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TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE BENEFITS OF THE URBAN AGRICULTURE PRACTICE: A STUDY IN A BRAZILIAN CITY

BENEFÍCIOS TANGÍVEIS E INTANGÍVEIS DA PRÁTICA DA AGRICULTURA URBANA: ESTUDO EM UMA CIDADE BRASILEIRA

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ABSTRACT

Vulnerable consumers who face difficulties in accessing quality food may live in a kind of food desert. To overcome these difficulties, community urban gardens, as initiatives related to urban agriculture activities, may emerge as solutions. This paper has used practice theory as a lens to understand how individuals involved in the production and consumption of urban community gardens can have their lives transformed through the emergence of a new social practice. For this, an exploratory research and qualitative methodological strategy was carried out in the community garden of the city of Betim, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The results were divided into two categories of analysis, which were: a) health as a tangible benefit of the practice and b) well-being as an intangible benefit of the practice. That is, the individuals who were involved with the practice of urban agriculture in the studied context had positive changes in their lives with regard to health and the feeling of general well-being.

Keywords: Practice Theory; Food Deserts; Urban Agriculture.

RESUMO

Consumidores vulneráveis que enfrentam dificuldades de acesso a alimentos de qualidade podem viver em uma espécie de food desert. Para suprir essas dificuldades, hortas urbanas comunitárias podem surgir como soluções. Este trabalho se utilizou da lente da teoria da prática para entender como indivíduos envolvidos com a produção e o consumo em hortas comunitárias urbanas podem ter suas vidas transformadas por meio do surgimento de uma nova prática social. Para isso, foi realizada uma investigação de natureza exploratória e de estratégia metodológica qualitativa na horta comunitária da cidade de Betim, Minas Gerais, Brasil. Os resultados foram divididos em duas categorias de análise, que foram: a) saúde como benefício tangível da prática e b) bem-estar como benefício intangível da prática. Os indivíduos que se envolveram com a prática da agricultura urbana tiveram transformações positivas em suas vidas no que diz respeito à saúde e ao sentimento de bem-estar geral.

Palavras-chave: Teoria da prática; Desertos Alimentares; Agricultura Urbana.

INTRODUCTION

Macromarketing literature has already consolidated the understanding that, in addition to understanding marketing as a macro-level system (Hunt, 1976; Bartels & Jenkins, 1977; Shaw & Jones, 2005), the field should also be concerned with how this system can be optimized to improve the life of society at large, making it more distributive, fair, and with special attention to vulnerable consumers (Baker, Gentry & Rittenburg, 2005; Commuri & Ekici, 2008; McKeage, Crosby & Rittenburg, 2017; Lamb, Wong & Ponchio, 2018).

Thus, food issues could not be neglected when addressing issues such as welfare and distributive justice. In this sense, Cerovečki and Grünhagen (2016) were the first to propose a macromarketing approach to food deserts. The authors understand that a food desert is characterized by a geographical space where consumers have difficulty accessing food. This barrier can be caused by the configuration of supply channels (by distance from trade, the high price of products or low diversity of available food, for example) or by the difficulty of resources on demand (such as consumers with mobility problems or low income). However, it is also mentioned in the literature the food quality issues related to the nutritional quality of nearby foods available (Truchero, 2015).

In Brazil, there are initiatives that seek to balance this and resolve some inequalities in the food supply, proposing a fairer distribution and better nutritional quality, such as agriculture in urban areas of the country (Aquino & Assis, 2007; Darolt, 2007; Lamine, Brandenburg, Alencar & Abreu, 2016). In an unequal country, where the Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) ranges from 0.862 to 0.418 (Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento), federal government actions become of special interest to promote urban agriculture solutions, as can be identified by the National Plan for Food and Nutrition Security (PLANSAN) 2016-2019 (Câmara Interministerial de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional, 2016).

Initiatives related to urban agriculture appear in this context as a considerable alternative for improving the living conditions of the populations in a state of social vulnerability, in addition to creating sustainable relationships in the economic, social and environmental dimensions of cities.

From this discussion, we choose an empirical case to problematize the way the themes of food deserts, urban agriculture, and social practices are articulated. This is the community garden of the city of Betim, state of Minas Gerais, which is the object of this research. It can be considered as a case of urban agriculture located in a poor area of this city, where several low-income families with little access to adequate food reside. In investigating it, the research's objective was to highlight how the involvement of low-income individuals in urban agriculture minimized the effects of food deserts through their social practices.

It is easy to see that the article brings to debate an issue that seems to constitute a gap in the literature in this field of study. This issue is related to the articulation of the effects of urban agriculture on food deserts. It is noteworthy that research on the social, economic and environmental aspects produced by urban agriculture is still incipient mainly regarding the opportunities of this activity to impact the planning, design and construction of urban areas, especially in poor areas (Pearson, Pearson & Pearson, 2010). In addition, it is appropriate to take into account that the practice theory in this context is also configured as something still little explored in studies involving these themes.

Given these issues, there are several elements that justify the execution of the research. Firstly, it should not be forgotten that consumer welfare issues and the discussion about the effects of urban agriculture on food deserts are themes that are very close to the field of macromarketing. As pointed out above, the literature is lacunar in the articulation between these themes and the present research can serve to shed light on these issues. Secondly, practice

theory researchers will have access to results from empirical research based on a real-world situation in which a context of urban agriculture is investigated in a poor region. Thirdly, it is important to mention that the reports and discussions presented are rich in portraying the reality experienced by consumers who had an increase in their well-being provided by urban agriculture practices.

LITERATURE REVISION

Food Desert and Urban Agriculture

The term food desert emerges in the context of promoting public policy in the United Kingdom in the 1990s to only later be appropriated by scholars in their empirical research (Truchero, 2015; Battersby, 2019). Initially, the term was used to geographically define urban spaces that did not have fruit and vegetable stores available or where they are sold at high prices. In addition, access to transportation in cities that would make it possible to search for and purchase these foods has also been taken into account by research in this field, as well as the impact of disorderly city growth and food security issues (Coveney & O'Dwyer, 2009; Truchero, 2015; Madhumita *et al*., 2017; Crusch, Nickanor & Kazembe, 2019).

Generally speaking, it is possible to identify that discussions around the term food desert have increasingly overlooked the geographical aspects of ways of providing food for consumer studies, with their issues related to private transportation, income, mobility, etc. (Cerovecki & Grünhagen, 2016). On the other hand, identifying that there are many definers of a food desert besides mere geographic aspects can avoid public policy errors, such as those provided by the misunderstanding that the positioning of a supermarket in a geographic space can solve the problem of access to quality food (Battersby, 2019).

From these considerations, it is interesting to use the concept of urban agriculture which seems to have an interesting relationship with the theme of food deserts. Among the various definitions, urban agriculture can be understood as the cultivation of vegetables and fruit trees, in addition to other specialized crops, timber production, small-scale animals rearing (ranging from cattle and poultry to local species such as guinea pigs), beekeeping as well as aquaculture (fish and plants combined) (Dresher & Iaquinta, 1999). This finding seems to be in line with the idea of Zezza and Tasciotti (2010) when they argue that urban agriculture can have a role to play in addressing urban food insecurity problems, which should become increasingly important with the secular trend of urbanization of poverty and population in developing regions.

Thus, it is possible to list some elements that constitute the essence of an urban agriculture enterprise. The first has to do with the nature of the activity that should be related to agricultural and livestock production. Another interesting element is linked to the locational characteristics of the activity that may encompass individual, collective or public areas, including roads, squares, parks and idle areas and vacant lots. Finally, urban agriculture activities can be practiced in various modalities such as urban gardens and agroforestry yards. It may also include the use of fruit trees in urban afforestation, but also the cultivation of medicinal and ornamental plants (Machado, 2002).

In this research, we sought to understand how social practices can serve to minimize the effects of food deserts with urban agriculture initiatives through social practices. Thus, it was considered appropriate to advance the discussion of social practices which is the theme of the next section.

Social Practices

The practice theory gained strength in the social sciences in the late 1960s as part of a set of culturalist theories that had as a counterpoint the neoclassical and Durkheimian-based

positivist approaches (Reckwitz, 2002). The path for the development of practice theory was previously paved by philosophical currents, among them, the metaphysics of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, who understood that life was a continuous flow of practices, since "human life, for the life-philosophers, is inherently activity (Schatzki, 1993, p. 308). In addition, Foucault's post-structuralism and Butler's theories are considered an important part of the studies on the role of practices in shaping society (Schatzki, 1993, 1996; Reckwitz, 2002; Halkier, Katz-Gerro & Martens, 2011).

Considered by Schatzki (1996) the two fundamental pillars of the practice theory, Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu developed distinct parts of the field, but with similar structuring foundations. Giddens (1984) has in his theory of structuration a form of ontology when he puts it as a lens for interpreting the constitution of society. For the author, society is constituted through the practices of individuals who keep them in their routines and store them in forms of memory. Thus, social practices, carried by individuals and dispersed in time-space, are the central point for the social sciences, healing the theoretical clash between the power of agency and structure. For Giddens, social practices have a duality, that is, while shaping structures through routine actions, these structures allow individual actions to happen. Therefore, by observing social practices through their individuals and their routinized actions, it is possible to open ways to understand the formation of social structures and, at the same time, the motivation and mechanism of individual actions.

Social practices are treated by Bourdieu (1977) as products of *habitus*, a device - fruit of material environmental conditions such as class conditions - that allows individuals to perform actions in a particular social field. This device also accommodates ways of seeing and interpreting the world, which means that individuals with the same *habitus* can interpret and predict each other. Thus, the *habitus* is responsible for a certain fluency of individuals in social fields, because it is possible, with it, to predict actions of other individuals and to know what is right or not to do in a given situation (Bourdieu, 1977, 2000, 2011). The *habitus* and its practices, thus, are what build the objective structures of society, at the same time as they derive from them (Bourdieu, 1977). At this point, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is very similar to Giddens's structuring, as practices stand as an intermediate point between social structure and individual agency. For this work, however, it is important to understand that social practices carried by individuals are the central point of analysis for the social scientist.

The constitution of social practices

Schatzki (1996) divided the concept of social practice into smaller parts and detailed each of its elements. Firstly, it is possible to have two dimensions of practice: the macro level and the micro level. At the macro level, the practice acts as an *entity* (nomenclature explored by Røpke (2009)). At the micro level, practice acts in an integrative way as *performance*. Thus, the entity and performance reinforce each other, that is, on the one hand, the practice happens through the micro-level by individuals in their routines and performances, and on the other, the entity reinforces itself in a macro-level and can disperse through time-space to act again at the micro level when recruiting new practitioners to the practice (Shove & Pantzar, 2007b).

Two illustrative examples of social practices acting at the macro level as an entity and at the micro level as performance come from the empirical works of Shove and Pantzar (2005, 2007b). In the first of these, the authors investigate the practice of Nordic walking, initially consolidated in Finland which, acting as an entity, was able to disperse through time-space and to be practiced in other countries such as Norway, Japan and the United Kingdom. In these countries, Nordic walking has developed different performances, associated with different meanings of its home country. In the second example, the authors investigated the practice of floorball, a type of sport that, as an entity, recruits practitioners in specific places that, depending on the context, acquires configurations of their distinct elements from their place of

origin, that is, distinct performances. In both examples, the practice acts as an entity and, when practiced at its micro level, on a daily basis by the individuals, the practices have different performances, as they adapt to each context and the socio-historical burden existing at the place of importation (Shove & Pantzar, 2007a). The work of Plessz and Wahlen (2020), in addition, shows the sharedness of the eating practice through three dimensions of time and they argue, according to the theory, that the social practices survive because they are shared in time and space.

Whether as entities or as performances, practices constitute a nexus of *doings* and *sayings* which form a bundle with material arrangements (Schatzki, 1996; 2002; 2019). These elements of practice can only be together – forming a nexus – and practiced by social actors if they are "glued". Doings and sayings of a practice only form a nexus if they manifest the same *rules*, *teleoaffective structure* and *understandings* (Schatzki, 1996; 2002; 2019). According to Schatzki (1996, p. 89), doings and sayings are linked by:

> (1) through understandings, for example, of what to say and do; (2) through explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions; and (3) through what I will call "teleoaffective" structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and moods.

In the rise of twenty century and with the evolution of the field, some authors consciously transformed these elements into a more empirical model composed of objects (or material), doing (or competence) and meanings (Magaudda, 2011; Shove & Pantzar, 2005).

Thus, when participating in a practice, the individual shares a series of objects, doings, and meanings, which belong to the same practice only because it permeates an understanding of them, a teleoaffective structure, and some explicit rules on how to act within that practice.

Due to the wealth of elements and possibilities for analysis, the theory of social practices is also widely used by researchers interested in issues of sustainability, health and food, as the theory sheds light on the routines of individuals and changes in their actions. In this respect, it may be of great interest to macromarketing researchers. This was the focal point in Røpke (2009), when proposing the use of practice theory in ecological studies. Halier and Jensen (2011) used practice theory and associated methodologies to study changing eating habits for health promotion among ethnic minorities in Denmark. Studies such as Shove and Southerton (2000), by addressing the routine use of household appliances, can also shed light on changes to more sustainable habits. Not least, the work of Gram-Hanssen (2011) proposes to analyze routine residential electricity consumption and the role of technology in changing practices. In this paper, therefore, we will use the practice theory to understand the changes that the practice of urban agriculture has promoted in the lives of individuals in a Brazilian city.

Next, in the presentation of the methodology, we describe the researched empirical object, which is already presented in its initial formation as a point of concern of social actors with health and quality of life in the city, a topic of interest to macromarketing researchers, urban agriculture and also the practice theory.

METHODOLOGY

Community garden of the city of Betim-MG, Brazil

The community garden of the Granja Verde neighborhood started from an initiative of the residents surrounding an area of the local electricity company, Companhia Energética de Minas Gerais (CEMIG) in 2013, which is where its power transmission towers are installed. According to the residents, the area was generating disturbances, such as garbage accumulation, drug use and the appearance of rats and cockroaches in their homes. As a result, some of them began to surround small portions of the area that were closest to their homes and to clear them. The first actions ended up generating many conflicts, as some residents thought that the

objective would be the invasion to build houses. The initial idea was followed by other neighbors to a large extent. Thus, the planting came naturally, until the neighborhood community negotiated with CEMIG the right to use the space. The large plot has been divided into small plots (58 small plots are recorded), each of which is the responsibility of a family, who can grow and use the food they produce as they please.

According to the reports of the residents who form the data of this research, the garden arises and meets the demand for healthy and organic fruits and vegetables, as well as herbs for medicinal teas. According to the data collected, these products were not regularly accessed and consumed prior to the installation of the garden. In addition, residents cannot tell where they can buy organic produce near their homes except in the community garden. Thus, the garden occupies a space within a food desert, since the definition of this term is given both by the viability and availability characteristics of the supply chain and by the means and resources available for demand access (Truchero, 2015; Cerovecki & Grünhagen, 2016).

Data collection

Data were collected using a script of interviews with pre-structured questions (Gaskell, 2000) and the field diary were used in participant observation moments. In this case, we used technique with ethnographic inspiration (Belk & Casotti, 2014). For this, site visits were made, interaction with neighborhood residents, and various conversations with consumer-producers happened. The field diary served as a point for take notes of the impressions we got from the site, interactions between residents, and to take notes of those conversations moments that haven't been recorded because the more formal interview moment passed and the record app was off.

We realized nine interviews, all in their own garden, during the rest intervals of the consumers-producers. Just one of these interviewees wasn't recorded by its own request. All the interviewees selected were residents of the neighborhood who cultivated in the garden and fed on the food collected there. We adopted the snowball technique (Noy, 2008) to reach all the consumer-producers and when we got the saturation (Gaskell, 2000) we stopped and started to analyze the data. Furthermore, nowadays the number of regular producers is about 15, which makes the number of informants we have relevant. We have 174 minutes of recordings, which were transcribed for the analysis stage. The contact with the field began in April 2018 and lasted until June 2019. There were eight visits to the field in total, lasting approximately four hours each, allowing me to follow the whole morning work period of the residents in the garden.

Analysis Strategy

To perform the data analysis, the discourse analysis of French origin was used. Unlike content analysis, discourse analysis seeks the meanings that are "behind" the interviewees' statements, as well as associations with other discourses and power structures, and the researcher must adopt a critical stance in the face of data obtained in the field (Bakhtin, 1986; Gill, 2000). For Bakhtin (1986), the basic unit of discourse is the utterance, which has its limit until the lexical selection is answerable, but not yet constituted as discourse; The utterance is not a grammatical unit, but an element for linguistic analysis. Still, according to the author, speakers of a language are adept at selecting lexical so that they can express themselves and pass through the desired meanings.

Discussing the applicability of discourse analysis in the field of marketing, Elliott (1996) argues that the postmodern turn of the discipline required new interpretative methods of reality and, thus, discourse analysis placed itself in the field of interest in the area. For the author, as a benefit to marketing studies, the "discourse analysis abandons the positivist assumption that people have a single attitude that can be represented through mutually exclusive response categories" (p. 65). Bringing the discussion of the application of discourse analysis to the field

of practice theory studies, it can be said that this can be an interesting path for researchers to follow.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

When performing the initial exploration of the material, two categories stood out in the data and emerged to perform the analysis. The first of these concerns is the *tangible* improvement in health conditions reported by respondents practicing agriculture. The second relates to the improvement of a general and *intangible* sense of well-being. In the last case, respondents do not know why they are feeling better, but clearly they associate the current state with involvement with the garden and the practice of urban agriculture. Following is the analysis of the data in light of these two categories, highlighting the discursive fragments that best illustrate them. The interviewees will be presented with pseudonyms.

Health as a tangible benefit of practice

While exploring the field and starting conversations with agricultural producers, something that emerged and caught our eyes was reports of improvements in clinical conditions such as obesity and depression. Discursive fragment 1 is illustrative of this category of analysis.

> (1) [. . .] I had an arrhythmia problem myself and with every little thing that happened my heart was racing, what a thing… I took a lot of medicine, I took a controlled medicine, heavy controlled medicine for a lot of problems, stress… and after I came here it ended [laughs] because It's a therapy, I dropped everything. (Rodrigo).

The interviewee explicitly reports how his health improved and the symptoms associated with this improvement. He also points out that he stopped consuming the medicines used to treat his illness. The lexical selection "*because it is a therapy*" demonstrates that the interviewee sees work in the community garden as therapeutic. The lexical "*therapy*" here does not act in an intangible sense, but by associating it with the improvement of clinical conditions, the interviewee informs that the performance in the garden has the ability to replace conventional medicines of the pharmaceutical industry.

Still, in the discursive fragment 1 there is an element of social practice, which is the routine activity. As observed in the literature, the routine and daily life of individuals are fundamental for the configuration and consolidation of social practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996). In addition, performance-level routine reinforces practice as an entity, giving dispersing power in time-space.

Respondents cannot define whether improvement in health is due to the practice of agriculture (remembering that the practice is composed of doings, objects and meanings) – as demonstrated by the discursive fragment 1 –, the ingestion of quality food itself or by herbal remedies learned (interest that grew in individuals with involvement in the garden). In the case of the discursive fragment 2 there is the reinforcement of the idea that the tangible improvement of the health of those involved with the community garden is done by doing the practice. By asking Mr. Claudio what changed in his life after working in the garden, he answered as follows:

> (2) [. . .] For me a lot, health, right? Thank God… Just staying here tanning and sweating here [. . .] This is too good, alright. This was wet with sweat, just sat there a bit and already dried. That's all you see, how good you feel. You get home, take a shower, lay on the couch. When it comes three o'clock you come here, and leave here at five thirty, six o'clock. (Claudio).

The discursive fragment 2 also brings routine as an element of practice in the case of urban agriculture in the city of Betim. The interviewee cites the rest and returning hours,

suggesting that these times are repeated. In addition, the interviewee understands the sweat of his body as a kind of atonement for the ills by the hard work on earth. This is followed by a moment of relaxation, expressed when using the lexical selection "*come home, take a shower, go there on the couch*".

In addition to improving health by doing the practice, as explained earlier, there is also a direct association between eating food from the garden - which they consider to be of quality - with improved laboratory test results and clinical findings, as shown by the discursive fragments 3 and 4.

> (3) [. . .] I planted more because of my wife. She has a high blood glucose problem, so it reached a level as soon as the doctor wanted to treat it already, because she reached 135, her glucose was already starting to become pre-diabetic. [. . .] 'The thing is this: let's not take medicine. Then lose a little bit '[. . .] You have to see the power of plants, my friend! I make tea at home. I do too. I make tea there twice a week. I pick up five leaves of that blackberry there, so for business to have a little aroma, put a couple of mint twigs, a delight! [. . .] Her glucose has dropped to 98 [laughs] and mine is 104. Almost, I have to get tested again now. So, I do exams every six months. I always follow. So what is the gain of it here? My glucose is ok, my bad cholesterol, which is fat, is below 150. (Adenilson).

> (4) [. . .] People don´t care about the health of the population. If you don't have a little knowledge, a good head, you're screwed, man. Because the market offers you so much. You see so many juice, so many cookies… everything is just a bad thing for your health. (Adenilson).

In approaching the elements of practice, there is an element discussed by Schatzki (1996) that stands out in the discursive fragments selected so far, which is *general understanding*. It is shared among practitioners in the Betim community garden that the industrial, as opposed to the natural, is bad. This understanding goes beyond issues related to food consumption to avoid the consumption of industrial medicines, considered worse than the natural solutions produced in the garden. By using lexical in the diminutive, Mr. Adenilson demonstrates the care he takes in producing his medicinal teas. As he talked and talked about the "*little leaves*" and "*little aroma*", his fingers went, as if sprinkling salt on an imaginary pan as an alchemist.

In order to ensure the health of the producer-consumers and to maintain the quality of the food produced, which is in contrast to the food supplied by the large industrial-scale production-consumption chains, the practice of agriculture in the Granja Verde neighborhood garden must have *rules* (one of the elements of the nexus). In the case studied, EMATER played a fundamental role in consolidating these rules by teaching techniques for the production of safe and organic foods. Today, all production of the garden happens this way. At this point, the data run counter to the practice theory literature, understanding that every social practice needs rules that help to keep practice cohesive (Schatzki, 1996).

The community garden of the Granja Verde neighborhood in Betim, Brazil occupies a space in a region described by the residents themselves as a *food desert*. In addition to promoting physical activity for the consumer producers who work there, it also provides quality food for themselves and surrounding residents. This finding is in line with Brazilian research showing how the availability of healthy food can increase the likelihood of residents close to consuming them (Jaime, Duran, Satri & Lock, 2011; Vedovato, Trude, Kharmats & Martins, 2015). However, an important element for this improvement in the health of individuals is effective participation in the practice, adopted as a routine.

Wellness as an intangible benefit of practice

In addition to tangible improvements in clinical staff and laboratory tests, farmers in the community garden of Betim report that they generally feel better. There is even a certain confusion shown by respondents in trying to explain how well they feel about working and consuming the community garden. Health and wellness issues seem to blend into their explanations. There is a feeling of general improvement, as follows in the discursive fragment 5.

> (5) [. . .] Health has improved a lot, mine and many companions. We have examples there, a 93-year-old boy who lives in activity. Another boy there, he had a health problem and as soon as he started moving his problem ended. And health and spiritually we improve a lot. Health and quality of life [. . .] (José).

The lexical selection "*health and spiritually we improve a lot*" reveals this sense of overall improvement and, moreover, of "*spiritual*" improvement. The interviewee puts twice "*health and quality of life*" side by side when trying to explain what improved in his life after involvement with the community garden, demonstrating an association between tangible and intangible transformations. In this discursive fragment there is the appearance of another element of social practice, the meanings. These findings are very similar to others in the Brazilian context of public policies of health (Costa, Garcia, Ribeiro, Salandini & Bógus, 2015). For practitioners of urban agriculture in the community garden of the Granja Verde neighborhood, there is a meaning associated with quality of life and well-being, which can be explained and defined by other discursive fragments, such as 6 and 7.

> (6) [. . .] I had companions here that you didn't talk to before. The relationship has changed. We got to know each other... the community itself interacted better than before. (José).

> (7) [. . .] You come here, we are in the middle of the urban space (noisy, car and etc.) but being here is like in the woods, right? You just concentrate on this little piece, it doesn't even look like you're in town, you're in the fields. So for me it particularly does very well. (Rodrigo).

Well-being thus has a specific meaning for those individuals who participate in the practice of urban agriculture in the community garden of the Granja Verde neighborhood. There is also a feeling of community and empowerment around the garden as the case shown by another Brazilian study (Ribeiro, Bógus & Eatanabe, 2015). Well-being, within this practice, is associated with a moment of decompression within the urban environment, healthy living within the neighborhood and the feeling of being in the countryside. This is a point of relevance within the practice theory that, as a culturalist and phenomenological approach to the constitution of society - as opposed to Durkheimian and neoclassical positivism - places meanings as contextual, that is, dependent on the practice to which they belong (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996).

Another discursive fragment associated with this intangible and proper feeling of well-being is 8. A simple gentleman who had difficulty expressing himself with the standard variety of the Portuguese language used a sophisticated and synthetic lexical selection to express how he felt when working in the garden.

> (8) [. . .] For me it's a party, this is a party for me. See? I made about three flowerbeds and got it here. Tomorrow I'll pick up here and go out to that flowerbed there, see? Then I stop, because there's no place for me to dig anymore. Then I will bring the manure, sow here and plant okra. (Claudio).

By saying that he feels like a "*party*", Mr. Claudio demonstrates that the feeling of well-being can also be associated with intense and agitated activity, numbness and a unique enjoyment. Land work is also responsible for this overall improvement, as shown in the discursive fragment 9.

> (9) [. . .] because depression will make a person very still, have no one to talk to, be quiet at home and have nothing to do. And that goes on accumulating a depression in the person and the person keeps having those feelings that he is not capable of anything, that he has no strength to leave home. And here in the garden we share knowledge with each other, what one learns passes to the other; and whenever one is coming to visit the other and chatting; and the land that the person sees, that the little plant is there, he has that power to make that little plant grow and produce. This depression goes away, this is surely a cure, right? (Joao Paulo).

The lexical selection "*he has that power to make that little plant grow*" also demonstrates an intangible "*spiritual*" character attributed to the garden. A certain mystique. It can be observed that the lexical "power" does not lose its meaning in the sentence if we interpret it with a mystical connotation, sometimes in its colloquial sense. Again, an interviewee uses a sophisticated lexical feature. It is clear from this fragment, along with the analysis of the previous ones, how the garden stands for the interviewees as an oasis of tranquility in the middle of an urban place, marked by stress, noise, sedentary lifestyle and poor-quality industrial products.

Whether by working on the land, living in the neighborhood or eating quality food, individuals who engage in the practice of urban agriculture in the Granja Verde neighborhood of the city of Betim have their lives positively transformed with regard to health and the feeling of well-being.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By approaching the theme of food deserts and knowing that it is of interest in the field of macromarketing, this research demonstrates that it is possible to promote forms of food supply that occupy these deserts and that, through the social practices involved, can promote health and wellbeing for the population.

By proposing to understand how individuals who engage with urban agriculture transform their lives through social practices, a qualitative and phenomenological research strategy was adopted, adhering to both the field of macromarketing and practice theory. This research design and the analysis of the results obtained in the field provided some considerations.

The first concerns the point in time-space that was the milestone of the transformation of practices with the introduction of urban agriculture. The practice theory literature demonstrates the importance of objects as one of the starting points for the transformation of social practices (Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Magaudda, 2011). However, in the case of the community garden in the Granja Verde neighborhood, this turning point was the emergence of a possibility in the urban space. This note can demonstrate to interested public managers that transformations in public space can transform people's lives in the city.

Secondly, it became clear that not only the transformation of space and the commencement of garden activities were sufficient for the practice to survive in time and space. Other elements of the practice must be present so that, in fact, there may be a social practice. In our research, it was possible to identify the elements of the practice acting together, as is the case of the rules used for the production of organic foods, the understandings related to the industrial and the natural, the meanings that circulate in the context of the garden, among others. Thus, it is possible to endorse the literature finding that for a practice to be dispersed in time-

space, several elements must act simultaneously and relationally. Public managers or those interested in social policies can use this understanding so that they can make their interventions thrive and produce satisfactory results. It is not enough just to create a community garden in an urban area, for example, it is necessary to act in a chain of understandings, values, rules, objects, meanings and activities for such actions to be successful.

Thirdly, specifically about the community garden of the Granja Verde neighborhood, the insertion of individuals in the practice of urban agriculture provided visible health transformations in very tangible ways, such as improvements in obesity, depression and indicators of laboratory tests. In a country like Brazil, urban agriculture projects can be used in parallel with public health policies with positive results, as shown by other Brazilian studies. In addition, an improvement in the overall sense of well-being of the producer-consumers was very much associated with the health situation, either because they were active, related to the community, or felt as if they were doing something important to the community. However, in general, consumer-producers do not make a very clear distinction between tangible and intangible improvements, but they do associate the start of working in the garden with this positive life transformation. This finding seems to be in line with what is established as one of the opportunities for urban agriculture initiatives.

Finally, the highlight was a growing anti-industrial sentiment, as if residents resisted the food industry's attacks on its pesticides and, in addition, the pharmaceutical industry's attack on its unnatural remedies. The community garden has become a resistance bunker to conventional market products.

As a limitation of the research, we found the unavailability of secondary demographic data about the city, its regions and neighborhoods, since data from the IBGE and the Human Development Atlas in Brazil did not explore cities at their micro level. The City of Betim also does not make such data available on its website, as with other cities in Brazil. With them we could better define the food desert areas of the city of Betim and make comparisons, placing the Granja Verde neighborhood in front of others. The low number of farmers active in the garden and the irregularity with which they attend the site was also a limitation found, as the number of respondents could be higher.

Further research may also help explain how practices “die”. In the case of the community garden in the Granja Verde neighborhood, although the practice generally survives, there are reports of people who “discouraged” and stopped producing. The research which focuses on this individual could shed light on the "death" dynamics of social practices, as we have seen this action of the elements of social practice to make it survive. Similar research designs can also be constructed to investigate other urban facilities and the benefits to communities, such as public gyms, racetracks, etc. Such investigations may have the potential for use by academics and public officials interested in improving the health and well-being of the population.

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