

Rural and urban development integration through democratic territorial planning and environmental concern

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ABSTRACT

This report presents the study based on the hypothesis that integrating rural development into urban planning as a tool for environmental protection aids to reduce the industrialization that causes climate changes. The integration of urban and rural developments into a territorial plan is not only possible but necessary to help the implementation of the SDGs.

Applying the methods of bibliographic review, survey research with urban planners, and study case, the project aims to (a) make a comparative analysis of the territorial planning systems in France and Brazil (b) investigate into how the Lefebvre's "right to the city" can be made applicable to individuals living in peri-urban and rural areas and (c) analyses the Loire Parliament initiative and the "Opération Grand Site". The study shows the role of international agendas for urban planning and sustainability, the importance of the concepts of urban and rural, that are different but not opposites, and the necessity of investing in urban services for small and medium cities.

1- Introduction

Despite scientific knowledge and international commitments to protect the environment, respect people, and empower local governments, our industrial society's ways of life are responsible for climate change and climate disasters, while failing to ensure affordable and adequate housing for people worldwide.

Thinking and planning beyond city limits is crucial in upholding the Right to the City for everyone, whether they live in urban or rural areas. All people are entitled to adequate housing, nutrition, education, health, leisure, work, internet access, mobility...

By working with the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 and the principles of the New Urban Agenda (UN Habitat III, 2016), we

explore the concepts of urban and rural areas in Brazil and France and analyze the foundations for recognizing the legal personality of the Loire River through the Loire Parliament movement, addressing questions about democratic participation in territorial planning.

Debating how to integrate rural development and environmental protection into urban planning is important not only for adapting cities for climate changes, but, as Covid-19 showed us, we need to change societies to face the biggest threat of all: the modern way of life. Therefore, we can conclude that the ecological transition is an imperative for our societies.

2- Experimental details

The study's premise is that the integration of rural areas' development into democratic urban planning can induce people to live in small

villages and improve environmental protection. The research was structured around three key phases:

A. A comparative analysis of the territorial planning systems in France and Brazil.

B. An investigation into how the Lefebvre's "right to the city" - which is updated to include access to public services, job opportunities, recreational facilities, and infrastructure - can be made applicable to individuals living in peri-urban and rural areas. This raises the question: why should these rights be tied to a specific classification of the territory? The exploration also involved a discussion on the definitions and distinctions between "rural", "urban", and "peri-urban" areas.

C. An analysis of the Loire Parliament initiative and the "Opération Grand Site", a project undertaken by the "Communauté de communes du Grand Chambord".

After a classic bibliographic review and besides attending scientific and cultural events in urban and rural areas, the scientific activity included a comparative analysis of the actual Brazilian and French legislation and a bunch, of meetings with urbanists, jurists, artists, and scholars. The list includes MSH personnel, Tours University professors and researchers, and some public actors from the Loire Valley mission for UNESCO World Heritage, the Urbanism and Arts Polo - POLAU, the Loire Valley collective for the recognition of Loire River juridical personality, the agglomeration of communities of Grand Chambord, and the two local Councils for Architecture, Urban Planning, and the Environment – (CAUE 37 et 41).

The encounters addressed the subject of rural and urban areas from different perspectives: history; fauna history; sociology; language and literature; biology; geography; landscape and heritage; urbanism; and law. They were all crucial to an overall understanding of the complex subject we are dealing with: people's way of living and occupying territory.

After a first round of meetings, an appropriate questionnaire was developed to conduct a survey in order to analyze the different points of view of urban planning actors about three key concepts: urban (as confined and high density spaces, including residential, working, and interaction areas), rural (as open and low density spaces with a closer connection to nature and traditional lifestyles), and democratic participation in urban planning (as the involvement of community members in decision-making processes).

The field research involved conducting 12 interviews (April-July 2024) – 7 face-to-face and 5 online; 9 men and 3 women were interviewed; 3 public managers (1 political position and 2 technicians); 3 presidents of local architecture councils and 6 members of urban, local and metropolitan development agencies.

Although there was a script of questions divided into two blocks, "concepts of urban and rural territories" and "current challenges of urban planning", the interviewed actors could either give direct answers or propose general statements addressing the issues. More than tabulating answers, the interviews aimed to comprehend the dynamics and understandings about urban planning, rural areas and the environment.

3- Results and discussion

Contrary that we could suppose, French unitary system, where the competences for urban planning and urban legislation are defined by infraconstitutional law, shows more decentralization than Brazilian federal system, where the competences rules are in its Federal Constitution.

In both countries, general rules of urban policy objectives are found in national law (in Brazil in the Constitution and in the City Statute – Law n. 10.257/2001; in France the Urbanism Code contains the national rules of urbanism). There is a growing similarity between the objectives of those urban policies, that we can attribute to the growth of international forums and their declarations, in which both countries show

active participation, as seen in the Quito Declaration at the UN Habitat III conference.

As an example, the article L101-2 of the French Urban Planning Code establishes the objective of balance between urban and rural areas (1st, "a" to "c" and 3rd) and the Brazil City Statute promotes the "integration and complementarity between urban and rural activities" (art. 2°, VII).

As for the comparison between the concepts of urban and rural, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE does not have a definition of urban area, nor an established criterion to define the minimum urban core, the effective concern is to understand hierarchies on a metropolitan scale. In France, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies – INSEE does not bring population or economic influence criteria to define a metropolis, but urban unit is defined as a built area with buildings not more than 200 meters away, with at least 2000 inhabitants.

Despite the accuracy of the INSEE definition, for the interviewees we surveyed, there is no single differentiation between urban and rural. For the interlocutors who work in the Architecture Councils, the INSEE definitions represent a statistical reality and not a geographical or cultural one.

For all the interviewees, the ecological transition and sustainable development appear as important issues, with the reduction of artificialization, mobility and the energy matrix being the main forms of confrontation, which shows an alignment with the French central government policy. Democratic management is cited by many as important, but not very effective, because people are not trained for the participatory process, are not interested in urban planning and want to discuss "the garden itself". The importance of local politicians and managers and the need for government actions to train people for the participatory process is emphasized, because the "alternative to democracy is authoritarianism".

The analyses of the Loire Valley Parliament initiative reveals a great synergy on getting

people together do defend the environment from a various fields of knowledge, environment; anthropology; arts; urbanism; biology; law, which appears as more fruitful, than the profound juridical and juris-philosophical discussion whether a natural element, as a river, can be granted the juridical statute of a moral person. At the moment, it is not possible to forecast if the question will be solved by a juridical path, or by a social-political one.

The analyses of the "Opération Grande Site" met its end when the project didn't go forward because, as far as we could verify, differences in political and administrative interest among the parts involved in the project, uprising a question about the importance of having more institutionalized than discretionary public policies.

4- Conclusion

The differentiation (not opposition) between urban and rural areas can be intended as a political and administrative tool for land management, that is useful for taxation, land use definition, and public service planning (which is part of urban planning concerns).

When territorial planning has the mission of strengthening rural spaces, providing rural cities with local networks, organic agriculture, short circuits, cultural and leisure services, it assumes a political position that brings limits to the globalization of our lives. Instead of seeking a differentiation between urban and rural, we should reflect on the artificial and the natural, not opposing them but approaching that issue with a posture of reverence for nature. This is an extrapolation of the precautionary principle of environmental law.

The concept of urban ecology helps us understand this issue when we think about cities (urban or rural) as living organisms, interacting with their environment. What do the cities take from nature and what do they return back to the nature (water, oxygen, fresh air, energy in the "from part" of the balance and pollution, dams,

waste, deforestation in the “back part” of it). What can we do to rebalance this equilibrium?

The question of this study was to reflect on rural cities, anthropic agglomeration where people can live in a way that minimizes the artificialization of land, reduces the consumption of industrial products (including industrially processed foods), where the risks of disease contamination may be lower than in large cities, maintaining access to public services, as well as cultural and educational enrichment.

To develop strategies to reduce industrialization and ensure the quality of life for urban and non-urban residents, we need to think about proposing a reasonable city size that allows the economic viability of public services, as well as the distancing of habitats. By allowing people to live in medium-sized cities, which are becoming centers of small urban and rural cities, we make an important contribution to environmental protection.

However, there are concerns that need to be addressed. The dependence on cars for transportation in rural areas contributes to climate change, and this needs to be mitigated. But cars are never just cars; They are symbols of masculinity, power, independence, and modernity. How can we overcome these cultural elements to encourage people to reduce car use? Furthermore, shouldn't we question the tendency of inhabitants of small communities to defend the values of nationality and territorial identity, which could lead to xenophobia, homophobia, or even sexism, for example? If these attitudes manifested, wouldn't they be dangerous and couldn't they amplify polarized and divided societies? This is a concern that deserves to be explored and understood.

5- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

Together with Professor Eddazi Fouad from the University of Orleans, we are planning a second French-Brazilian seminar on urban law, and a publication of the studies.

A colleague from Brazil is preparing an application for a visiting research project.

The perspective is to follow up the Loire Valley Parlement, as this year they organized the “Grand Remontée” and continue the discussion and partnership.

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

As results of the research, two articles were submitted to different journals of urban law, French and Brazilian ones. Also, a resume was submitted to a Brazilian event of urban law. They all await acceptance.

During the fellowship, we organized two studies journeys and one seminar: “Is the rural town an oxymoron?” which took place in the 18/06/2024; “The outskirts of the city, a transitional approach between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the urban” in the 24/10/2024; and “Hybrid research seminar between Brazilian and French researchers at University of Orleans”, 21/10/2024.

I also presented two conferences about Brazilian urban law and Brazilian metropolitan regions. At MSH, we produced two video capsules: «urban planning and climate change: legal tools and environmental protection»: <https://www.canal-u.tv/chaines/mshvaldeloire/planification-urbaine-et-changement-climatique-les-outils-juridiques-et-la>; and «The Loire, a legal person?»: <https://www.canal-u.tv/chaines/mshvaldeloire/la-loire-une-personne-juridique>.

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