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Rural land management. Challenges for family farming and its contribution to food production in Argentina.

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Summary

In the past decade, public policies concerning family farming promotion have been developed in Argentina and the rest of Latin America with the aim of contributing to local food supply and, ultimately, food sovereignty. However, these policies are geared toward rural and peri-urban areas where, at the same time, there is an endorsement of commodity production, tourism and real-estate business endeavours which reproduce unfavorable conditions for small agricultural development. In particular, the expansion of activities mobilized by large companies exerts pressure on family farmers' land access, resource use, and alternative types of production and commercialization. In this context, territorial analysis is key in understanding and accounting for conflicts and different actors' strategies in the pursuit of imposing their own projects.

Our general research goal is to identify and analyze the territorial processes which are configured at the intersection between –and in the dispute among– public policies, resistance practices which resignify or challenge them, and the spatial representations which are prevalent both in the latter and in the former, with regards to the issues of family farming, food production and land management. Our present analysis focuses on case studies in different Argentinean provinces.

Key concepts and case studies

In recent decades, social sciences have recognized the importance of space and spatiality in social production and reproduction. Soja (1996), following Lefebvre, reflected on the trialectic of spatiality, defining social space as a result of three elements: the materiality of space, which is the perceived world of empirically measurable and mappable phenomena; the representations of space, that is, the way in which we conceive of, think about, and rationalize it; and lived space, which is the particular way in which we experience space in everyday life.

Building on the concept of social space as a more abstract category, Geography proposes another series of concepts which allow a more specific emphasis on some of its dimensions, such as territory (which underlines the power relations involved in the appropriation of space by an actor or group; Raffestin, 1980; Souza, 2013; Haesbaert, 2006) and place (which focuses on the particular features of the intersection –in a specific locus– of social relations which operate on different scales; a subspace of global space in which a totality is expressed; Silveira, 1995; Massey, 1994).

¹ The authors belong to the Grupo de Estudios Geografías Emergentes: políticas, conflicto y alternativas socio-espaciales, based in the Instituto de Geografía of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. This research is part of the project “(Des) ordenamiento territorial e inclusión socio-espacial: desafíos para la agricultura familiar en el campo de las políticas públicas. Estudios de caso en Argentina”, directed by Dr. Mariana Arzeno and financed by the following research grants: PICT 2015-2240 and UBACyT 2016.

As we can observe, actors, their practices, and the power relations they establish are central aspects of any understanding of the production of space, territory and place. However, not all actors have the same capacity for making an impact on this process. In capitalist societies, the State (under the predominance of the logic of capital) acquires/adopts a central role in the production of space. Thus, in our research, state policies are a key part of our analysis. They activate a series of practices and discourses (representations) by state and non-state actors which, in an articulated or conflictive manner, form a specific field for intervention. Generally, state policies are established surrounding issues (questions) which have been socially problematized (Oszlak y O'Donnell, 1995). In our case, the issue of family farming and food sovereignty mobilizes social organizations around the world and has led states to define concrete actions. Since this is a political as well as a territorial issue, interventions usually involve land management proposals which aim to manage the intrinsically contradictory (and conflictive) base of spatial production. These conceptual references allow us to specifically account for how state policies are implemented and how they are resignified by the practices of diverse social actors in the complex and contradictory context of spatial production, through the construction of local-scale issues which, by nature, define political spaces for action and intervention.

The following selected case studies seek to examine how the issue of family farming and food production is problematized and approached both by public policies and alternative practices, in local-territorial contexts in which tensions exist between family farming and other actors/activities. In each case study, we specify useful concepts and analytical tools for broaching the subject.

Tensions and convergences between agriculture and green spaces in Buenos Aires's peri-urban area. Case study: Pereyra Iraola Park²

This case study focuses on the tensions and convergences which have been established between agriculture and green spaces in peri-urban areas, based on the territorialities defended by different actors. Following Raffestin (1980 and 2012), we define **territorialities** as the ways in which groups or individuals appropriate portions of space, both materially and symbolically, in a historical context. In our work, we are interested in understanding the stances and actions taken by key actors throughout time concerning uses of periurban space. We pay special attention to the history of ideas since all interventions on a fragment of space imply values and points of view regarding both "nature" and the desired territorial outcome.

Our analysis centers on a peri-urban park which has experienced disputes around land use: Pereyra Iraola Park, which is a large green space in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. It was founded in 1949 with the double goal of forming a forest reserve and a horticultural area. Since that time, a fraction of the park has been occupied by small farmers; however, recently their presence has been challenged through accusations that they pollute the park. This can be linked both to a rise in environmental consciousness and the presence of real-estate interests in the area. In response, the park's farmers have begun to adopt agroecological practices so their activity can be considered more compatible with the purposes attributed today to most green spaces and nature reserves. In sum, this case allows us to see how different territorialities have replaced and disputed one another regarding admitted land uses in a portion of space.

Environmental land management policies and its implications for family farming in Misiones between 2008 and 2016³

In this case study we analyze the tensions between environmental land management policies (focused on rainforest preservation) and family farming. We begin by problematizing the notion of land management which prevails in public policies. From our perspective, land management seeks to manage a spatial base which –given the clash of interests between the actors who inhabit, produce and build

² This subject is part of Francisco Fernández's undergraduate thesis in Geography.

³ This subject is part of Lucila Muñeca's doctoral thesis in Geography.

territory– is inevitably contradictory; at the same time, it necessarily implies position-taking by the state and a reassignment of (material or symbolic) resources and, therefore, of power, between involved actors. By analyzing environmental policies and their implications for family farming as a food-producing sector, we observe that environmental land management prioritizes a certain economic valuation of natural and landscape resources, which differs between social groups.

Although the conservationist paradigm has become progressively more flexible (by trying to bridge conservation and production), at the same time new forms of nature conservation appear which also imply a commodification of nature (commercialization of environmental services, ecotourism, forest certification schemes, etc.). The sustainability discourse increasingly gains traction in the public sphere and is reflected in state policies. We are interested in observing the place which is given by environmental land management policies to categories such as *nature*, *environment*, *ecology*, and *sustainability*, the views and **representations** which they convey and their incidence on the way of understanding space and on its transformation. Contrary to the worldviews built by certain discourses, nature is a social construction which is perpetually being changed and redefined. By going beyond the traditional dichotomy which opposes Nature to Society and Culture, we aim to understand and work with NatureS (Swyngedouw, 2011) as entities which are essentially political.

Territories and conflicts between family farming organizations and the state in Misiones⁴

In this case study, we are interested in analyzing the tensions between ways of thinking and organizing the territory built by family farming organizations and their conflicts with the state regarding the construction, planning and definition of territorial policies aimed at strengthening family farming in Misiones. Our analysis is based on the concept of territory, following Sack (1986), as a spatial domain on which individuals or groups exercise territoriality, that is, an area in which they try to influence, affect or control people and processes through different mechanisms of power-wielding. In this way, different actors converge on a territory, proposing different ways of organizing, thinking and reproducing it, often in a conflictive manner.

In the north-east of the province, part of the food production is carried out by family farming organizations which struggle for land tenure against forestry and livestock companies. Regarding this demand, the organizations take action to build a territory consistent with the reproduction of a way of life oriented toward producing food. Their actions include the following: product diversification, native seed use, collective organization of production and the search for marketing alternatives.

The main conflict is based on the fact that the state –at the same time as it encourages food production through policies and programs– imposes requirements surrounding formal land tenure, which excluded some family farmers. On the other hand, there is no active policy aimed at solving this issue nor at halting the process of land concentration by companies. This case study shows that some state policies are a form of territorial control oriented towards reproducing an unequal and concentrated agricultural structure which favors company interests.

Spatial practices surrounding food production and marketing on the basis of Social and Solidary Economy in Mendoza⁵

In this research, we focus on the analysis of the **spatial practices** which are carried out within different experiences of social and solidary economy (SSE) in the province of Mendoza –in western Argentina– and the role of such practices in sustaining these experiences. We define spatial practices as social practices in which spatiality (spatial organization, territoriality and a sense of space) is a clear and prominent component of an organization’s strategies, forms of expression and/or objectives (Souza, 2013). Such practices are important in sustaining these kinds of SSE experiences, which are based on the development of associative economic activities and a democratic kind of management aimed at autonomy from the for-profit private sector and from the state (Pastore, 2010).

⁴ This subject is part of Aymara Zanotti’s undergraduate thesis in Geography.

⁵ This subject is part of Emanuel Jurado’s doctoral thesis in Social Science.

One example is the Union of Landless Rural Workers (UST), a peasant-based social organization born in 2002, whose political slogans focus around comprehensive agrarian reform and food sovereignty. Their main obstacle is a lack of access to land and water, which they dispute with different agents of capital. As a form of grassroots resistance, the organization has developed alternative economic circuits based on the production of diverse types of food through the creation of industrial and primary production centers. Regarding marketing, most of the products circulate through fair-trade networks within Mendoza City and throughout the rest of the country (Buenos Aires, Rosario, Córdoba and other areas). Our analysis shows that each of these productive structures require designing and implementing social practices which the UST develops in order to activate different places through productive labor, with the goal of supplying food to nearby and distant areas.

Conclusions

Our research is based on a theoretical perspective which accounts for the contradictory and conflictive process of spatial production and the political-ideological character of land management: Which is the desired order? What representations of space are enforced? What other “managements” arise from social organizations? These questions are key for understanding the disputes and strategies of different actors in order to impose their projects in each place. Our case studies show that state policies tend to reaffirm a territorial (economic, political and environmental) order which creates pressure on family farming and its capacity to produce food. Through everyday resistance, social organizations experiment with practices which tend to disrupt that order, both materially (by developing alternative productions and ways of trading) and symbolically (by building other ideas and representations around space and its possible management).

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