EVASION OF POSSIBLE RURAL SUCCESSORS: PARENTS AND SON'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: One of the problems experienced in the rural context is aging without successors, and there is a dropout of young people in this environment and there are few people to continue the activities performed by parents. The exodus of sons, the decrease in the percentage of the active rural population, and the loss of the succession dynamics of the productive units, can be compromising in the medium and long term to promote the development and rural companies’ sustainability. In this context, this research aimed to analyze what were the factors that contributed to the successors not staying in the countryside from the perspective of parents and sons. It has the subjectivist approach, with multicasestudy method, and content analysis to assist in the results interpretation. Among the main findings, there was a predominance of short and medium-term vision, conflicting expectations between parents and sons, and planning failures for continuity of rural family property. It is concluded that investing in structured processes of preparing properties and families for succession means contributing to the sustainability of rural companies and to the relational health of parents and sons.

Keywords: Family succession; Evasion of young people; Rural sustainability;

INTRODUCTION

Introducing research is taking care of the ground and requires inspiration. Researches on rural youth are recent, and it is necessary to open ways to broaden the studies on this public, especially in view of the contributions that this category can bring to the transformation of rural space (Muller, 2016). Observing the familiar structure of family farmers raises concerns not only regarding their permanence over time, but also reflects social concerns, such as the parents’ own destinies, which in this condition may be without protection in old age (Matte & Machado, 2017).

In recent years there has been a sharp decline in the population in rural areas, as according to data from the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management, in the 1980 Population Census, almost 39 million people lived in rural areas, while in 2010 there was a decrease, falling this number to 29 million. Another caveat is that this decrease is more apparent among young people, who in 2010 accounted for less than 15% of the rural population, while in contrast, the number of older people increased by 10% in the rural environment (Brasil, 2014).
The emptying of rural youth is a contemporary theme that deserves concern. The exodus of sons, the decrease in the percentage of the active rural population, and the loss of the succession dynamics of the productive units, can be compromising in the medium and long term towards the promotion of rural development (Froehlich et al., 2011). Talking about the context of family farming and its interfaces about the future of rural development is important to match the elements that could serve for future interventions (Redin, 2014). According to Spanevello, Azevedo and Vargas (2011), understanding these issues is particularly important to define actions that promote succession and continuity of family farming. Given these aspects, it is believed that the work presents empirical contributions.

Given this context, the objective of the research was to analyze which factors contributed to the non-permanence of successors in rural areas. Through the multicase method, we sought a multidimensional look at this issue. In this way, information was raised from the point of view of the predecessors and successors.

Theoretical Foundation

Growing old in the countryside and not having people to succeed what was built seems to be a complex process. Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory can be cited to understand this phenomenon. From a systemic view, the systemic approach is a proposal to study living systems, their social groups and their relationships, and establish interdisciplinary basic principles applicable to any physical, biological, human and sociological system (Bertalanffy, 2013).

Bertalanffy (2013) said that his theory was a way of thinking, in the 1920s, he was intrigued by the evident gaps that existed in research and found that even with a wide variety of forms and characteristics biological beings had commonalities. Thus, it was found that regardless of whether these living and social organisms have numerous and varied elements, all had an interaction of these components with the goal of achieving a certain purpose, what he called the system (Bertalanffy, 2013). It can be said, therefore, that system is a set of objects united by some form of interaction or interdependence and that generates cohesion to the set. So, we used this theory to comprehend, understand and describe the characteristics of the object of the study, as it can be seen as a complex system. In the systemic approach, the whole is more than just the sum of the parts and in relation to organizations, what happens in a process, for example, can modify or affect others, and consequently, the system as a whole (Bertalanffy, 2013).

It is inferred that the family system that has no successors in rural areas faces some difficulties. Some families may realize the problem only when their predecessors realize they are getting older. Sequeira and Silva (2002) state that old age is a period of great change regarding biological as well as psychological and social issues. Although aging is accompanied by several changes, any of these changes may be larger or smaller according to the context in which this elderly person is inserted, and in this case lives an uncertainty: who will succeed all that was built?
There are numerous variables that can influence the well-being of the elderly, one of them is the subject's perception of the environment and the congruence he has with it. In addition, it is important to highlight that the continuity of the rural family business promotes regional social and economic gains, according to preliminary data and estimates from Epagri/Cepa (2016), the state of Santa Catarina produces R$ 28,808,931 thousand reais in agribusinesses products generating an index of 45,054 thousand jobs created in the agribusiness sector according to size and relative participation in 2011 (Sebrae, 2013). At the national level, agribusiness has been growing and has been supporting the Brazilian economy, being responsible for the trade balance surplus; in addition, for every R$ 3.00 generated in Brazil, R$ 1.00 is linked to agribusiness. These data call our attention to the maintenance and support of this market, and for this to occur we must pay attention to the continuity of this activity for the next years (Furlan, Angnes, & Morozini, 2018).

Although there are several factors that point out the advantages of living in rural areas, the aging of the rural population according to Spanevello et al. (2017) can also be understood as a social problem when we look at family-type agriculture. This particular type is reproduced through three processes: the first is succession, which involves the passing of business from parents to succeeding sons; the second occurs by inheritance, in which the passage of heritage between successors occurs; and the third is the withdrawal or retirement of the parents (Spanevello et al., 2017). Succession is a major challenge for family businesses (Teston & Filippim, 2016).

As stated by Sharma et al. (2001) succession process is determined as the actions, events and happenings that affect the power transfer from one family member to another in the organization. This process begins when the company’s owner shows the intention for the succession to occur, until the successor leaves the position for another individual to assume this position (De Massis, Chua, & Chrisman, 2008).

According to Kischener, Kiyota and Perondi (2015), until around the 1970s, the farmers succession process was mainly done by cultural tradition than by law. In this context, in many cases, young people live with an important dilemma: the decision-making about whether or not to stay in rural areas. Among all the factors for youth leaving, the issue of studying is more relevantly pointed out as an external factor that not only offers knowledge, but also triggers a comparison between the lifestyles offered by the rural environment as opposed to the urban environment (Brumer & Spanevello, 2008).

The research by Brumer, Rosas and Weisheimer (2000) shows that sons’s permanence expectations in the agricultural activity are linked to the professional choice and the valorization of the farming profession in relation to other activities, the rural way of life, the relationships between parents and sons and the qualifications required to be a successful farmer in the market.

Thus, several reasons seem to have contributed to the departure of young people in rural areas, hindering the succession process, causing apparent social problems, and hindering the sustainability of the rural enterprise.
Research Methodological Procedures

This research has the approach characterized as qualitative (Bardin, 2011) and interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006), which is the most appropriate to understand what were the factors that contributed to the young people not staying in rural areas.

The method chosen was the multicase study (Yin, 2001). Resident families (predecessors or predecessor) in western Santa Catarina properties without successors in rural areas participated in the research. Only families who agreed to sign the Free and Informed Consent Form which included the Voice Recording Consent Form were included. The research also had as inclusion criteria that they were sons who had not lived with their parents for at least two years and that their parents were over 50 years old. The first case was invited because of the researchers' accessibility and for being part of a cooperative network. Subsequently, the snowball technique was used. The snowball or snowball method (Freitas et al., 2000).

The meetings were held at the predecessors’ homes, and in some families, because the interviews were held on weekends, the sons (successors) were present. Interviews were conducted with four families, four predecessors and four successors, between July and September 2018, and all were recorded and transcribed in full for further interpretation.

The technique for data analysis used was content analysis (Bardin, 2011). Some central themes emerged from the participants' report. For parents, how did they see their sons leaving home, how did they face the fact that there were no people to succeed in managing the property, what were the factors that contributed to their sons not staying on the farm, what do they plan to do with rural property in the future, what are the future expectations for them (the predecessors) in old age. For the sons, the themes of how they left home were investigated, how they face the fact that there were no people to succeed the property management, what were the factors that contributed to the non-permanence in the rural property, what they plan to do with rural property in the future, what are the future expectations for them (the predecessors) in old age.

Presentation and Results Discussion

The departure of sons from home was constituted as the central point of the presentation of the results. Thus, the categories were listed according to the frequency of the main themes in the collection of life history, namely: reason for leaving the sons and the property future. And the names of families with fictitious names of birds from southern Brazil were named.
4.1 Reason for leaving the sons

Regarding the reasons for sons leave home, some young people pointed to the fact that they felt the desire and need to study and the countryside became difficult due to several factors:

The reasons why I left the farm where I lived with my father and mother was the interest in going to college and I had to get a job first, because the leftover monthly income from farming and milk was not enough for me afford college tuition and transportation to town (Nightingale Family).

For parents, the reasons for leaving their sons was their encouragement to seek better living conditions through studies:

I think one of the reasons that we encouraged them so much to study, we encouraged them because we saw that in our days of working in the fields it was very difficult it was all manual and it was very hard is not that today, today is easier then we encourage them because we didn't want them to go through what we went through (Canarinho Family)

Among all factors, the study (education) is relevantly pointed as an external factor that not only provides information and knowledge, but triggers the comparison between the lifestyles offered by the rural as opposed to the urban, the study represents for sons the access to urban jobs or the alternative of life that is not part of the countryside reality, so a significant part of young people go to study, seeking higher education (Brumer & Spanevello, 2008). This factor was mentioned as the main reason for leaving young people from rural areas, being the distance from commuting to the city to study higher education as the main factor of their dropout.

Some young people also pointed out that they could receive their own money and buy their things and become independent as a reason for leaving home.:

I remember one time I asked my father to buy me a cell phone and he said to me: “Go to work and earn!” [...] when I turned 18, I went to the city [...] I got a job in a cold store, and I worked for 4 years there [...] I’ve been studying English for 4 years, I’m almost finishing my course, I left the cold store and I’m in a supermarket now [...] I’m waiting to finish English so I can start a college that will be graphic design or something related to English and exchange (Sabiá Family)

According to Wickert (2006), it is important to point out the relationship between consumption capacity and a sense of independence, which is fundamental in the discourse regarding the motivation for job search. Important vector in the movement for a job appears the desire for independence, which sometimes comes linked to the issue of consumption. The pursuit of independence is one of the factors that help young people in their decision-making to migrate to the urban environment. In rural areas, due to the property being together with their families, it is often impossible for the young to have something only yours that can acquire your goods.

Some also pointed to the lack of incentive for young people to stay in rural areas:

When I decided to leave home, we sat down and talked, in my time there was not so much encouragement, not for parents, but for society itself, the economy, technology, today there are machines, so it relieves a little the burden of the interior , in my day I didn’t have that (Sparrow Family)).
Many factors explain the rural exodus in Brazil, among which the most striking factor was the modernization of the Brazilian countryside, an economic model based on income concentration. This process, while increasing agricultural productivity, made it impossible for small and medium farmers to continue agricultural production (Wedig, 2009). Nowadays, modernity is part of the rural environment in the families that remained, which is also the factor of families and young people departure who could not invest. Since the families that remained, needed to reduce the activities due to labor and performance of activities be manual due to the lack of conditions for financial investments.

Thus it can be concluded that the reasons why the successors left the countryside were the fact that they felt the desire and need to study, become independent and the lack of incentive for young people to stay in rural areas coupled with technological advances. It is evident how much rural family work has been seen as limiting growth through learning as well as limiting independence for young people. Planning and executing actions that can fill these gaps through structured follow-up of succession can certainly promote the sustainability of rural companies.

Bertalanffy (2013) states that an organization, which may be a rural organization, influences the environment and receives influences from it, moreover, it is a system integrated by several related parts or units that work in harmony with each other, where when there is a change in one of the parts the whole is affected. Thinking about the family as a system, it is understood that the experience of each family member affects the family system that is influenced by social, economic, cultural, environmental factors, among others.

4.2 The property future

Regarding the future vision of the property in the parents' opinion, factors were pointed out that they would like to remain in the countryside managing the property until they can and then their sons return and manage the property.

Our kids left home because there was no space here, if they stayed here it was too little, it was too long doing nothing, so they work, until they are young they are working there, after which comes a point that they retire they will return [...]. Our sons have left home, to look for a better branch, not to suffer as much as we have, and until we are able we stay, and in the future one or the other can come back and continue, carrying on the property, because they don't want to sell it (Nightingale Family).

While predecessors believe that off-farm successors may find better conditions, they also yearn for their sons to return to property, that is, they rule out the possibility of disposing of rural family property. According to Spanevello et al. (2017) one of the most expressive forms of this attachment is the attempt to stay on the property until the end of life, i.e., farmers do not want to leave the property and yet, who would like their sons to return as farmers. The form found by parents, and viewed by them as the most appropriate, is the return of their sons to property. Thus, in addition to being supported by their sons, they can count on the possibility of productive reactivation of the property and its permanence under family ownership.
But the successors of some families think it would be more feasible for parents to live in the city, possibly selling the property.

As for property in the future I never thought about it actually, I think dad and mom always said that when I retire to sell and live in town I don't know what I would be living here, but having the experience to spend my whole life living in the countryside I think it is more viable for them to go to the city because everybody is going there (Sparrow Family).

Carneiro’s research (1998) also reveals that the destinations of properties without succession prospects are varied, and may either be leased to neighbors who remain in the agricultural activity, be abandoned or even be sold. The migratory movement from the countryside to the city has become very expressive in recent decades and this makes it difficult for those who stay, because they feel isolated and distant, which ends up causing concern in their sons for the parents to enter the phase of old age so distant from them and health resources confirmed in the next report:

Our future is actually God will give because it will depend on the sons, we are trying to keep here, maybe later we can even sell a piece and go live in the city, it would be good for them [sons] even, or stay there, I don't have much prediction going forward, you have to see your health as it will be too, because it's no use staying here sometimes the two of us sick, far from resources, practically isolated, there are few people close, soon we will live there near the health post then [laughs] but for now let's have some kittens of milk and we are taking, working with it (Sabiá Family).

According to Spanevello et al. (2017), the decision to stay with their sons is based not only on their parents’ wishes, but also on their sons’ signaling for such a possibility. Sons’ decision to take them to spend the end of their life in the city goes through the easiest health care available in the urban environment. Some parents report that they will stay in the countryside until they can, even knowing that their sons will not succeed.

Look until we get to work because we don't want to go live in the city. Let's work until our time comes! (Sparrow Family).

So the daughters wanted us to go to the city to be there closer to them but by the time we get sick we'll be closer to them. We tell each other that until we are healthy we are used to living here with our little corner and we will stay here (Canarinho Family).

According to Spanevello et al. (2017), farmers accept to live far from the establishment when they really need their sons, but it can noticed that parents tend to stay on the property until the “limit of forces”, motivated by attachment to land and life built on the site. The lack of planning for the sustainability of rural property through succession is evident. Both parents and sons have shown that they think of rural enterprise only from the short- and medium-term perspective, that is, only as long as their own generation exists. In addition, there are conflicting expectations as parents want their sons to return, sons want their parents to migrate to the city.

According to Bertalanffy (2013), the organization differs, however, from other social systems by its high level of planning. One of the important points of the systemic perspective of the organization is the good understanding of the roles’ concepts, norms and values, main components of
a social system. Once roles, norms and values are identified as the main components of a social system, it is possible to understand the organization. Still according to the General Systems Theory, and directing to succession, the parts have adapted first, leaving the property, there is a probability that the whole will meet elsewhere, which would be in the city. However, the exit incentive could be a movement of the whole where the parts seek expansion, and if succession occurs or could occur it would be homeostasis, but when the parts change the whole feels. Concern for succession indicates failures in planning and indicates that it could be as before as it has not reached the next stage due to the likelihood that some sons will return to do so.

Conclusions

The research sought to understand what were the factors that contributed to the non-permanence of successors in rural areas, raising information from the point of view of predecessors and successors. It was identified that aging in rural areas and not having people to succeed what was built, as well as to live with the elderly who decide to stay there is a complex process.

Considering these aspects, it was observed that the reasons why the successors left the countryside were the fact that they felt the desire and need to study, became independent and the lack of incentive to stay in rural allies with the Technological advances, sons also expect parents to migrate to the city, where they can be accompanied when they are older. As for the predecessors, there is hope that these sons will return in the future to continue ownership. The study raised questions that need to be rethought regarding the referral of rural entrepreneurial families, since before old age. Working to develop a long-term vision, raising awareness of the importance of planning and talking about succession have proved to be key aspects of property sustainability and the relationships of business family members. It is important to mention that during the interviews, (re)telling stories, allowed parents and sons to talk and resignify leaving home. Although the research was not therapeutic, data collection aroused positive feelings in families, and it was found that the act of speaking makes (re)know an untold reality and can become an important link for the family.

It is necessary to reflect on the complaints pointed out by the sons as reasons for their evasion from the countryside, such as the difficulty of studying, the use of technology and the distance where they are being overcome. It is known that these difficulties are currently being met. It is up to the provocation to consider whether we will possibly have an inverse movement from the city to the countryside. Perhaps it is an opportunity for future study. As a limitation of the study, it points to the typical aspects of case studies, which prevent the generalization of the findings, and the deadline for data collection, which did not allow the inclusion of other families.

These families who remain in the countryside without successors end up without many perspectives on property and generate reflection on the past in preparation for this moment. Thinking about strategies for this organization is something to be considered in future studies, because the rural area without farmers is like a kingdom without a king.
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