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Articles

Furniture industry and demographic dynamics of Ubá, Minas Gerais, Brazil

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Abstract: The present study seeks to relate the influence of the main economic activities developed in the city of Ubá-MG to its demographic dynamics, from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century, highlighting the role played by the furniture industry. It also aims to show the consequences of urban population growth in the city landscape, transformed throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. For this, we reviewed the literature on the historical evolution of Ubá, relating it to the population data obtained from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística and Ipeadata website. The substitution of subsistence farming practices for coffee and later tobacco production attached great importance to municipal development. However, the furniture industry has become and continues to be the major activity in Ubá, both economically and demographically. It also had a great impact on the modification of the urban landscape in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Keywords: Demographic Evolution, Economic Activities, Furniture, Micro region of Ubá, Migration.

Introduction

The present study seeks to relate the influence of the main economic activities developed in the city of Ubá - Minas Gerais to its demographic dynamics, from the second half of the 19th century to the first decades of the 21st century, highlighting the role played by the furniture industry. It also aims to show the consequences of urban population growth in the city landscape pattern, significantly changed during the twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Although it addresses the specific case of Ubá, several considerations made in this article reflect the reality in most of the medium-sized cities in the country. These urban centers grew more than the cities subordinated to them, for some driving forces which attract populations from the surrounding small towns. Cities such as Ubá offer better conditions to access to basic services, more chances of employment, among other benefits (IBGE, 2008). Thus, their demographic growth has drastically increased over the last decades, mainly caused by the migration of the populations from smaller cities.

Ubá evinces well the situation of most Brazilian municipalities that witnessed rural-urban migration, especially in the 1960s, according to

the 1970 Census of Population (IBGE, 1970), when the Brazilian urban population surpassed the rural contingent (BRITO, 2006).

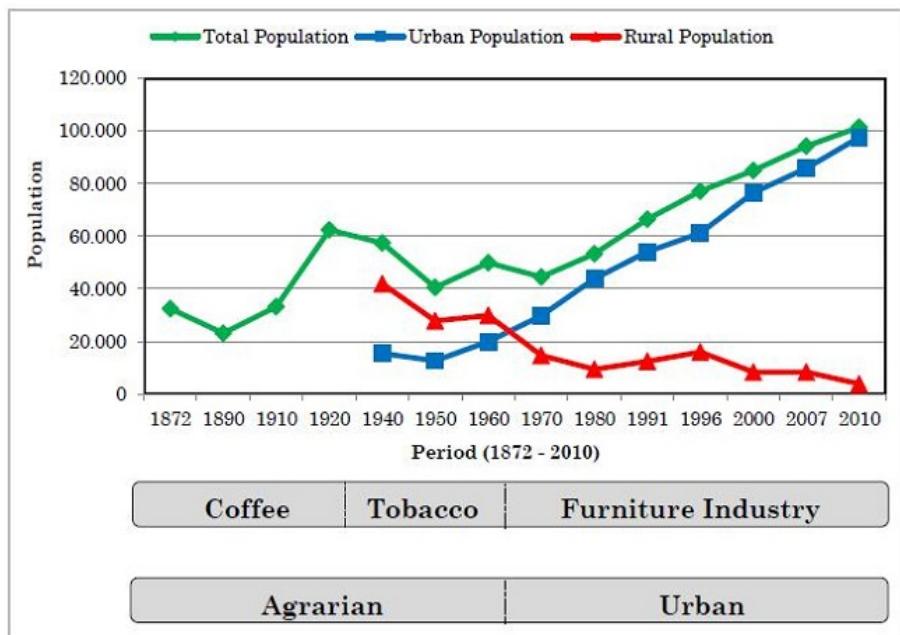
Ubá has some peculiar characteristics that favor constant economic relations with smaller cities and with the microregional space linked to it. Its geographical position also allows economic connections with larger centers (AMORIM FILHO; RIGOTTI; CAMPOS, 2007; IBGE, 2008) as it is 290 km from Belo Horizonte, 300 km from Rio de Janeiro, 580 km from São Paulo and 470 km from Vitória. In addition, it is situated about 100 km from some major regional centers of Minas Gerais, such as Juiz de Fora, Barbacena, Muriaé, and Viçosa.

This article holds initial discussions about Uba's demographic evolution since there is no specific work on this subject, and can thus become a reference for future research.

Prevailing economic activities in Ubá

It is possible to differentiate four main periods associated with the dominant economic activities throughout Uba's history: 1) Subsistence farming; 2) Coffee monoculture; 3) Tobacco culture and 4) Furniture industry (Figure 1).

Subsistence agriculture was the mainstay at the beginning of the municipality, lasting from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the expansion of coffee into the Paraíba Valley made this production assume importance in the region, and consequently, subsistence agriculture started being gradually replaced. Indeed, the monoculture of coffee focused on exports, became the most important economic activity (ALBINO, 2009; INTERSIND, 2014).

**Figure 1**

The relation between demographic evolution and economic activities of Ubá, from 1872 to 2010.

Source: IPEADATA (2014), ALBINO (2009), ANDRADE (1961); OLIVEIRA et al. (2010).

Source: authors.

Note: The practice of subsistence agriculture was not presented in this graph due to the lack of population data prior to the period of 1872.

Concomitant to coffee, and of regional importance, there was the production of roll or rope tobacco (OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR, 2011), corn, and, to a lesser extent, onions. With the coffee crisis in the late 1920s, tobacco production grew in importance, controlling the local economy between the 1930s and 1950s. During this period, Ubá was known as the largest consumer of agricultural inputs and fertilizers, as well as the largest producer of tobacco throughout the country. From then on, tobacco suffered from a sharp decline in the regional market due to its low combustibility (ALBINO, 2009; INTERSIND, 2014) and the inadequate use of agricultural products for many years in a row, compromising its quality. As a result, in the late 1950s, the crisis in tobacco industry left a huge number of people out of work on farms and in the city (OLIVEIRA et al., 2010).

The significant decline in tobacco production increased unemployment in Ubá, which launched the search for new economic activities that would absorb the unemployed, and in this context, the furniture industry seemed the most promising (INTERSIND, 2014) and likely to develop because of several reasons.

First, woodworking had existed in Ubá since the beginning of the 20th century and was connected with the entrance of Italian immigrants who, besides the labor force to work in the coffee and tobacco fields, bringing the professional vocation for manufacturing. Therefore, during this century, companies related to the sector were gradually emerging. In 1917, the first joinery was opened for the production of frames and of custom made furniture. In 1927, another company began to produce and

sell luggage and furniture on consignment. In 1947, a broom factory was established, and in 1957, a company named Auto-Refrigeração started manufacturing wooden refrigerators in series (OLIVEIRA et al., 2010).

However, the furniture industry really started to be the central focus in Ubá in the 1960s, as an alternative to the economic crisis that the city and the region faced as a consequence of the fall in tobacco production. In 1959, Francisco Parma founded Domani, the first lacquered kitchen cabinet factory. These cabinets were made from dismantled wooden crates supplied by Armarinho Santo Antônio, a large commercial company that purchased a great number of goods, from food products to clothing for later distribution in Ubá and region. Later, Domani commenced manufacturing cabinets, wardrobes, sofas, and frames from imported raw material (OLIVEIRA et al., 2010).

Oliveira et al. highlights (2010) other key factors to the growth of the furniture industries:

- a) The interest of the Commercial and Industrial Association of Ubá (ACIU) in developing industrial activities in the municipality for the absorption of available rural labor;
- b) The existence of furniture industries, such as Auto-Refrigeração and Domani;
- c) The creation, in 1963, of a parallel board of directors with ACIU, responsible for dealing with problems concerning the precariousness of communication, the scarcity of electricity, the road Ubá / Juiz de Fora asphalt and, credit lines at Banco do Brasil;
- d) The organization of fairs and exhibitions by ACIU, with the purpose of promoting the manufacturing park, in order to encourage the launch of industries in the city and within the region. The first exhibition occurred in 1963 and the second in 1964.

Since then, furniture companies have grown significantly in the city. Through financing, Domani expanded its production and sales capacity, hiring up to 1,200 people, playing a leading role in the growth and in the development of the local furniture industry (ALBINO, 2009; SILVA, 2008).

Domani ceased its activities in the mid-1970s. As a result, many of the dismissed workers decided to open their own businesses, taking advantage of the knowledge gained in terms of production and marketing and of a large source of available manpower. Technology and location contributed to the development of this activity (SILVA, 2008).

At the end of the 1970s, there was a considerable increase in the number of industries in the furniture sector, amounting to 25 new companies and increasing to 72 by 1980 (OLIVEIRA et al., 2010). At the end of the 2000s, this number had grown to 410 (ALVES, 2009).

It can be seen, therefore, that besides the tradition of woodworking brought by Italian immigrants, and the existence of various companies related to this sector in the course of the twentieth century, there was a concern, mainly of the part of private initiative, to promote the industrial development in Ubá. As the woodworking activity was

predominant, the development of the furniture industries would be the most promising for the businessmen of the time (INTERSIND, 2014; SILVA, 2008). Population data obtained from the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) (IPEADATA, 2014) show that there has been an exponential increase in the urban population since the 1960s, accompanied by a considerable decrease in the rural population, which coincides with the development of the furniture industry in the city.

The influence of the furniture industry on urban population growth

As illustrated in Figure 1, until the 1960s, the municipal demographic contingent underwent a wide variation in its growth pattern, sometimes tending to rise sometimes to decrease.

There was a decrease between the Censuses for 1872 and 1890, followed by an intense period of growth between 1890 and 1920, another decrease from 1920 to 1950, and another period of growth between 1950 and 1960. Between 1960 and 1970, there was another demographic decrease, which was the last recorded drop in the total population of the municipality.

Relating Figure 2 to Table 1, it can be noted that the increase and decrease of the total population of Ubá were conditioned to the dismemberment of the municipality, by the emancipation of its districts, until 1970, when the municipal territory did not go through more changes, the total population grew continuously.

However, from the mid-1960s onwards, the furniture industry became the most important economic activity in the city, constituting itself as a factor of population attraction, shown in Figure 1 when, from the 1970s, Ubá became a municipality with an urban population superior to the rural population.

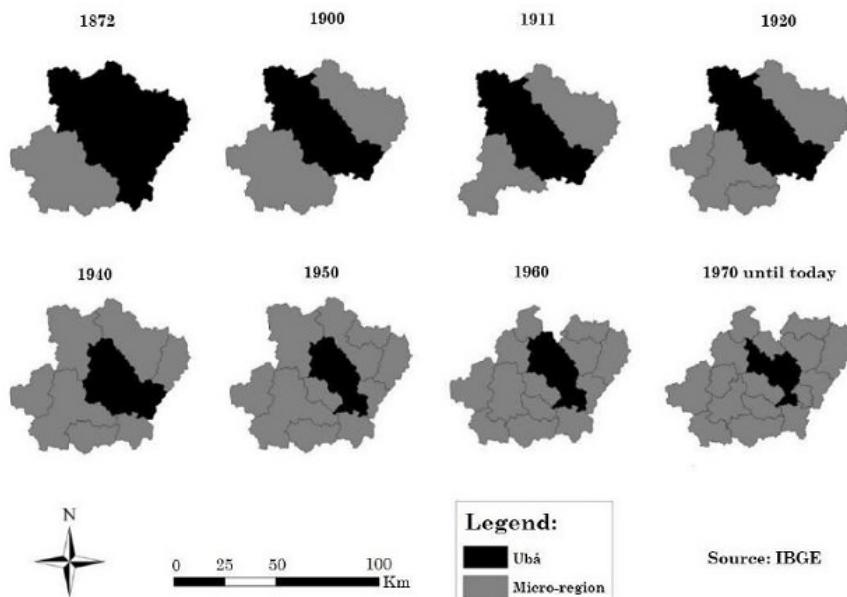


Figure 2
Transformation of the municipal territory of Ubá / MG from 1872.

Org.: the authors. Source: Vector files available at <http://download.ibge.gov.br/downloads_geociencias.htm>. Accessed Oct. 03, 2014.

Table 1
Municipalities emancipated of Ubá.

Emancipated Municipalities (Year)	Lost Population
Visconde do Rio Branco (1881)	18.295
Senador Firmino (1938)	18.604
Guidoval (1948)	10.063
Tocantins (1948)	10.519
Divinésia (1962)	4.375
Rodeiro (1962)	4.308

Org.: the authors. Source: IBGE Cidades (2015).

When the company Domani ended its activities and many of its employees opened their own businesses, there was a growth in the number of companies in the sector, but in a disorganized way. The production presented artisan characteristics, with little technology. Entrepreneurs lacked sufficient knowledge and resisted any attempt to gather information from each other, fearing that their strategies would be copied by competitors. Since this was a problem, some entrepreneurs indicated the need to create a trade union in the sector (OLIVEIRA et al., 2010).

In June 1986, the Ubá Furniture Manufacturers Association was created, consisting of 20 companies, which later, in 1989, had its name changed to Inter-Municipal Union of Furniture Industries of Ubá (INTERSIND, 2014), whose purpose was to organize the actions of the sector in order to assist entrepreneurs in the search of solutions for the growth of the furniture industry (SILVA, 2008).

Since the 1990s, the furniture industry has undergone a great training of personnel and entrepreneurs, in addition to investments in the renewal of machinery and equipment. Much work has been developed in favor of the furniture industry, such as the organization of trade unions and associations, the establishment of labor training institutions and technology, such as the Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (SENAI), as well as the development of furniture, machinery and raw materials fairs (OLIVEIRA et al., 2010; SILVA, 2008).

Consequently, this rise of the furniture industry in the city, along with the provision of raw materials and technologies, made the urban setting more attractive to people. Thus, the population data of the municipality shows that the rural exodus, chiefly since the 1960s onwards, was very intense, triggering the growth of the urban population. Together with improvements in life expectancy and advances in health, the urban population of Ubá grew considerably, reaching 97,599 people according to the latest demographic census provided by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE, 2010).

The growth of the total population of the municipality and its urban population is related to the flow of people exiting the rural areas. However, the migration of people from the municipalities of the micro-region should also be considered, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2
Demographic evolution of the Ubá micro-region between 1940 and 2010.

Municipality/Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1991	2000	2010
Astolfo Dutra	9.993	11.858	14.538	11.119	10.513	11.412	11.805	13.049
Divinésia	-	-	-	4.375	3.132	3.009	3.188	3.293
Dores do Turvo	-	-	5.313	5.335	4.841	5.043	4.799	4.462
Guarani	9.379	8.049	8.390	10.063	7.884	8.046	8.520	8.678
Guidoval	-	10.063	11.143	10.158	7.249	7.177	7.490	7.206
Guiricema	17.219	16.964	15.318	13.933	10.443	10.297	9.259	8.707
Mercês	13.925	10.138	10.201	9.637	10.119	10.074	10.061	10.368
Piraúba	-	-	8.571	10.274	10.251	9.142	11.140	10.862
Rio Pomba	24.528	26.169	16.607	14.588	14.057	14.884	16.359	17.110
Rodeiro	-	-	-	4.308	3.244	3.749	5.375	6.876
São Geraldo	-	10.648	10.325	9.758	7.521	7.860	7.716	10.263
Senador Firmino	18.604	16.036	6.587	6.754	6.757	6.241	6.598	7.230
Silveirânia	-	-	-	2.699	2.075	2.047	2.138	2.192
Tabuleiro	-	-	5.866	5.356	4.791	4.361	4.572	4.079
Tocantins	-	10.519	13.547	14.346	13.158	12.836	15.005	15.823
Ubá	57.394	40.516	49.874	44.503	53.311	66.511	84.987	101.446
V. do Rio Branco	39.867	26.179	24.642	25.206	26.257	28.451	32.598	37.492
Micro-region	190.909	187.139	200.922	202.412	195.603	211.140	241.610	269.136

Org.: the authors. Source: Ipeadata (2014).

Noteworthy is the fact that since the 1970s, when the micro-region took its current territorial configuration, the municipality of Ubá was the only one that presented a considerable population growth, jumping from 44,503 inhabitants to 101,446 in four decades, corresponding to an increase of 128%, 56,943 people, more than doubling its population.

Apart from Ubá, only Visconde do Rio Branco achieved a remarkable demographic increase, going from 25,206 to 37,492 inhabitants in 40 years, an increase of 12,286 people (49%).

The other 15 municipalities in the micro-region did not show strong rises in their population rates. Indeed, seven of which had negative growth rates between 1970 and 2010. Hence, in 2010, Ubá represented 37.70% of the micro-region's population, followed by Visconde do Rio Branco with 13.94%.

Clearly, therefore, while the municipalities of its micro-region remain steadily in relation to the growth of its populations or have low growth rates, Ubá has a constant and significant increase, differing considerably in demographic terms.

The urban area of Ubá has been an attraction for people from other municipalities. The 2010 Census (IBGE, 2010), regarding the migratory data of the municipality, showed that 6,143 people, at the age of five or older, did not reside in Ubá until July 31, 2005. It means that the entire contingent changed in five years, between 2005 and 2010. Of this total, 5,744 people went to the urban area and 398 to the rural area, which shows the city's appeal.

Following the trend of the total population, the urban population of Ubá had increased significantly from 1970 to 2010, in comparison with the municipalities of its micro-region (Figure 3). As for the rural population (Figure 4), there is an opposite situation for the municipality of Ubá. From 1970 to 2010, there was a sharp fall, mainly from 1996, which is a reflection of the investments made in the furniture industry from the 1990s, as already mentioned, increasing the attractiveness of the urban setting.

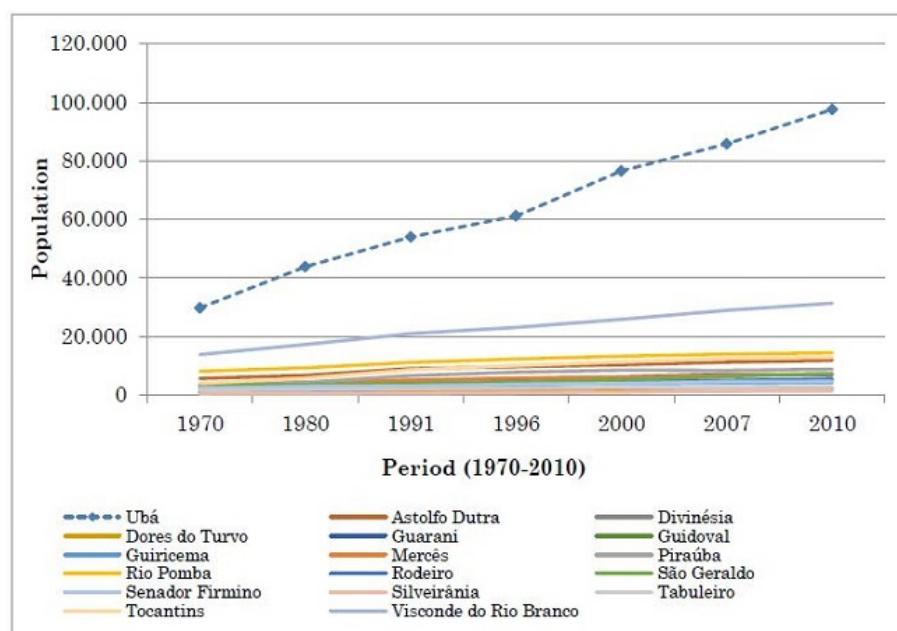


Figure 3
Evolution of the urban population of the municipalities
of the Ubá micro-region between 1970 and 2010.

In addition to Ubá, other municipalities also had significant declines in their rural population, such as Visconde do Rio Branco, Guiricema and Tocantins. However, this reduction was not accompanied by a significant increase in the urban population, except for Visconde do Rio Branco. The other seven municipalities also had a drop in their rural population, without experiencing an increase in their urban population, which resulted in a decrease in their total population (Table 2).

Other data available at the IBGE website display the decrease of the population in rural areas in its micro-region (IBGE; 1985, 1995, 2006). The number of people employed in agricultural establishments increased from 37,679 in 1985 to 20,265 in 2006, representing a 46% decrease (17,414 people) (Table 3). Out of this 46 %, Ubá contributed with 3,941 people. Such data demonstrate how agriculture and livestock farming have declined in economic importance in the municipality and in its micro-region, losing ground to urban services.

Table 3
People employed in agricultural establishments between 1970 and 2006.

Location/Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1995/1996	2006
Ubá	5.069	4.390	4.305	5.664	3.625	1.723
Micro-region	35.229	36.551	33.970	37.679	29.802	20.265

Org: the authors. Source: Agricultural Census of IBGE, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1995/1996 and 2006.

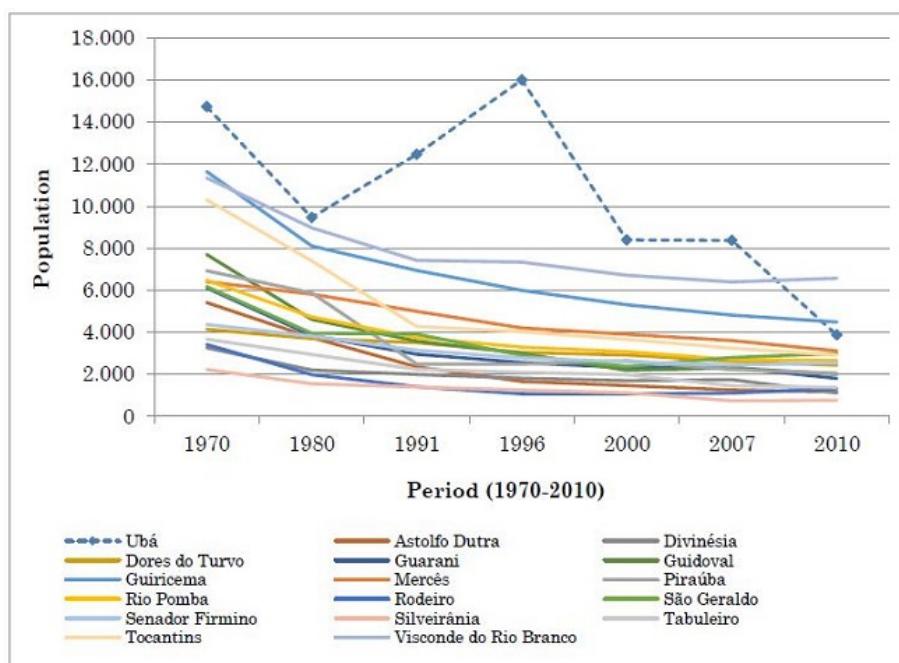


Figure 4
Evolution of the rural population of the municipalities
of the Ubá micro-region between 1970 and 2010.

Org: the authors. Source: Ipeadata (2014).

The industry and the services sectors are more representative in the regional economy, although the agricultural sector in six municipalities

still has greater importance than the industrial sector. However, the Ubá micro-region follows the trend of the state of Minas Gerais and Brazil, where the industry and services sectors (Table 4) make important contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Table 4
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the micro-region of Ubá, of Minas Gerais and of Brazil.

Municipalities	Sectors		
	Agricultural	Industry	Services
Astolfo Dutra	9.154	60.402	90.496
Divinésia	4.276	3.930	17.885
Guarani	14.139	32.407	51.816
Guidoval	11.058	14.776	37.901
Guiricema	21.226	13.505	45.665
Mercês	12.205	10.977	53.806
Piraúba	13.104	12.014	61.083
Rio Pomba	17.198	39.542	118.695
Rodeiro	3.544	60.955	57.176
São Geraldo	7.322	28.213	49.915
Silveirânia	5.387	1.911	12.728
Tabuleiro	6.817	5.201	22.120
Tocantins	13.450	29.339	104.492
Ubá	21.684	439.681	874.312
Visconde do Rio Branco	17.939	276.840	314.905
Micro-region	178.503	1.029.693	1.912.995
Minas Gerais	15.568.048	54.306.183	97.398.820
Brazil	105.163.000	539.315.998	1.197.774.001

Org: the authors. Source: IBGE Cidades (2015).

Ubá has also experienced a trend of strong population growth. Analyzing the population estimates of the cities of its micro-region, from 1991 to 2015, it appears that it will continue to exceed those of their neighboring towns (Figure 5). However, while the populations of Ubá and Visconde do Rio Branco grow faster, the rest of the municipalities remain stable. This demographic growth of Ubá has been leading to an expansion of the city at an accelerated rate, whereas in the rural areas the tendency is for the population to fall.

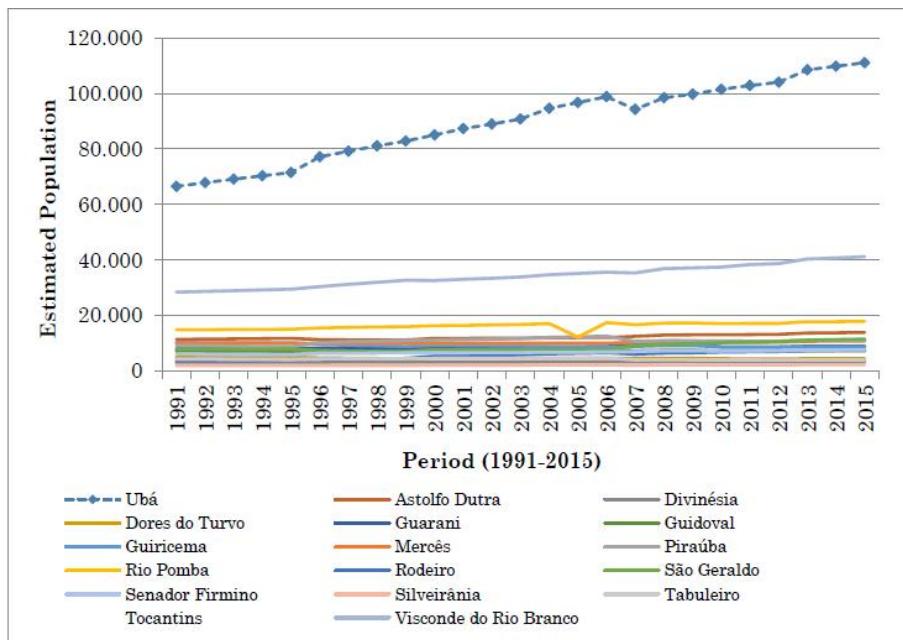


Figure 5
Evolution of the population of the municipalities of the micro-region of Ubá, between 1991 and 2015, according to the population estimates of IBGE.

Org: the authors. Source: IBGE Cities (2015).

Urban population growth and city landscape change

The rapid growth of the population recorded since the 1970s makes the current context rather different from the one at the time that Andrade (1961) conducted his research in the municipality in the late 1950s. The author pointed out that the dwellings and other constructions of the city of Ubá were located in the river valleys, next to the watercourses, hindering the occupancy on hill slopes due to the difficulties of construction and water supply.

Nonetheless, as a consequence of the advances in the construction sector and in water distribution technologies, in addition to the intense process of occupation of the valley areas until the 1970s, new housing started to rise in adjacent areas, as the strong demographic growth generated a heavy demand for new spaces in the original site.

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the view of occupations in areas of slopes and hilltops became common in the landscape. The real estate sector has become attractive in the municipality, due to the need for new housing by the growing population.

Demographic data obtained at the website of Ipeadata (2014) showed how the city of Ubá has attracted people. From 1970 to 2010, there was an increase from 33.75% to 43.10% of the concentration of the population of its micro-region. In other words, more than a third of the urban population of the micro-region resides in this city (Table 5).

Table 5
The concentration of the urban population of the micro-region of Ubá.

Year	1970	1980	1991	1996	2000	2007	2010
Urban Population	Ubá	29.782 (33.75%)	43.860 (38.82%)	54.051 (37.97%)	61.162 (38.02%)	76.602 (40.68%)	85.858 (41.35%)
	Micro-region	88.247	112.984	142.361	160.864	188.314	226.475

Org: the authors. Source: Ipeadata (2014).

This increase of 67,817 people, in 40 years, in the urban area, has as a counterpart, in the same period, a decrease of 14,721 in the rural area. This means that in 2010, 96.19% of the population were living in the city and 3.81% in rural areas.

Summing up the urban perimeter of all districts (Diamante de Ubá, Miragaia, and Ubari) and the main city of the Municipality of Uba, the total size of the area is 98.70 km², meaning that 24.22% of the municipal territory is urban areas. The rest, 308.80 km² (75.78%) are rural areas. The boundaries of these urban perimeters were defined in 2009 (PMU, 2011).

In 2010, with a population of 101,446 residents, the municipality had a population density of 248.96 hab / km². However, when it comes only to the population living in urban areas, such density rises to 988.84 hab / km². It is clear that when it refers to different locations, such density will be distinct as the districts of Ubá, which have less population compared to the rest. In fact, this data demonstrates how the municipal population is concentrated in urban areas because the population density is only 12.52 hab / km² in rural areas. That is, there is a difference of 976.32 inhabitants occupying a square kilometer when comparing urban and rural areas in 2010. This difference may become greater if we consider the 111,012 inhabitants estimated for 2015, following the trend of increase of people in the city and the decrease in the rural setting.

The urban setting increased considerably between 1985 and 2011 due to the growth of the urban population in that period (Figure 6). The urban area of Ubá jumped from 43,860 people in 1980 to 97,599 people in 2010, which corresponds to an increase of 53,739 (122.52%) in three decades.

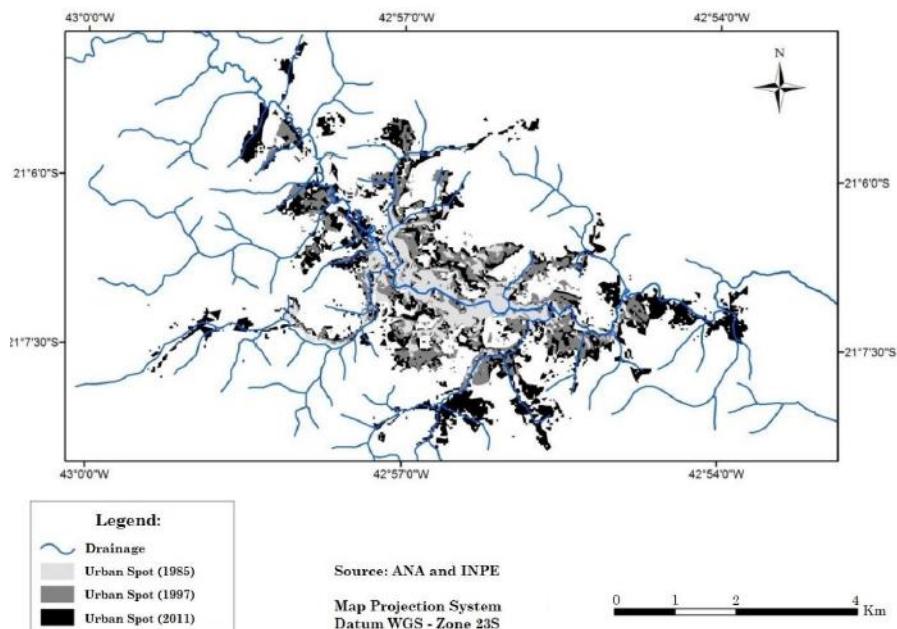


Figure 6
Growth of Ubá urban setting between 1985 and 2011.
Source: Santos (2013).

The growth of the city accompanies the valleys, following the watercourses, and occupying the floodplain areas, launching "tentacles" (ANDRADE, 1961) towards the river valleys that circulate the hills (Figure 7). However, this expansion was not limited only to river valleys, due to their intense occupation. It spread to the slopes of adjacent hills, occupying slopes that in some cases are very steep (Figure 8).

The comparison between Figures 7 and 8 is an example of the modification of the urban landscape over five decades. It is noteworthy how the occupations along the Ribeirão Ubá have grown with the course being practically channeled. In addition, in the 1960s, the area named Jardim Glória occupied the lower parts of the slopes, but, in 2014, it expanded to the higher areas of them and to hilltops, connecting with the São Domingos area, located on the other side of the topographic divide, which also expanded in this direction. This type of situation has become common throughout the city, because of the various subdivisions being constructed.



Figure 7

The central area of Ubá in the 1960s.

Source: Photo from the Ubá Historical Archive and adapted by the authors.



Figure 8

The Central area of Ubá in 2014.

Source: Image extracted from Google Earth Pro software and adapted by the authors.

Final considerations

It is of great importance to know the demographic evolution and the urban growth of any municipality. In the case of Ubá, it was seen that its main economic activities influenced the demographic dynamics not only within the municipal territory but also in its micro-region. The rural exodus of the population of the municipality itself and the emigration of people from neighboring municipalities were factors that contributed to the increase of its urban population. As a consequence, there was an expansion of the urban area, beginning in the river valleys, on the banks of

the water courses, and later advancing to the adjacent slopes, occupying steep slopes and even areas of hilltops.

The relevance of knowing such facts lies, for example, in understanding some of the environmental problems that the city and the whole municipality are currently experiencing. Examples are the occurrences of frequent floods in the city since the beginning of its occupation, because this happened near the water courses, in the floodplain areas. On January 19, 1919, the *Folha do Povo* newspaper, found in the Municipal Historical Archive, reported a great flood on the banks of Ribeirão Ubá, which is the main watercourse in the municipality.

As the city was growing, expanding and occupying areas of slopes and hilltops, the floods and other problems began to worsen, namely landslides. The opening of subdivisions and the construction of properties, which remove a great amount of soil, exposing the deepest horizons and leaving them more exposed, intensifies erosive processes in these areas of interest to the real estate market, especially when they are not accompanied by infrastructure works, such as rain gutters and sewage systems. Furthermore, there is the matter of public water supply, which generally becomes insufficient in times with lower rainfall volumes.

Therefore, studies that relate economic issues to demographic issues can contribute to the understanding of environmental dilemmas or processes that take place in a given city or municipality because environmental problems may have part of their origins in historical aspects related to the economic and the demographic evolution of a location.

However, in studies of demographic pressure on the environment, one care should be taken not to reduce research to a one-dimensional relationship, which often relates population pressure to natural resources. "Demographic pressure has already been blamed for all the ills of the modern world" (HOGAN, 1991, p. 61). There are other issues as important as population growth involved in the occupation of space, which negatively interfere in the environment (HOGAN, 1991). Not only is the number of people inhabiting the right location that will determine great resource exploitation and environmental degradation, but also how this occupation occurred historically, the housing policy established in it, as well as economic, political and social interests.

This article aimed to support future work in the city and take into account the relationship between society and the environment. Future research should have greater depth, going beyond the economic and demographic aspects evaluated here.

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Notes

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