

Representations on contemporary rural property: nature as a “consumer dream” in Brazilian real estate Market

Mayã Martins¹, Silvia Nascimento²

¹⁻²Universidade Federal Fluminense

¹martins.maya@gmail.com

²silvianascimento@terra.com.br

Access to land is a symbol of power, safety as a shelter, well-being and livelihood, as well as something that can be easily converted into currency. In addition to its primary functions, the land was, in our political context, socially transformed into a consumer good laden with symbolism. We have as a research question the representation of rural property in Brazil, aiming to investigate the growth of gated communities, the notional of rapprochement with nature and its environmental consequences. Our methodological approach is through case study, backed by a bibliographical revision and systematization of both official and press material on the subject.

The necessity of being informed about the world, in order to adjust ourselves and dominate it, is the reason why we create social representations (JODELET, 1989). We corroborate with Agier and his reflections on interpretation and representation: “Interpretations can be implicit on practices and interactions and the observer must reveal them: what such and such practices mean from the point of view of the social significance in which they occur?” (2011: 148). For Velho, usage from an individual’s discourse: “implies ‘acceptance’ to its existential experience expressed into its own words” (1973: 92).

We observe that rural property can be conceptualized through several prisms, as shown by the terms rural, field, nature, amongst others. The diversity of nomenclatures anchored by the complexity in rural spaces, characterized in the last decades by the intensity of the economic impacts and promotion of local development. The distinctions marking the rural - urban binarism were attenuated in recent years by a process of urbanization in rural areas, which stopped being perceived purely

agricultural. Carneiro (1999), presents two phenomenons occurring in rural areas: first, the reduction of available agricultural jobs and the increase of people performing non-agricultural activities; secondly, the occupational patterns in rural areas, often related to leisure and/or habitation, referencing to a romantic and bucolic notional of rural areas.

The recent forms of occupation of the rural space are usually followed by a reconstruction of belonging relations with the rural life, as well as the interests that normally go along with with them, such as a healthy relation with the environment, which is not always taken into consideration by real estate enterprises, especially the ones located between the countryside and the cities, in the periurban zones, the most favored place by rural gated communities. The contraposition of values and expectations between a livelihood in a rural environment and an urban routine exposes the fissures that these spatial and symbolical displacements can generate.

The expansion of gated communities, both horizontal and vertical, has been a tendency in Brazilian cities for the last 25 years. Aimed for the middle class, which possesses considerable financial assets and capacity to contract debts, these gated communities are located outside central areas, therefore being able to benefit from the low land values which makes them viable. Such communities bring new spaces and relations to the periphery and and rural areas, segregating themselves, usually, from the localities outside their walls and security apparatus (LAGO, 1999: 14, 15). They are, therefore, characterized by a new “way of living” which brings together modernity and security, but are generally situated in areas with precarious services and infrastructure (LAGO, 1999: 15). Residences are created with an absence of dialogue between the communities and their surroundings.

From such communities’ repertoires, we can highlight those that, as characterized by Azevedo, are located in far away places but possesses quick access to more privileged and central areas of the city (2007: 27). This is the situation of the case study in which this project is based on, the new enterprises in Barra de Guaratiba, a neighborhood in the west region of Rio de Janeiro (Zona Oeste). The gated communities growing in the last two decades are publicized highlighting the proximity

to the most privileged parts of town due to the easy access through the recently constructed Grota Funda tunnel and the exclusive line of the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit).

The Guaratiba neighborhood is classified as belonging to the Residential Zone 6 (Zona Residencial 6, ZR-6), a delimitation established in the 1970's which takes into consideration only the rural characteristics of the time, and which is being currently reformulated. The combination between sophistication, comfort and life close to nature can be found in advertisements of realties in the neighborhood, especially the more recent ones. As an example, we present a house advertisement in the Pôr do Sol gated community, located in the Roberto Burle Marx road. Along with the appeal to "nature" - "For those who really enjoy proximity with nature and tranquility" - there is the appeal to sophistication - "There are excellent houses in the community".

If by one hand the inhabitants of the rural areas have been migrating to the cities without enough education to be able to compete for the best jobs, by the other hand the inhabitants of urban areas who acquire rural properties tend to adapt them to the practicalities of the urban life. It is known that rural property today is postulated as a "consumer dream", in other words, as an idealization. According to Almeida Jr. (2004), it is important to bring attention to the consequences of this notion, since few purchasers of this kind of property question themselves about the impacts they provoke in the rural area as a whole.

Such tensions bring to light environmental discussions, alerting to new configurations related to the usage of the soil and its consequences. Let's consider, for example, the construction of artificial lakes inside the leisure areas of rural gated communities, which aren't related at all to the local nature and which aggravate, with the fracture of the greater property into smaller ones, the matter of reduction of environmental preservation areas, as well as increasing the populational density. We consider, as a result and for final considerations, that the interest for such lands, with its economic and symbolic valorization, is under the influence of the discursive universe, comprehending that there's an entire imaginary fomenting the representation that the experience of union with nature brings meaning to existence. A single location may have different meanings for different groups, involving disputes, with its

dominations and resistances, not only for the territory but for the meanings of the land as well.

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