

Paths to sustainability in rural development: from the emergence of "new" paths of socio-technical transitions in family farming

Driven by concerns about negative consequences of modern technological processes of agriculture, and aware of the complexity of the transformation of this scenario in the field, farmers, researchers and social mediators are linked with each other to face adversity resulting from this modernization. This way, creatively, they build new possibilities of development that deviate from the hegemonic model. For this, these social actors create new connections between the development of technologies and the social context to which they are imbricated. In this context, it is considered that changes and alternative innovations are occurring. By valuing environmental and economic specificities, these changes refer to adaptations and rearrangements in social and work relationships able to guide socio-technical dynamics that, despite starting at the local level, generate consequences beyond this level. Since the diversity of trajectories that make these innovative processes need to be further studied, this research aims to analyze organizational interconnections between family farmers, social mediators and researchers focusing on its influence on the construction of a new rural development project, based on an alternative socio-technical code to the conventional. For this, the Oriented Perspective to the Actor, the Multilevel Perspective and the Approach of Social Construction of Technology are interrelated mobilized, which emphasize the social construction of new production systems and the capability of these framing in technological transitions. Having clear that the emergence of these alternative innovation is fundamentally dependent on the conditions of the physical environment and associated to cultural repertoires, the development of this research, which is essentially qualitative, adopts as an empirical cut the municipalities of the North Coast of Rio Grande do Sul. In this region it is possible to identify groups of social actors that have been developing innovative strategies of organization. Articulated, these strategies, that sometimes are directed by ideals of 'peasant agriculture mode' and other times are directed by ideals of 'agribusiness mode', are configured as a heterogeneous project of rural development. This development project, while ensuring the socioeconomic reproduction of family farmers, recover customs and traditions, strengthen social ties, and reconnecting farmers to nature. However, while this new and devious process is causing significant socio-technical transformations in the region, its consolidation is constantly influenced and threatened by regulations agreed in macroscale that guides the establishment of scientific knowledge and the conformation of social organizations. The current political-economic context and, consequently, the operationalization or contingency of public policies of strengthening of family farming in the country have a direct influence in the configuration of social organization and the strategies that consolidate this project. Also for this reason, its construction has limitations mainly related to the participation of social actors. The appropriation of discourses and practices by a few social groups makes other groups, especially the most socioeconomically vulnerable farmers, unfeasible to participate in these strategies.

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