorest rural areas (Hall, 2006;)

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11 For an evaluation of PRONAF’s impacts, it is recommended to look at Mattei (2005); Guanziroli (2006) and Mattei et.al. (2007).

12 In fact, the “Comunidade Solidária” programme faced serious resistance, even from within FHC’s government, which was the reason why its practical impacts were insignificant. However, and from this programme on, several activities have been articulated which would shape the agenda of DLIS (Sustainable Integrated Local Development) projects. These projects whose authors are NGOs, development agencies, enterprises and mediators, had the purpose of developing local actions through the promotion of “empowerment”, the formation of social capital and the valuing of the social actors’ advocacy in the struggle against poverty. For more information and access to papers and documents, it is recommended to see www.rededlis.org.br.

13 Among the analysts, and mostly, political scientists, it is common to explain the success of the programme “Bolsa Família” and of other actions of the “Fome Zero” project (Zero Hunger Project) by the victory of Lula in the presidential elections in 2006.
Ipea, 2007; Kageyama e Hoffmann, 2007; Schneider, 2006). Concerning rural development, the most consistent instrument for an interface with these social programmes is the Food Acquisition Programme (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* - PAA) for family farming, which was created in 2004 with the purpose of being a mediator, with financial and market instruments, between food production and food consumption.

The third factor, that is favouring and strengthening discussions about rural development in Brazil in the recent period, concerns politico-ideological transformations. These changes have two directions. On the one hand, sectors of agrarian elites, which until now, were against changes, particularly in the support of social and compensatory policies were forced to change their stand.

This is very easy to perceive concerning the polemic issue of the agrarian reform, because the present attitude is not so more of being against dispossessions and rural settlements, but of discussing the model and form in which this process is being implemented. This change was operated by the political and organisational strengthening that occurred in rural areas in the recent period and also by the relative weakness the agrarian elites acquired, facing oscillations in the price of international agricultural commodities, which consequently caused an increase in indebtedness and the reduction of the land value, one of their main actives. Selling lands to the State for settlements became a “good business”, especially for those land owners who possessed non-productive extensive areas.

The other side of this political and ideological change consists in the fact that during the 1990s, several arguments were created in an attempt to demonstrate the fundamental differences among the variety of producers of Brazilian agriculture. Those arguments were based on the idea that there is an opposition and a polarisation between family farming and entrepreneurial farming. Family farming comprises production for local and national markets and, in contrast, entrepreneurial farming produces commodities, mainly for exportation. Deriving from this notion is a dualism that is translated into a permanent political and ideological dispute among agribusiness and the other forms of production that are generally grouped in family farming and rural development. This polarisation has been promoted by both sides and subscribed by organisations, scholars, mediators, and policy makers.

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14 This does not mean that there is a consonance regarding the role of MST as protagonist of the agrarian reform. Recent debates (newspaper articles, editorials and magazines that were launched in the last week of April 2007) that took place in written press revealed this polemic situation.
It is obvious that the idea here is not to reduce or ignore these differences, even though one cannot deny that their bases for arguing are extremely fragile, if not inconsistent. However, this is not what is important to evaluate and to discuss in this paper. The fact is that as an outcome of this polarisation (or Manichaeism), the discussion about rural development itself arises as an alternative and an opposition to the notion of agribusiness. The latter gained emphasis since the end of the 1980s, because of the agricultural sector organisation according to the chain production model and its growing integration into industries upstream and downstream (denominated agroindustrial integration), the crisis of the state farm credit model and the growth of the private sector in the provision of financial resources, and the emergence of new interest groups and political organisations (such as ABAG, the Brazilian Agribusiness Association and the most acknowledged example), which started to defend this model of production, especially inspired in the North American example.

The fourth and last important factor that has contributed to discussions about rural development in Brazil concerns environmental sustainability. As it has been mentioned, the debate surrounding this topic transcends the frontiers of rural areas. In fact, the sustainable development discussion itself precedes the recovery of the debate on rural development. In this case, a confluence of two topics occurs which emerge simultaneously in a social, political and intellectual scenario in the mid-1990s. At this point, it is essential to remind that the most severe critiques consequent to the “green revolution” model are historically dated and arose by the end of the 1980s, in Brazil and in other Latin American countries.

Concomitantly to critiques to the perverse results from the “green revolution”, there was an attempt to internalise the environmental issue in technical-productive models, denominated as alternative, ecologic, organic, among other nomenclatures (Almeida, 1999; Ehlers, 1996). Parallel to this activism, there was a growing interest among scholars in using the sustainability notion as a theoretical reference and as a

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15 The fact that there were two ministries that dealt with agriculture and rural issues (the MDA and MAPA) enlarges this controversial topic, because it is not rare to hear that the MDA supports family farming and the agrarian reform and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Provision represents big land owners, i.e., agribusiness.

16 At present, surrounding the agribusiness notion, there is a hidden myriad of forms of organising agricultural production, commercial practices, forms of management, integration in markets and, overall, a political and ideological idea that is generally treated as monolithic by people in favour and against it. Therefore, agribusiness is understood both as a set of modern technological organisation, management and commercial integration practices, led by private companies and organisations and as the forms of large agrarian properties (formerly designated as latifundia), input and seed supplying companies, etc., in sum all that can be associated to the capitalist commodity production in agriculture and livestock breeding.
development model (Altiere, 1987; Almeida e Navarro, 1997). What should be highlighted is that both politically active ecologists, who preconised alternative farming, and scholars of sustainable development provided important contributions to the rural development debate, which began being designated as sustainable due to these movements.

The construction of the relationship between rural development and the sustainability issue occurred, in short, in two different ways. On the one hand, in the middle-south region of Brazil, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, the 1990s would reveal a set of actions that went beyond preservationist and protest struggles by environmental movements which emerged in the former period. Perceiving the need to enlarge their scope of action, organisations and social actors that until then merely protested against the dominant productive model began concerning about proposing and suggesting new technological and productive models, such as agroecology, which became concrete indications of what the sustainable rural development could become. In some cases, these proposals became a guide to actions and policies of governments and institutions (public companies for technical assistance and rural extension) which worked in rural areas, as occurred in Rio Grande do Sul, between 1999 and 2002. In the Federal domain, particularly regarding the MDA, this discourse also began permeating actions for the agrarian reform and family farming; primarily, in a more rhetoric manner (as revealed by the project “New Rural World”, created by the minister at the time Raul Jungman) but increasingly more profoundly since 2003, with the election of Lula, particularly regarding the technical assistance and rural extension fields, whose orientation by agroecology became a political strategy (DATER; SAF; MDA).

On the other hand, mostly in regions from the middle-west and north of the country, where the Amazonian and cerrado biomes are localized, the debate on sustainable development emphasizes a conservationist and preservationist position about biodiversity, in general by exposing deforestation and the occupation of agricultural borders by new and old owners. Concrete proposals about co-management and use of resources by local populations, generically designated as “peoples of the forest” (rubber

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17 About this topic, there is a vast literature in Brazil and an increasing interest coming from scholars. For further details, please look up Almeida (2004, 2004).

18 However, in no other institutions of the State the relationship between rural development and sustainability would be as significant as in the National Council on Sustainable Rural Development (CNDRS), which is presently denominated as CONDRAF, founded in 2000. In fact, this has been the highest level of institutionalisation of this issue, as the National Plan on Sustainable Rural Development, whose guide-lines were being discussed since 2002 and became official in 2006 illustrates (MDA/CONDRAF, 2006).
tapers, fishers, riverine populations, coconut breakers, etc.), comprising several forms of exploring forest and water resources are still reluctant.

Besides these four factors above, it is possible that the emergence of discussions on rural development in Brazil during the last fifteen years has still had other determinants or random elements. Nevertheless, this paper does not intend to be exhaustive about these determinants, it is only concerned with summarising those that seemed essential and on which there is an agreement among scholars and specialists about their importance.

**Main themes and theoretical references on rural development in Brazil**

According to the analysis of the debate context, the current discussion on the rural development theme in Brazil has been strongly influenced by normative actions and intervention policies by the State. This fact leads to the following questions: how do policy makers design the discussion agenda? Where does the inspiration from the State come from and how are programmes and proposals that influence and lead discussions formulated?

There are two possible answers for this fundamental questioning. The State’s agenda may reflect social demand and, therefore, be the result of pressure by movements, actors, institutions and organisations from rural areas, which pose their claims and problems and expect the state technocracy to find solutions and to present proposals for them. The other possibility is that the debate agenda and rural development themes are conceived *ex ante* by scholars, researchers and academics, and by mediators and/or organisations that survive through the designing of projects and their interface with the State.

An analysis of the recent Brazilian debate on the rural development theme leads to the conclusion that the formulation of the State’s agenda is less influenced by direct demanders of policies, in this case farmers and the rural population, than by scholars and mediators. Of course the existence of pressure by social demand is clear and it has practical effects, such as the Landless Workers’ Movement’s (MST) demonstrations known as “red April” (“Abril vermelho”) or the “cry of the land” (“grito da terra”) and the mobilisation about the “harvest plan” (“plano safra”), the latter sponsored by rural workers’ unions, which are in its core composed by family farmers.
But the agenda of questions shaping the Brazilian rural development policies in the last fifteen years has been highly immersed in ideas and proposals collected by policy makers from scholars and mediators, which have had a decisive influence. For this reason, it is fundamental to know who the main interlocutors from the State are and to analyse how they understand rural development.

The following analysis of the approaches to rural development will have as reference some authors or groups of researchers. Since the purpose of this essay is to summarise their contributions, it was decided to merely evaluate the literature in general without making excessive quoting, which would extend each section too much.

a) **Institutions, innovation and sustainability**

The rural development perspective presented by Veiga and Abramovay is one of the most fertile proposals and with the widest thematic and theoretical scope. Throughout several years, these two USP [University of São Paulo] researchers have studied the area of rural themes, their trajectory being articulated by a multidisciplinary matrix in which economy, ecology and economic sociology stand out. In view of their trajectory and capacity for training professional researchers, the perspectives defended by these authors influence the work of several of their followers, whom I will not quote merely to avoid the risk of unintentionally not mentioning one or two of them.

The main point of consonance between both authors is probably the value they confer to family agriculture and the recognition of the galvanising potential of local economies. To a greater or lesser extent, they both sustain the argumentation that the innovative capacity of family farmers and their interaction with local institutions are fundamental for an increase in the generation and aggregation of value as well as for a decrease in transaction costs and for stimulating the economy of scope. The fact that the authors have performed studies on the conditions and potentialities of family agriculture in advanced capitalist societies seems to have been the starting point for their formulations on rural development. In general, they consider family farmers as “entrepreneurs”, and their innovative capacity a quality inherited by their peasant past. But peasants and farmers are considered distinct in their form of integration in the market and in their reproduction in an environment that stimulates the farmer to become a merchandise producer. In the case of these small land owners, possessing their own means of production, the authors sustain that the reproduction of family farmers depends on their capacity for making choices and for developing skills facing the challenges the
social and economic environment they live in poses to them. In this environment, they are compelled to constantly innovate (through the technological treadmill and territorial interaction) and to become pluriactive.

The authors develop the argumentation that the entrepreneurial and innovative capacity of family farmers is responsible for the social and productive diversification of the rural territory they live in. From this point of view their work has a direct connection with the discussion on the themes of territory and of development of the rural space as a whole. As a consequence, both scholars have influenced the introduction of the notion of territorial development in Brazil (which became a governmental policy in recent years), in general strongly based on their dialogues with European bibliography, particularly French (the notion of territorial contracts or projects, the idea of districts and innovation environments, among others). Some of Veiga’s work productions indicate that the most appropriate territories for the innovation process are those in which local economies are able to generate an aggregate demand for products and services, which is stimulated by the local circulation of accumulated richness and foments entrepreneurship by creating a virtuous circle (or “spots”) of development. Moreover, the author emphatically presented the territorial nature of the rural space itself, sustaining that “the Brazilian rural is much greater” than what the sectarian analyses from the official census (2002) suggest. In a slightly different and more sociological perspective, Abramovay brings up the literature on social capital, especially its more instrumental aspect a la Putnam (primarily), in order to comment on the factors generating cooperation, reciprocity and solidarity (which he designated as “civic culture”). This influenced his work on the role of social capital in the development of rural territories and his studies on “proximity economy”, in which he intends to show that specific environments are prone to innovation and cooperation because they encompass an historical tradition of cooperation which generates a mobilising capacity around a project or guiding idea (Abramovay, 2003; 2006).

Although both authors have their own research agendas, they still share a common understanding of the role of institutions in rural areas. In this issue, the intersection with the perspective of Douglass North and the authors of the new institutional economy becomes more evident. While in the work of Veiga institutions are associated to the State itself (public companies, governmental policies, etc.) or to para-state organisms (consortia among municipalities, development agencies, universities, etc.), Abramovay’s studies focus on farmer organisations, their forms of cooperation and the tacit rules and norms (the social capital) existing in territories. In both cases, the importance and the role of institutions in the formatting of a stable institutional environment is highlighted, which
reduces uncertainties and risks and creates forms of governance and management fundamental for the reduction of transaction costs. Due to these analyses and to their undeniable capacity for translating analytical references and a programmatic set of ideas, both authors keep close relations with institutions working in the rural development area, generally performing evaluation studies and consultancies which influence political agendas.

Besides these connection points, the authors have produced equally relevant and influent individual contributions to the discussions on rural development in Brazil. This is particularly the case of the theme of sustainability, which Veiga has been studying more specifically for a long time and which has become his main point of controversy with the economic mainstream. In this matter it is important to recognise his efforts in creating an interchange among the analytical contributions of Ignacy Sachs, Amartya Sen and Celso Furtado. Abramovay (2004), in his turn, tried to discuss rural development in light of the recent contributions of the so-called economic sociology (Granoveter, Fligstein, etc), placing the reflection on the process of construction of markets as socially embedded institutions (embeddedness) in specific environments in the centre of his analysis. The way in which markets can be built suggests that the widening of the social integration of farmers would help reducing risks and vulnerability, ultimately contributing to fight rural poverty and generating social cohesion.

b) The new Brazilian rural: non-agricultural activities and compensatory policies

The analytical and conceptual framework on rural development deriving from the work and research performed within the “Rururban Project” (“Projecto Rururbano”) is the second aspect under analysis. Generally, the work of this research group has been acknowledged in the academic, political and institutional fields in Brazil since the end of the 1990s for having demonstrated that the rural world, by the end of the twentieth century, as well as in other areas, could no longer be considered as exclusively agricultural. Having mobilised more than forty university researchers (25 possessing a doctoral degree) from eleven states of the federation, from twenty different institutions and with a portfolio of more than twenty sub-projects, this project, created and coordinated by the professor José Graziano da Silva, reveals, from its creation on, in 1996, until today, vitality and capacity for intervention in several different areas.

19 For further information on the projects and on those integrating them, see the webpage www.eco.unicamp/projetos/rurbano.
As indicated by Graziano da Silva (2001; Del Grossi; Graziano da Silva e Campanhola, 2002), the emergence of the new Brazilian rural world derives from the technologically-based process of conservative modernisation of agriculture itself. When this process is completed, by the end of the 1980s, especially in the central and southern regions of Brazil, a new economic and demographic conformity arises possessing as fundamental feature the growing reduction of the differences between the urban and rural worlds, especially regarding the labour market, due to the increase in population with non-agricultural activities. The rural world is no longer “synonym for delay” and no longer connected to agriculture, which becomes merely one of its activities. According to Graziano da Silva (1999), the erosion of the differences between the rural and the urban worlds leads to the emergence of a continuum between both of them, which can be referred to as rurbanisation, the term created by Gilberto Freire, but which will be suitable for describing the present stage of the process of changes in space and in demography.

This new rural (or rurbanisation process) would basically be composed of three groups of activities which would be a modern agriculture and livestock farming activity (agribusiness) based on commodities and intimately connected to agroindustries. A set of non-agricultural activities connected to housing, leisure and to several industrial and service sector activities and, last, a set of new agricultural and livestock farming activities fomented by niches of market. Besides this modern facet, the delayed side of the rural world would persist through the remaining poverty and through the wide ranging vulnerability of the population, characterising the social group Graziano da Silva denominated as “no-nothing” (sem-sem), which would be formed by the excluded and unorganised who, besides having no land, no job, no education, no health and no income, wouldn’t even have a social organisation mobilising them (Graziano da Silva, 2001). The structure of this new rural world would be set up by pluriactive families, which are those combining agricultural and non-agricultural activities and promoting the integration between sectors (agriculture with commerce and services) and between spaces (rural with urban spaces).

From a theoretical point of view, this interpretation by Graziano is not dissident with his former work, in which he maintained that the conservative modernisation of the Brazilian agriculture would have solved the agricultural problem posed by the capitalist development model in the 1950s, when a gap between the agricultural and the agrarian questions emerged. The solution for the agricultural question would have been found by
incrementing the national agriculture and livestock farming activities, technologically and productively, which, through this modernisation, would have eliminated the problems connected to the supply of products. According to Graziano da Silva’s view, only the agrarian problem would have remained unsolved, and this would be a fundamentally social and demographic problem, given the population surplus (the thesis by Inácio Rangel) that still exists in rural areas and the incapacity by the modern agricultural sector (agribusiness) for promoting its absorption through productive processes.

Based on the extraordinary capacity of researchers of the Rururban Project for producing data and statistics, especially with PNAD’s (National Household Sample Survey) methodology for treating data, it wasn’t difficult to show that, from the 1980s on, Brazil suffered a constant fall in the economically active population occupied with agricultural activities. Therefore, as technological progress advances in agriculture under capitalism, it is useless to expect a rise in the levels of employment and occupation. In this sense, the viable solution for the historically permanent agrarian problem could be achieved through the generation of work and income opportunities through non-agricultural activities (since the modernised agricultural sector spares a great part of the labour force) or, when this is not possible, through the activation of social compensatory policies, including the selective agrarian reform (the “little reform”), actions for the fight against hunger (from which stems the later designated Fome Zero/Zero Hunger Project) and for food security (in support of commercialisation ways for small producers), among others.

This set of social and compensatory policies, destined to wide contingents of rural population living in poverty and social vulnerability environments (particularly in the semi-arid region of the Northeast) should be added to the policies for the new Brazilian rural world, which include policies for housing, rural tourism, the recognition of the value of amenities, the normalisation of work relations and of rural urbanising (services, infrastructures and planning), among others. In its whole, the convergence of policies for the “new” rural world and for the “precarious and delayed” rural world would constitute the framework of rural development actions. In fact, as a minister of Lula da Silva’s government, Graziano da Silva sought to implement several of these policies, having some of them remained till the present, such as the Zero Hunger Programme.
c) The strength of tradition and the historical and social limits to rural development

Another aspect of the studies on rural development, also being described, builds its thematic agenda upon the limitations and potentialities of the processes of social changes in the rural areas of Brazil through an analysis of the traditional and patriarchal political tradition, which dims not only structural transformations but also, and fundamentally, socio-cultural changes. Although this is an aspect of thought, non-oriented by a research agenda or by a common institution, its exponents reiterate that there are limitations and difficulties connected to the composition of the Brazilian social matrix itself, which have obstructed wider changes in institutions, in social organisations and, mainly, in the State. It is important to highlight, also as an alert, that this approach is particularly diffuse and polysemic and that one may doubt that it can form a sufficiently coherent corpus in so as to be described as an interpretative aspect of the recent debate on rural development.

Nevertheless, it is preferable to take the risk and to emphasize that among a non-insignificant group of scholars and researchers it has been sustained that in countries like Brazil, and in other countries of Latin America, the possibilities of rural development processes are limited and more fragile by the conformation of the relations of power and forms of traditional dominion which impregnate rural spaces. The themes discussed by these authors are generally connected to the study of clientelism, patriarchy and political behaviours and practices based on what Max Weber called forms of dominion based on the person (charismatic) and on social inheritance (traditional).

For these authors, frequently sociologists or political scientists, the possibilities for developing and altering the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations, which inhabit the poorest regions, go against mechanisms of social and cultural dominion historically built by local elites in order to legitimate their power and to keep the privileges that sustain their social positions. In the opinion of scholars like José de Souza Martins, Zander Navarro, among others, the priority change to be fomented in Brazilian rural areas does not merely include the promotion of access to actives or to material and financial resources, such as land, water, infrastructures or credit for financing planting and commercialisation.

By reflecting different realities, these authors stress the need to promote radical democratisation processes, in which social groups would no longer be guarded and controlled by elites and mediators (agents of the Church, State, political parties, social movements, etc.). They basically sustain that rural populations themselves should
organise management organs whose institutionalisation and legitimacy would be connected to the State in two ways: on the one hand, through the concession of resources (funding, infrastructures, etc.) and the recognition of rights (citizenship, access to land, etc.); on the other hand, through the demand of compensations materialised in an increase in indicators connected to the quality of life and social well-being (for example, schooling). Studies such as those of Navarro (1999; 2000), Martins (1999; 2001; 2003), Bandeira (1996) and Fox (1990) indicate that the development processes can and should effectively contribute to stimulating “social emancipation”, creating accountability mechanisms and, in that way, promoting the democratisation of society.

In his vast work, José de Souza Martins indicates exhaustively the problems caused by the inadequate understanding of the fact that, generally, mediators and policy makers (along with intellectuals) have a relationship with their beneficiaries, in the case of rural populations. According to Martins (1981; 1989), the Brazilian history is replete with examples of practices which had the purpose of “helping others” but ended up creating forms of dominion and control over others. This trajectory includes clientelism and patriarchism (so well expressed in the notion of paying a favour) from the pre-republican period, the populism of the *Estado Novo*⁹⁰, till the contemporary period, when a socio-communitarist facet is assumed and guides the ideology of left-wing parties as well as organisations connected to the Church, such as the Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT). In his more recent work, Martins sought to show the contradicting aspect of the Brazilian society which, despite the economic and technological modernisation, still maintains conservative forms of dominion and subordination based on clientelism. In fact, this is a central theme in his studies on the “agrarian question” in Brazil (especially the ones focusing on the Amazon region), about which he sustains that the overcoming of the blockage that land property represented for the development of capitalism would have occurred through the conversion of land property into “capitalised income”, therefore turning great land owners into capitalists. This conservative process (as it did not cause any ruptures or revolutionary processes) would have begun with the Act of Lands (*Lei das Terras*), in 1850, and would have been consolidated during the military dictatorship (1964-1984), when the State financed this conservative modernisation process. But “the power of the delay” and its metamorphoses, according to Martins, have also reached other spheres of society, such as the state technocracy, political parties and institutions, becoming a common political practice. In

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⁹⁰ *Estado Novo* (Portuguese for "New State") was the name of the authoritarian government installed in Brazil by President Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, which lasted from 1937 to 1945.
his studies on social movements and organisations, Martins uses this perspective to analyse the existent forms of control and dominion in the Landless Worker’s Movement (MST), in the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, connected to the Catholic Church) and in the settlements of the agrarian reform.

Although through a different perspective, the work of Navarro also reveals the difficulties and limits of the process of transformation into a typically conservative society. Focusing his studies on the possibilities of “social emancipation”, generated by the emergence of the social movements of the 1980s, Navarro reveals disenchantment and scepticism towards their potential for rural development in his recent work. Among his arguments, he sustains that rural social actors, whether from social movements or from social organisations, such as unions and NGOs, would be politically fragile, would not be prepared and not always interested in promoting deeper changes. Their fragility would derive from the social foundations they are supported by, which would possess instability (particularly regarding financial resources) and subordination to external agents (in general the State or the local political elites) as its main features. The lack of preparation would arise from substantial deficiencies related to the quality of their technical professionals, sometimes reflected in proposals or projects with little transformative potential (as examples, he questions the technological formats that have been disseminated in the settlements of the agrarian reform and by NGOs). But his strongest criticism goes to the reduced interest by social actors who emerged in the post-dictatorship period in promoting effective changes that can stimulate the real democratisation of society. Navarro maintains that the revolutionary and transformative character of social movements (just as of other actors) was slowly emptied and reduced to a rhetorical discourse and a dated ideology which would contradict the practices existing within these organisations, which would be based on less democratic forms of dominion and clientelist control.

The concern of these authors about the technological and historical grounds limiting and/or hindering the possibilities of social change has been conquering room and repercussion in the literature on development in general. Recent studies on the development issue, including those carried out by the World Bank and by other international agencies, are filled with references to such notions as empowerment, social capital, accountability, democratic governance, among others. Deep down, these studies have revealed that development programs that seek to produce substantial changes can only be considered as successful (efficient and effective) if the actions implemented reach sustainability, which in this case means to become lasting and not to retrocede to the
starting point after external help (generally financial and material) ends. But more than this, it means to make effective changes so that they can alter the conditions that existed beforehand through the eradication of their cause. And these conditions can only emerge and become consolidated if a new culture comes to existence to guide beneficiaries, turning them into their own agents of change (in the international literature, this process is generally described as *bottom-up*).

d) An agrifood focus for rural development

The fourth approach I intend to analyse possesses a fluid and little recognised relationship with more general issues of rural development. It is likely that some of its authors do not even pose themselves this question or have any other concern about the theme of rural development *per se*. Generally, this is a field of studies that focuses on agribusiness and agrifood (sometimes more agroindustrial) chains from a perspective which usually does not correspond to the conventional economic theory (the mainstream). These are authors who analyse the forms of integration of small farmers (although not only theirs) in agroindustrial or agrifood chains, revealing a subsequent concern about the social aspects of this process. This means that they do not only examine forms of management, administration, entrepreneurial rationalities, decision making, innovation forms, access to markets and commercialisation, which are usually the issues agribusiness scholars find more interesting, but they seek to understand under what conditions small farmers and their organisations can face the challenges created by the current way in which capitalism operates in agriculture and in food production. On the other hand, this a set of analysts (frequently economists, managers and agronomists), whose work began emerging from the 1990s on, who offer an alternative interpretation to the studies of the 1980s which were too hooked on the idea that the integration of farmers in agroindustries (or agroindustrial complexes, CAIs, as they were then denominated) would fatally lead them to subordination and to the loss of autonomy. Contrarily to this idea, the studies related to this tendency have revealed that not only agroindustries (mainly the smoking, milk, swine and poultry industries) prefer a much less specialised integration just like farmers themselves who, when they can, chose to integrate (which to some means a capitalist exploitation) to avoid staying out\(^\text{21}\).

\(^{21}\) This does not mean to abandon the recognition that the agricultural modernisation process, which has widely privileged the agroindustrial sector, did not exclude thousands of small farmers and opted for the selection of the most qualified.
Of course, it is easy to fit a lot of people under the same “umbrella”, however taking the risk of including analytical and interpretative perspectives that have nothing to do with the theme of rural development. In fact, the option of including these studies in the discussions on rural development from the last fifteen years in Brazil is connected to the fact that many of these authors began granting importance to the analysis of the forms of integration of family agriculture in agroindustrial chains and in markets. And, by doing so, the question which became the axis of their investigations, that matters for rural development studies, is to know how family farmers, agrarian reform settlers, artisanal producers, extractivists and so many other categories of small producers, can integrate in a capitalist model of development that preconises more and more intensively the consumption of food whose main features are quality, hygiene, freshness, fat content, etc. Even so, due to the strongly ideological political environment predominant in Brazil, which opposes agribusiness and family agriculture under any sense and form, it might not be understood and accepted by interlocutors that it is possible and even necessary to discuss the role of markets, technological innovations and agrifood chains in the process of rural development.

The most general question present in the work of several authors and even in theoretical approaches is the almost consensual diagnosis that, in the current stage of capitalism, the possibilities for survival and social reproduction of family farmers as food, fibre and raw material producers fundamentally depends on their integration capacity in an environment in which they are capable of innovating (technical progress), of acquiring a relative dominion over markets and of developing management and property planning forms. Another consensual point among the authors of this approach is the fact that, in general, they analyse a kind of more “capitalised” family farming, with access to markets and to more modern technologies, frequently localised in the dynamic regions of rural economies.

As it is not possible (and much less the purpose of this paper) to review the whole literature on these themes, only the work of some authors was chosen as reference, namely John Wilkinson (1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2003) and other authors from compilations edited by Lima and Wilkinson (2002) and Souza Filho and Batalha (2005).22 Maybe the work of Wilkinson can illustrate some of the questions and challenges this perspective poses on the theme of rural development. What Wilkinson (2000b) called “agroindustrial focus” reveals the importance of understanding what the conditions and possibilities are

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22 This book, in particular, constitutes an interesting contribution by authors working with the theme of agrifood chains using as reference the concepts of filière, by L. Malassis, and of production and agrarian systems, by Marcel Mazoyeur, from the French school.
of family farming having an important role in the agrifood production in this historical moment in which capitalism is moving from its Fordist phase into a flexible production and consumption system. In this new phase, the “will of the consumer” (Wilkinson, 2000) will be guiding production processes and the kind of products being produced. Moreover, as food supply problems (installed capacity for production and know-how) have almost been overcome (with the exception of poor regions and countries), the new challenges of agrifood production are related to food safety (sanitation) and to the search for sustainable (environmental impacts) and socially fair (compliance with ethical moral and humanitarian questions) forms of production. This originates a discussion which will inclusively gradually overcome the notion of production chain and introduce, in replacement, the idea of network which, according to Wilkinson (2006), is a useful and adequate notion to cope with the social and technical aspects of production. For this reason, including in theoretical and economic terms, its effort will go towards promoting the intricate dialogue between the Marxist political economy and the approaches of socio-technical networks (via Latour and Callon), by incorporating the economic sociology (Granovetter) and the French conventions theory (Thévenot e Boltanski) in them.

Globalisation and the changes in capitalism in its post-Fordist phase can open a set of new opportunities for family farming, as long as it can compete and be able to fill the room left by great agroindustries. Until the present, the participation of family farming in economy is a marginal phenomenon, usually characterised by great informality (in sanitarian, fiscal, labour, retirement aspects, etc.). The challenge presented to family agriculture would consist in an improvement of its capacity for social interaction and integration in local markets or non-standards (school meal programme, social programmes, etc.) in a context of “quality economy”. Quality economy refers to the multiple forms of social construction (embeddedness) of the perception of quality, which can reside in the supply of traditional, artisanal and regional products. In this set, family farmers would need to develop skills for building new markets, “reading the tendencies and tastes of consumers”, being able to organise socio-technical networks (the fair trade or solidary kind) and short chains of production (short agrifood chains) which would enable to meet demand.

The family farming capacity for responding to the flexible demands of gradually more segmented and claiming markets (niches) would arise from their great capacity for innovating through experience (learning-by-doing) and for learning collectively through tacit knowledge. Since, in agriculture, production is largely dependent on nature and

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23 In this paper it is not possible to discuss the nuances and the possibilities and limits of this dialogue.
based on “uneconomies of scale”, only producers-workers themselves can achieve constants in production processes. This knowledge ends up disseminating through sociability networks (friendship, neighbourhood, etc.) and affects the whole local productive system, which generates forms of innovation through collective learning and competitiveness at the level of the territory. Although these are potentialities, there are also the risks and limits. Among them, Wilkinson emphasizes firstly the low level of education among farmers. But other barriers are also important, such as, for example, the limited ability of absorption of produced surplus by local markets or the scale limits imposed by conventional commercialisation networks (big supermarket chains, wholesale commerce, etc.), which collect high entry costs for small farmer products. Another obstacle concerns the guarantee of property rights and the appropriation of generated outputs, since many farmers do not possess knowledge about business forms of contracting and become vulnerable to all kinds of risks.

Whether this perspective is perceived as a rural development approach or not, the agroindustrial or agrifood focus constitutes an important reference within rural studies in Brazil. To a certain extent, the way the State finds to support agroindustrialisation programmes (starting with PROVE24 from Brasília, which afterwards spread to several other places and became the present PRONAF-Agroindustry, from the Ministry of Agrarian Development - MDA), participation in international fairs and regional markets, and also the support to forms of technological innovation (via research companies), product certification and support to formal education, are policies which can be incorporated in the scope of proposals by this approach.

To conclude this section it is necessary to emphasize that the four selected approaches on rural development in Brazil stem from a perception that needs some relativisation, because it constitutes a specific point of view which does not intend to exhaust the subject. For this reason, and to endow recognition to everyone, a brief summary of other perspectives is presented, which also participate in rural development discussions in Brazil and offer relevant contributions to them. Therefore, at least three other contributions can be mentioned.

The first contribution concerns the work on the notion of multifunctionality conducted by an interdisciplinary research group articulated around projects involving several Brazilian universities and the close collaboration of research teams in France. In

24 PROVE - Small Agricultural Production Verticalisation Programme (“Programa de Verticalização da Pequena Produção Familiar”).
fact, this team effort primarily aimed at testing the application of the notion of multifunctionality to the Brazilian context and, following that, at verifying to what extent public policies for family farming, agrarian reform and rural areas can benefit from it. According to Carneiro and Maluf (2003; 2005 and Maluf, 2002), the application of the notion of multifunctionality of agriculture to the Brazilian reality would enable a disruption with the agricultural sectarian focus on the rural world, the launching of a focus on families and rural territories and the recovery of the peasant logics of family farming. Bearing in mind that this is a research effort in progress, the expectation is that its exponents may advance theoretically and politically, which will allow the assertion of the extent to which the discussion of multifunctionality in Brazil will bring or not to discussion questions and themes similar to those in the European context, where an intimate linkage with rural development discussions exists.

The second perspective is developed by authors who defend the recovery of the development agenda in general (including rural development) through the more active and stronger participation of the State in the process of affirming rights and access to capacity building. The work of Guilherme Delgado (Jacoud et al., 2005), as the work of other IPEA [Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – Institute of Applied Economic Research] researchers, indicates that the changes in the social inequality background in Brazil, particularly the extinction of poverty in rural areas, will only be possible if the State’s social policy stops considering public costs as expenses and starts considering them as a development mechanism, which would entail the conversion of some social policies towards the promotion of inclusion and social rights as well as the redistribution of wealth. The studies by these authors on the role of rural social welfare in the process of activation of local economies is perceived as an example of how the State’s social policies could become an incitement for the development and social change process. In rural areas, where a significant part of the poor population is concentrated, the authors maintain that policies keep having a compensation bias (such as the agrarian reform, for example), while they could be turned into development policies if they generated forms of inclusion through work, income and access to citizenship.

The third perspective of the studies on rural development is widely disseminated through bibliography which concentrates its efforts in showing that the discussion on contemporary rurality entails a valuing of the local and territorial spaces as physical and social spaces which can be used both for analytical and conceptual purposes and as guides for planning and intervention forms. For several authors, the discussion on rural development is included in analyses of the potentialities of local and territorial
development, taking as reference small municipalities or microregions. It is not the purpose of this reference to review these works, but among their authors it is worth mentioning the studies on the relations of small farmers of the semi-arid region of the Northeast with local markets and institutions (Sabourin e Tonneau, 2007; Sabourin e Teixeira, 2002; Lopes, Mota e Silva, 2002; Duqué, 2002). But it is also possible to identify the growing interest surrounding the theme of territorial development which, since the creation of the Territorial Development Secretariat (SDT/MDA), has conquered great importance among scholars, mediators and organisations working in rural areas (SDT/MDA, 2003; Schneider e Tartaruga, 2004).

**Some final considerations**

Through the presentation of the social, political and intellectual context in which the debate on rural development in Brazil emerged, this essay sought to demonstrate which the main factors were contributing to the legitimacy of the theme. In this process, the role of the State and of public policies focusing on family farmers and the agrarian reform played a decisive role, since it was through them that a debate was constituted among scholars and researchers who began developing the rural development theme itself. But it was also mentioned that the discussion on rural development in Brazil is being impregnated by a political and ideological sense growing and getting stronger as the polarisation between the defenders of agribusiness and of family farming (though not only this kind of farming) also conquers more strength. Another factor contributing to the emergence of the debate was the way in which environmental issues and issues related to sustainability were incorporated into the development theme.

This paper has also intended to show that the debate on rural development in Brazil is widely tributary of the contributions by scholars and mediators, greatly than of the demands by actors and social and political organisations of the rural world. Therefore, the beginning of the discussions on rural development in Brazil in the last fifteen years arose from the State and its relations with mediators and scholars. This does not mean that the actors, organisations and formal institutions taking action in the rural world did not interact with or put pressure on the State. The postulate sustained in the paper is that the debate on rural development in Brazil emerged as an issue and a theme of interest as scholars and mediators began producing interpretations and readings about the social processes occurring since the beginning of the 1990s. In general, these were the studies and documents which served as inspiration for agents, mediators and policy-makers for
the designing of intervention and planning forms. The social and political demand itself has rarely achieved an influence on the debate (maybe except for the agrarian reform), although it has entered the process as a synthesis of the thoughts, formulations and abstractions produced by scholars and mediators. In this paper, some arguments have been exposed which sustain this postulate, therefore the only thing that is left is to analyse what and how social actors, organisations and institutions performing in rural areas think.

Regarding the main theoretical approaches which discuss rural development in Brazil, the paper sought to highlight the themes and analytical and interpretative perspectives they offer. In general, by adopting a view of the whole, it is possible to understand that there is some convergence and consonance among the proposals analysed. Firstly, scholars seem to agree that the usual reduction of the concept of rural world to agriculture and livestock breeding activities has lost its sense nowadays, presenting the challenge of thinking about the interface and attributes characterising the space and its content as a whole. Secondly, there is a relative concordance about the multidimensional dimension of sustainability of development, as also regarding the role of family agriculture and of the heterogeneous forms of its integration in the dynamics of the capitalist economy. Thirdly, even if in a diffuse way, the approaches seem to agree that, in Brazil, the focus of rural development actions should be placed on the fight against poverty and the multiple vulnerabilities of rural populations.

Another comparative appreciation also leads to the statement that scholars rarely concur regarding future perspectives and tendencies and much less regarding intervention strategies. The examined approaches emphasize aspects that range from the role of institutions and of socio-technical innovations to the proposition of compensatory policies. But they also indicate obstacles and limits deriving from the political culture and the historical forms of social dominion, which could not be removed merely by State policies. Anyhow, this seems to reveal that the discussion on rural development itself still lacks a definition concerning its object and, most of all, it lacks the need by its main exponents to present a corpus of concepts, methodologies and empirical experiences that may serve as references. Until now, what seems to exist is a discussion on the themes and issues affecting agriculture and the rural world, which are submitted to analysis, reflection and evaluation through external demands, formulated by the State, mediators and other institutions.

The several articles composing the “Rural Development Dossier”, published by the Journal of Advanced Studies from the University of São Paulo, in 2001, indicate this tendency.
It is believed that studies on rural development in Brazil need to better define their thematic agenda, mainly by restraining its width and broadness. The way it is presented currently makes it hard to recognise which is its research agenda and, particularly, to define what studies on rural development are. Maybe the first step could be the search for a greater emancipation towards themes imported from the actions of the State and from public policies. This does not mean that this interface is disappearing or that it should be eliminated. Nevertheless, if the studies on rural development intend to be reasonably guided by the perspective of social change processes, as it has been mentioned in the introduction of this paper, then it is necessary to try to maintain a critical and constructive interface towards its interlocutors, notably the State and its policies for rural areas.

As an orientation for future work, it is believed that there are possibilities and gaps unexplored by the studies on rural development in Brazil, which need to focus their study more deeply on the role of farmers and of other actors of the rural world in the processes of social change. It lacks to know, for example, how farmers and their families react to technological changes and to a greater interaction with the market and with other actors from society; to what extent these external forces reshape the interfamily relations of power, work, gender, etc.; how farmers themselves really react and what resources and strategies they use. In sum, many of these questions are also being studied one way or another, but enough attention hasn’t yet been given to this focus nor are there consistent theoretical references about it.

In this way, maybe the Brazilian debate could come closer to the current international literature on rural development, which has been pointing to the need of understanding the point of view of farmers and of the social actors in the process of social change. Therefore, it remains a challenge to the studies on rural development to go beyond the analysis and the interpretation of the transformations occurring in the forms of production, technologies, in institutions and in the growing interaction with the markets. This effort is important, but it will be partial and incomplete if the studies are not able to show to what extent these dimensions affect the relations with the space and the rural environment, whether or not they contribute to an improvement in the living conditions of rural populations, at last turning development into an effective process of social change.
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