


**QUEEN OF THE AGRESTE: FROM COTTON PRODUCTION TO THE  
PROVISION OF SERVICES** <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.037-208>**Isadora Duarte da Silva<sup>1</sup> and Diego Salomão Candido de Oliveira Salvador<sup>2</sup>.****ABSTRACT**

The objective of this work was to analyze the progression of the services offered in the city of Nova Cruz, from the 1950s to the present day. The methodology used was the theoretical and historical review regarding the evolution of the services provided in the municipality of Nova Cruz-RN, as well as field visits, to map the main services of the city, photograph and observe the urban dynamics generated by them. In addition, the REGIC methodologies were revisited and analyzed to understand the centrality of Nova Cruz. The results showed that cotton was the economic activity that gave visibility to the city, however, with its decline, the space was used by other services: supermarket chains, retail and wholesale segment, universities, federal institutes, national institute of social security, regional directorate of education and culture, banks and others. It is concluded that the absence of these services and their concentration in Nova Cruz, reinforce their importance in the region.

**Keywords:** Nova Cruz. Cotton. Services. Centrality.

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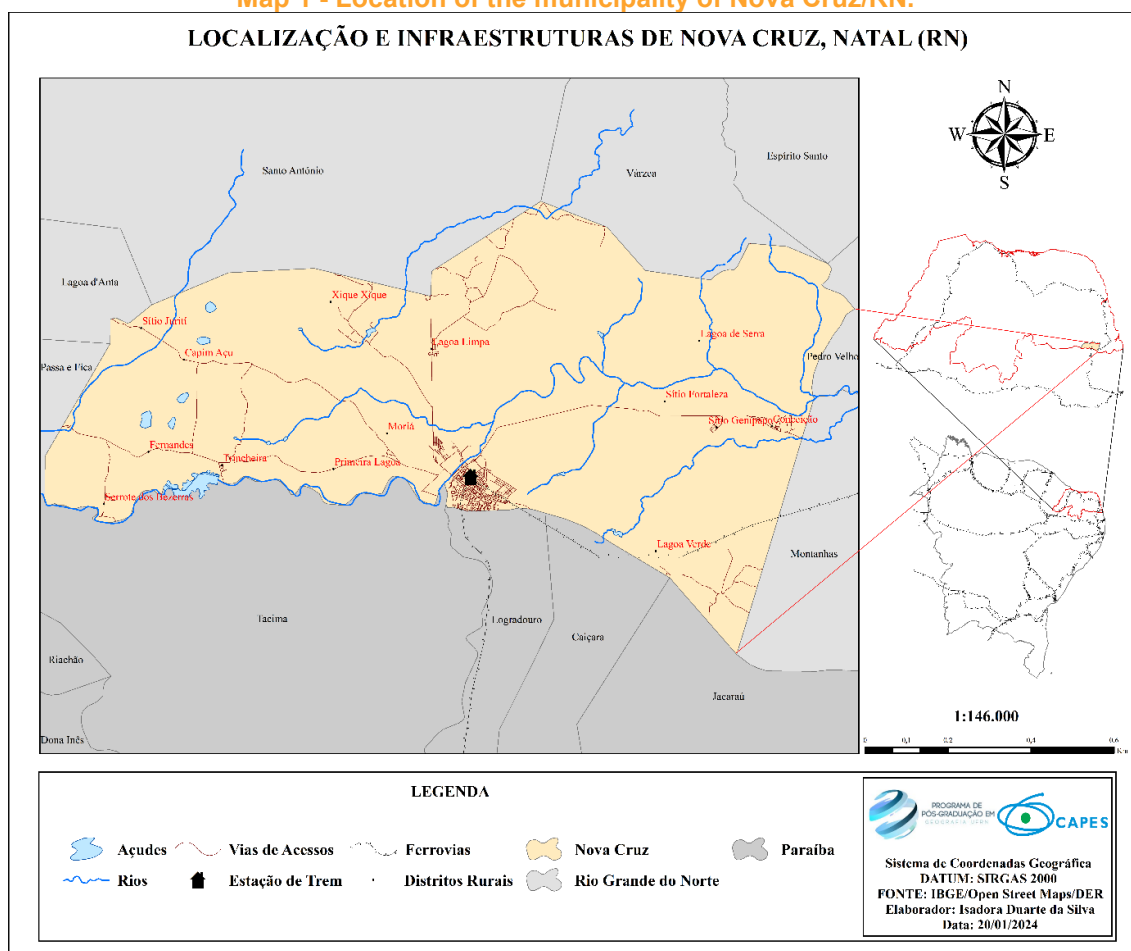
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## INTRODUCTION

The municipality of Nova Cruz is inserted in the microregion and mesoregion of Agreste Potiguar. Its territorial extension is 277,658 km<sup>2</sup>, limited to the north by the municipalities of Santo Antônio, Várzea and Espírito Santo, to the south, by Tacima, Logradouro, Caiçara and Jacaraú, located in the state of Paraíba, to the west, by Lagoa d'Anta and Passa-e-Fica, and to the east, by Montanhas and Pedro Velho as shown in Map 1. The seat of the municipality is about 114 km from the capital, and its access, from Natal, is made by the BR-226, RN-160 and RN-120 highways (BELTRÃO et al., 2005).

**Map 1 - Location of the municipality of Nova Cruz/RN.**



Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

Cattle raising and agriculture were the economic activities that established the conditions for the formation of the Northeast, as Nova Cruz extends, in constant, Andrade (1998, p.36), states that the agreste region, although it was colonized by cattle breeders, today agriculture is more relevant. In the middle of the twentieth century, the cultivation of cotton was the main economic activity of the municipality, occupying a prominent place in production, in view of this, Nova Cruz achieved a relative economic expressiveness in

relation to the surrounding municipalities, contributing to the well-known "Queen of the Agreste" (AZEVEDO, 2005).

The production of cotton and oil were responsible for leveraging the economy of Nova Cruz until the 1970s, with 2 cotton processing industries, 1 oil production factory, 4 gins and 3 tanneries (AZEVEDO, 2005). One of the last companies to operate in the municipality was the Consorcio Algodoeiro de Nova Cruz LTDA, founded in 1966 with the function of preparing and spinning cotton fibers.

However, with the cotton crisis in the 1970s caused by the boll weevil plague, Nova Cruz "reduced its cultivation area and lost the cotton processing industries that had been installed there" (LIMA, 2010, p. 100). As a result, there was an intensification of the rural exodus, increasing the urban population, demand for jobs and services. In this way, Nova Cruz starts to develop commerce and services, becoming a city with significant influence for the municipalities around it.

During the 1950s, Nova Cruz was characterized by an essentially agrarian economy, with basic services and limited infrastructure. Over the years, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, there were significant investments in urban infrastructure, which allowed the expansion and diversification of public and private services in the city. There was a remarkable growth in the service sector, driven by the economic development and modernization of the city.

The city of Nova Cruz has experienced several transformations over the decades, which have directly impacted the variety of services provided to the population. Thus, this article aims to analyze the urban formation of Nova Cruz and the progression of the services offered in the city, from the 1950s to the present day.

This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by offering a detailed and contextualized view of the particularities and dynamics of Nova Cruz, which is constantly evolving. In addition, it is hoped that the results of this research can serve as a reference for future studies, contributing both to science and to the planning of development policies in the field of research.

## METHODOLOGY

The research was developed from a bibliographic review develops from "the available record, resulting from previous research, in printed documents, such as books, articles, theses, etc." Severino (2013, p. 106), as well as websites, journals and dissertations. The secondary data surveys were carried out in electronic databases of the IBGE (IBGE cities), the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio

Teixeira (INEP) and analysis of the surveys developed by the IBGE on the Regions of Influence of Cities (REGIC) in order to characterize the object of study, as well as to understand the numerical indicators of tertiary activities.

In addition, on-site visits were carried out in order to observe the equipment that characterizes the third sector. These visits aimed to understand the dynamics of operation, in addition to cataloging and photographing the equipment to include this information in the work. The inclusion of tabulated data and photographs in the work aims to provide a visual and quantitative representation of the observations made, facilitating the understanding and interpretation of the results.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The perception of the city permeates several theoretical-methodological perspectives, so there is no single path to be taken, nor is there a current of thought with the absolute truth. The city is a complex and dynamic space, which can be understood in different ways. According to Souza (2005, p. 25), the "city is a very complex object and, therefore, very difficult to define".

We understand the city as a product of society, which is not a mere agglomeration of people and equipment, but a social space, with its own logic and dynamics. Thus, we will work on this concept based mainly on the conceptions of the philosopher Henri Lefebvre and the geographer Ana Fani. The city is seen "as a human construction, a historical-social product, a context in which the city appears as materialized labor, accumulated over a series of generations, based on the relationship between society and nature" Carlos (2007, p. 20).

Initially, Lefebvre distinguishes the city from the urban. The city is the physical place, the concrete space, while the urban is the social form that manifests itself in the city. A "(...) city, present, immediate reality, practical-sensitive, architectural data – and on the other hand the "urban", social reality composed of relations to be conceived, built or rebuilt (...)" Lefebvre (2007, p. 54). Thus, the city is a social product, which refers to the notions of agglomerations and sedentary lifestyle, being the matrix of the urban, while the urban is the process of the mode of production, of organization of space, that is, the urban is a way of life.

For the spatial analysis of the city, Carlos (2007) shows that there is an inseparability between space and society, since social relations are concretized in a real and concrete territory, thus, the socio-spatial practice is the way society produces and reproduces space. For Carlos (2007), the city is a product of capitalist society, controlled by the logic of

exchange value, being valued from its appropriation and commodification, however, the city should be destined to the realization of life, that is, use value.

The city is the result of the action of certain historical and social "agents", which according to (LEFEBVRE, 2001), contributes to differentiate the action and the result, the group and its product. Lefebvre (2001) states that the city has always maintained intrinsic relations with society, encompassing its composition, functioning and constituent elements, such as the countryside, agriculture, political and military powers, and states, so cities change as society transforms. However, urban changes are not passive to global social transformations, as they also depend on the direct and immediate relationships between people and groups that make up society. (LEFEBVRE, 2001).

In the meantime, the city is understood as a transforming agent of society, which influences its spatial organization and functioning, being an active agent in the production of these changes. Therefore, the transformations of the city are the result of a complex interaction between global and local factors. Thus, Lefebvre adds that:

the city is transformed not only as a result of relatively continuous "global processes" (such as the growth of material production over the ages, with its consequences in exchanges, or the development of rationality) but also as a result of profound changes in the mode of production, in the "city-country" relations, in class and property relations (LEFEBVRE, 2001, p. 58).

Transformations in cities are not a phenomenon of a single dimension, being linked to various social, economic and political aspects. Thus, Carlos (2007) notes that in the modern world, the city is articulated and inseparable in three planes: economic, political and social. In the economic plan, the city is characterized as the production of capital, being fundamental for the generation of profits and accumulation of wealth; the political dimension, the city is the space of domination by the State, being a standardized body; and the social the city is considered a socio-spatial practice, where social life is experienced and reproduced. Carlos (2007, p.21) emphasizes that "(...) These three planes reveal dimensions, such as those of local and global; against the backdrop of the process of globalization of society, as the constitution of urban society / world space."

The city, in addition to being the space for the coexistence of social life, culture and values, is also a center for the management of the territory, as stated by Souza (2005). The city plays an important and central role in the administration, organization and power of space, being the headquarters of several public and private institutions. Thus, Souza (2005) states that the city does not only act as a center of territory management due to the presence of companies and seats of religious and political power, but also as a space where goods are produced, marketed and consumed and where work activities are

developed, in this way, the city is a place of organization and social interaction, guided by diverse interests and values, forming affinity groups.

Cities are articulated with each other in different ways, intensities and functions, so there are no cities isolated from each other. "In a very variable way with regard to the type of flow and, above all, the intensity of the flows, all cities are connected to each other within a network - within the urban network" Souza (2005, p.50). Thus, there is an interconnection between cities, forming a dynamic and complex urban network.

The urban network is a social product built throughout history through different processes, such as globalization, colonization, etc. It articulates all cities with each other, forming webs of interactions allowing the circulation of people, goods, information and services. In this context, the urban network is "(...) a social product, historically contextualized, whose crucial role is, through spatialized social interactions, to articulate the whole of society in a given portion of space, guaranteeing its existence and reproduction Corrêa (2001, p. 93).

Over time, the urban network undergoes several modifications, gaining new meanings and functioning. Thus, the urban network is not homogeneous, with divergent characteristics in each place, being the result of its historical, social and economic characteristics.

In order to configure an urban network, Corrêa (1994) emphasizes that it is necessary to have three stages, the first being: to have a market economy, which produces or sells objects that are not produced locally and/or in the region; second: to have fixed offices in the territory that generate flows for business operation; and third: to have a minimum of articulation between the aforementioned stages, enabling a distinction between urban centers. This differentiation is based on the various characteristics, interactions and functions that urban centers play in the regional dynamics, producing central and hierarchical locations.

Corrêa (1994) asserts that this distinction characterizes the territorial division of labor:

The urban network is simultaneously a reflection of and a condition for the territorial division of labor. It is a reflection to the extent that, due to differentiated locational advantages, there is an urban hierarchy and functional specialization that define a complex typology of urban centers (CORRÊA, 1994, p.48).

Therefore, we understand that the urban network works as a reflection as a condition for the territorial division of labor. This division is configured with the productive specialization of a region, based on its locational advantages. The urban network, as well

as a reflection, also establishes an interdependence between urban centers and economic activities, both at the local and global level.

In the urbanization process, the urban network is materialized from production, circulation and consumption, being linked to distant regions, instituting a world economy (CORRÊA, 1994).

Globalization intensifies interconnection at a global level, enabling cities, even small ones, to participate in the production chain and attract investments from foreign companies. In the perception of Corrêa (2001), the large "multifunctional and multilocalized" companies establish an important attribution in the (re)definition of the functions of urban centers and vehemence of integration, causing differentiations between urban centers and new actions aimed at the accumulation of capital. Thus, the urban network is configured as a reflection of the results of the accumulation of the various social agents.

The capitalist logic is driven by the search for locations that maximize its profits, with access to the consumer market, infrastructures and cheap labor, making it attractive for new business investments. Thus, Corrêa (1994, p.49) certifies that in this logic, there is "(...) the valorization of certain locations to the detriment of others (...) as a consequence, some cities lose importance, while others are valued; new urban centers are created". These new centers undergo significant reconfigurations, responding to the demands of the global market, in contrast, to the decentralization of some cities, with the weakening of their traditional activities.

In this way, the centrality of a city is inherently associated with its degree of importance and ability to offer goods and services to other urban centers, creating an area of influence, therefore, the centrality of a city assumes a mainly economic nature (CORRÊA, 1994), composed of its productive and commercial activities. Central cities offer a complex and diverse set of specialized services in numerous areas, leading to an urban hierarchy and at the same time new interactions. This division and articulation, it is associated with development and structuring "(...) of a wide urban network, covering various types of centers located in various territories (...)" Corrêa (1994, p.53).

In this context, we can understand the urban network, according to Corrêa (2001, p. 93), as a "(...) set of urban centers functionally articulated with each other. It is, therefore, a particular type of network in which the vertices or nodes are different nuclei of settlement endowed with urban functions, and the paths or connections the various flows between these centers". However, Souza (2005) points out that the urban network is not "innocent", it is not an apolitical structure, in fact it reflects the procedures of economic exploitation and exercise of power.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF COTTON IN THE ECONOMY OF RIO GRANDE DO NORTE AND NOVA CRUZ: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Until the mid-1920s, the integration of Rio Grande do Norte with the national market was limited (CLEMENTINO, 1990). This restriction was the result of infrastructure and transportation challenges that hindered trade and the connection of RN with other regions, as well as the dependence on traditional activities, with little economic diversification. Thus, Azevedo (2013) concludes that the economy of Rio Grande do Sul in this period was mainly rural, with emphasis on agricultural and livestock production activities in the region, highlighting sugarcane in the Zona da Mata and part of the Agreste, cotton farming in the other regions, associated with subsistence food crops such as corn, beans and cassava.

Since the colonial period, rural activities dominated the economy of RN, with emphasis initially on cattle raising and sugarcane, later the production of cotton. The occupation of the Potiguar territory and the emergence of the first cities were consolidated from the raising of cattle in the hinterland and the cultivation and export of sugarcane on the coast (CLEMENTINO, 1990). The cattle farms or "corrals" were a way of organizing the space in order to populate the hinterland and, at the same time, to be "support for the dynamics of the northeastern sugar economy" Clementino (1990, p.76).

Thus, the logic was to occupy the lands considered vacant, that is, without formally recognized property, with areas of pastures and large corrals, with the aim of supplying meat, as well as its derivatives such as leather, for consumption in the cities of the coast (MEDEIROS FILHO, 2001). These two activities established a relationship of complementarity in the economy of Rio Grande do Norte, in which they generated flows of resources and people between the regions of the state.

For Clementino (1990) cattle were the basis of the urban system of Rio Grande do Sul and its old paths became the roots of the main regions of the state, such as the Coast, Seridó and West, which defined the first selections among the urban centers, forming an embryo of the urban network of the state, which is part of the northeastern system of cities, In this way:

The main villages (elevated to towns in 1775), along the cattle paths define their areas of influence. On the coast, except for the city of Natal, it is Goianinha with 6,661 inhabitants that emerges as the main sugar center. In the Sertão, to the west, the locality of São Francisco da Várzea (in Apodi) with 4,091 people and in the Seridó, Vila do Príncipe (Caicó) with 3,147 (Clementino, 1990, p.77).

The cattle path made it possible to connect cattle ranches to other urban centers, generating integration and development in the regions, thus, several cities stand out in this period. Clementino (1990) points out that until the eighteenth century, RN had eight



municipalities, of which, Extremoz, Arês, São José and Vila Flor were sugar producers and Porto Alegre, Açú and Caicó stand out with cattle raising, in addition to the municipality of Natal. Thus, it generated development poles and cities along the paths traveled

Another prominent and important economic activity in the production of the northern Rio Grande do Norte space was cotton production. With the crisis caused by the Civil War, there was an increase in cotton prices, giving rise to new markets, thus, RN had great prominence in cotton production, surpassing the sugarcane industry, which suffered from technological delays (GALVÃO, 2012). The expansion of cotton farming in the "*cotton hunger*" period promoted the rapid growth of some rural areas, such as Caicó, Apodi, Açú, Martins and Mossoró (CLEMENTINO, 1990).

Cotton production was also responsible for promoting a greater flow of population, increasing the demand for food, "(...) being, however, a crop that allowed other intercropping, such as beans and corn, corn and broad beans and even cassava, it also made these areas producers of food crops" Andrade (2017, p. 109). In addition, it contributed to the construction of railroads by the state, allowing the integration of the capital with the cities and with other states, reducing its isolation.

In this way, the industrialization of cotton was one of the engines responsible for the advance of urbanization in RN, as well as other activities, such as mining, commerce and the service sector (AZEVEDO, 2013). The mined activity stands out in the Seridó region, with a focus on the extraction of scheelite, with Caicó being the largest producer of the ore in the state. Another important production for the formation of the Potiguar urban network is the exploitation of salt, which "dates from the beginnings of Portuguese occupation" Tavares (2020, p.67) standing out in the municipalities of Macau and Areia Branca on the north coast of the state.

The cotton economy made the construction of the first railroad in RN possible. According to the official website of the Brazilian Company of Urban Trains (CBTU), it reports that the construction of the railroad was authorized in 1873, however, its construction only began in 1878 (BRASIL, 2015). The urban train was intended to transport cargo and means of transportation from neighboring communities, bringing transitions to the provincial way of life in Rio Grande do Norte (BRASIL, 2015).

Thus, after the 1880s, the railroad that connected Natal to the then village of Nova Cruz was built and inaugurated, with the objective of connecting the city to sugar-producing regions in the states of Paraíba and Pernambuco by a faster route, as well as for the flow of cotton (MEDEIROS, 2017). In 1901, the stretch that connected Natal/Nova Cruz was leased by the English company *The Great Western of Brazil Railway Company*, the railroad

connected the states of Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba and Pernambuco, the city of Nova Cruz to the city of Brum, in Pernambuco, developing the local commerce and industries of the time (BRASIL, 2015).

The railway line and cotton production offered the municipality development and visibility in relation to neighboring municipalities, attracting a considerable flow of merchants, farmers and travelers. People sought in the city of Nova Cruz new services, goods, infrastructures and jobs that were not served in their own cities, boosting the local economy, thus becoming an important city in the Agreste Potiguar region.

However, with the cotton crisis in the 1970s caused by the boll weevil plague, Nova Cruz "reduced its cultivation area and lost the cotton processing industries that had been installed in it" Lima (2010, p. 100). As a result, the "(...) passenger train stopped running in 1977 and the freighter in the late 1990s (...)" Azevedo (2005, p. 156), negatively impacting the economy of the region, the transport of goods and people.

Nova Cruz is undergoing transformations in its centrality according to the REGIC documents, with its peak in 1966, as shown in table 1, being classified as a sub-regional center, "the level 3 centers or sub-regional centers are subordinated to the level 2 centers (regional centers) or are directly linked to the metropolises" (REGIC, 1972, p. 16). They are cities characterized by less complex activities and with smaller areas of influence than regional capitals.

**Table 1 - Centrality of the municipality of Nova Cruz, between 1966-2018**

Year	Levels	Denomination
1966	3B	Sub-regional centers
1978	4B	Zone Center
1993	2	Weak
2007	5	Local Center
2018	5	Local Center

**Source:** IBGE (1972, 1987, 2000, 2008 and 2018).

Based on the analysis of the methodologies of the five REGIC documents, a reduction in the centrality exercised by Nova Cruz in the state urban network is observed from the REGIC of 1978. This is due to the decrease in the importance of the variable of agricultural flows, which previously had a strong presence in the municipality and boosted its relevance in the Agreste Region. In addition, the decline in cotton production and the extinction of the railroad resulted in the reduction of Nova Cruz's connections with other cities and states, reducing the number of flows of people and goods in the municipality.

For Tavares (2019), the territory of Nova Cruz was not used by new productive circuits, significantly reducing its role in the urban network. However, despite the reduction of influence in REGIC, Nova Cruz enjoys several instruments that allow interactions with

other municipalities, Tavares (2019), points out that the permanence and installation of new urban equipment in the city maintain its importance in the state urban network, especially in terms of centrality on a local and regional scale.

In this way, the presence of equipment and the insertion of new ones enable connections and interactions with other cities in the region, even though it is characterized by the 2018 REGIC as a Local Center, that is, a city that does not have "any other city linking to these as the main connection", according to REGIC (p. 77, 2018). Local Centers are cities that exert influence restricted to their own territorial limits, and can attract the flow of people to specific topics such as services in the education, health and banking sectors, responding to the demands of neighboring cities and the state of Paraíba.

### **A CURRENT OVERVIEW OF SERVICES IN NOVA CRUZ**

The diversity of tertiary services indicates that Nova Cruz is an intra-urban reference center as well as at the inter-regional level. According to Coutinho (2020), the centralization of certain urban functions is influenced by spatial selectivity, which is determined by locational factors, market size, product supply, and meeting other needs, resulting in the concentration of commerce and services in places with greater consumption potential. Therefore, the articulation between cities and the variation in demand play a crucial role in defining the areas that stand out as commercial and service centers.

The city of Nova Cruz has three bank branches, namely the branch of Caixa Econômica Federal, Banco do Brasil and Bradesco, as shown in Figure 1, in addition to the bank correspondents and two 24-hour banks and during the period of cotton production there was the Itaú branch. The presence of banks in small towns contributes to local development, attracting new activities, as well as flows of people.

**Figure 1** - Bank branches in Nova Cruz



Org. Author (2024)

The lack of bank branches in inland cities is largely due to the lack of population and the low economic dynamics of the place. Thus, at the national level, Dias (2017) emphasizes that the distribution of bank branches takes place in the largest regions of the country, stating that from the second half of the 1980s, banks began to plan and carry out strategic movements, with the objective of maintaining favorable positions for future actions. In addition, the author emphasizes that these movements were driven by external and internal constraints that altered the trajectory of the banking system, with the retraction of bank branches within the macro-regions and, at the same time, by the expansion in the largest regions of the country.

The banking concentration in the largest regions is the result of a strategic restructuring that would guarantee the survival, profit and growth of the banks. Even with this movement, small cities receive bank branches, as Contel (2011) states, they are of fundamental importance for small municipalities, as they are fixed geographically that dynamizes local life and generates new services. From this perspective, Tavares (2017) alleges:

despite still being quite concentrated, the location of bank branches in Rio Grande do Norte, in 2015, is no longer restricted to intermediate cities, as in previous periods. Cities at different levels of urban centrality have these fixed banks, even local centers. However, it is notorious that, in addition to those that are considered centers of territorial management, the agencies are located in local cities that we have identified as presenting greater urban dynamics, either because they house important productive spatial circuits for the state economy or because they are urban centers that, in the last IBGE study, were considered as local centers, but

which in previous studies exercised some level of centrality (TAVARES, 2017, p.124).

Thus, the banking service expands in the context of its productive restructuring, creating new hierarchies in the state network, as well as its installation occurs in a city that already had a certain centrality in the state's urban network (TAVARES, 2017).

Due to the various robberies of branches in Rio Grande do Norte, the cities that have banking services acquire considerable population attraction. In accordance with (SILVA, 2021), it reports that the banking system in the State of RN has undergone a reorganization in the face of the problem, reducing the number of branches and considerable expansion of banking correspondents, with the offer of simpler services.

In the field of health, the municipality has dental, gynecological, ophthalmological clinics, polyclinics, etc. The precariousness of the public health service in Brazil gives rise to the need to use private services, seeking quality and accessibility of health services. Another factor that strengthens the private sector is the great demand from the public network, which is often overcrowded.

The establishments that receive the largest contingent of people from other municipalities are the clinics and laboratories that work with medical care and laboratory tests. The institutions that stand out are the São Sebastião Laboratory and Clinic, Fêmeine Clinic, Vicente Abreu Clinic, Florence Clinic and Maria Vitória Medical Clinic with DNA Center laboratory, responding to the need and demand of health services in the municipality, as well as in neighboring municipalities.

The city has a vast number of establishments linked to the retail and wholesale segment, as well as franchised stores such as Americanas, Pague Menos, Drogarias FarMelhor, Br-moto Honda, Ótica Martins, Loucos por Coxinha etc. The establishments offer a variety of services, such as clothing, footwear, appliances, electronics, furniture, optics, perfumery, stationery, toys and printing stores. The supermarket and wholesale sector is one of the most prominent, offering variety and attractiveness to consumers in surrounding areas, such as the Rede Mais, Rede Supercop and Curimataú establishments.

These supermarket chains innovated in physical structure, with a large physical environment, in addition to having a bakery and café. Rede Mais and Rede Supercop have 24-hour banks, open from 7 am to 8 pm. In addition to generating additional flow and greater economic dynamics, these companies brought together a greater amount of formal work. The installation of supermarket chains is an indication of the role of the municipality in the role of the state urban network.



Nova Cruz also stands out with the provision of government services, Figure 2, with service to the public to solve various issues. It provides a Municipal Forum, for civil proceedings and administrative functions; Citizen's Central, being the only one in the Immediate Geographic region of Santo Antônio-Passa and Fica-Nova Cruz. The citizen's center works with the services of the Technical-Scientific Institute of Expertise (ITEP) with the issuance of identity cards and as the body of the State Department of Traffic (DETRAN), with medical examinations, Issuance and Renewal of the National Driver's License (CNH), vehicle registration, etc.

We have the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE), in RN we total 8 units spread across the regions of the state, offering courses, events and training for entrepreneurs. In addition, we took advantage of the Social Security agencies and the Ministry of Labor (Figure 2).

**Figure 2** - Citizen's Center, Forum, Electoral Forum and Social Security in Nova Cruz



Org. Author (2024)

The use of the aforementioned services is intensified on Mondays and Thursdays, due to the municipality's free market. The Nova Cruz street market was founded in the nineteenth century and represents one of the largest in the Agreste Region, providing various products such as clothing, footwear, meat, vegetables, household equipment, agricultural instruments, among others (Figure 3). Coutinho (2010) emphasizes that the street market serves the customers of the municipality, as well as consumers and market stallholders in the cities of Montanhas, Passa e Fica, Santo Antônio, Canguaretama, Lagoa

D'Anta, Pedro Velho, Goianinha, Brejinho and Monte Alegre, as well as in the cities of Jacaraú and Logradouro in the State of Paraíba.

The open market is configured as a commercial space, which plays an important role in the generation of informal jobs, representing opportunities for economic survival of several families, especially those who are not involved in typically urban activities. Finally, the fair is characterized as a vector of local development and regional integration.

**Figure 3** - Products sold at the Nova Cruz street market



Org. Author (2024)

In the field of education, RN provides 16 Regional Directorate of Education (DIREC) throughout the state, it is an organ of the State Secretariat of Education and Culture (SEEC) that acts in the management of state public education, being responsible for coordinating educational activities in their respective cities. Nova Cruz has the 3rd DIREC, being the director of supervision and guidance of the cities in the immediate region of Santo Antônio-Passa and Fica-Nova Cruz.

The DIREC network has headquarters in urban centers considered to be local, "this situation breaks the rigid hierarchy, given that the regional management of state education will also be concentrated in cities that do not exercise the same centrality as the centers of



territorial management" Tavares (2019, p. 159). However, they stand out with the centrality exercised and flows resulting from this service.

Educational services have been expanded and consolidated, attributing new flows to the city of Nova Cruz. According to INEP data (2024), the municipality has 53 active schools that offer basic education (Early Childhood Education, Elementary School, initial and final years and High School). Federal and private high schools play an important role in the flow of students from other municipalities, contributing to greater articulation with the cities in the region.

The private network is composed of 3 institutions, Colégio Nossa Senhora do Carmo (CNSC), Model School that offer from Kindergarten to High School and EPOC - Education by Principles with Kindergarten and Elementary School early years. The search for quality education is a factor of attraction for students, since in their place of origin, private education is largely not offered, especially high school.

Higher Education is marked by the installation of the Advanced Center for Higher Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), which offers courses in the distance learning modality. In addition to private colleges, such as UNOPAR, Faculdade Três Marias, Estácio and Uniasselvi offering undergraduate and specialization courses.

IFRN's Integrated Technical Education is a highlight in the region, as it is an excellent opportunity to obtain quality and technical training for free. The IFRN offers, in addition to the integrated technical course, the modalities of subsequent course and graduation. The courses are in the area of administration, computer science, chemistry and technology in systems analysis and development. The IFRN attracts students and civil servants from the surrounding municipalities and even from other mesoregions, generating a daily or non-daily flow, creating a centrality in the perspective of education (TAVARES, 2019). Other educational services that stand out are the technical and vocational courses, offered in the private network.

From the facilities of the educational fixtures, they generate a considerable movement of students between the city of Nova Cruz. Thus, the fixed elements provide actions that modify the places, creating and recreating environmental and social conditions that lead each place back. Thus, the flow of people daily in the city contributes to access to various services, as it can present new functionalities in the urban network, contributing to interactions between cities due to the various functions offered in the municipality.



## CONCLUSION

In view of its historical process and economic importance for the Agreste Region, especially until the middle of the twentieth century, due to the cotton activity, Nova Cruz is characterized as an area with a concentration of infrastructure and population. Although Nova Cruz lost its influence with the decline of cotton cultivation, the city reinvented itself through other activities that gave it importance in the Agreste Potiguar region.

The service sector, especially in commerce, education and public services, has become one of the pillars of the local economy. These activities attract several people to the city and generate various economic and social flows, as well as generate an urban-regional dynamic referring to the interrelations that occur between urban areas and adjacent cities. Thus, the absence of these services and their concentration in Nova Cruz, reinforce the centrality of the municipality in the region.

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