



A true Europe in the extreme south of Brazil: kitsch tourism and the production of urban space in Gramado (RS)

Daniel Luciano Gevehr
FACCAT – Taquara – RS – Brasil
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1815-4457>

Eduardo da Silva Weber
FACCAT – Taquara – RS – Brasil
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1539-2268>

Abstract

The municipality of Gramado (RS), one of the main tourist destinations in Brazil and Latin America, has become nationally and internationally known for its own urban identity. In this sense, the general objective of our research will be to analyze the construction of Gramado's identity by public and private authorities, between the 1910s and the beginning of the 1970s, through kitsch elements, to understand its influence on tourist consumption in mass and in the gentrification process, at the beginning of the 21st century. Our methodology is exploratory, descriptive and explanatory in nature, with bibliographic analysis. The sources used involve various written and iconographic documents, present in the works of researchers and/or local memoirists. The research conclusions allow us to affirm that the development of kitsch tourism and the specific means of producing and organizing the urban space of Gramado, from the beginning of the 1970s, were linked to the memory of cultural practices and social representation developed by the elite of immigrant origin, formed in the place when it was still the Fifth District of Taquara, and from which group its first political leaders came. When rapid social and urban transformations, resulting from the country's industrialization, threatened to distort the local identity, erasing the memory that founded it, the City Council decided to select it, frame it and disseminate it.

Keywords: Gramado; Identity; Memory; Invention of traditions; Kitsch tourism.

Uma verdadeira Europa no extremo sul do Brasil: turismo kitsch e a produção do espaço urbano em Gramado (RS)

Resumo

O município de Gramado (RS), um dos principais destinos turísticos do Brasil e da América Latina, ficou nacional e internacionalmente conhecido por uma identidade urbana que lhe é própria. Nesse sentido, o objetivo geral de nossa pesquisa será analisar a construção da identidade de Gramado pelo poder público e privado, entre a década de 1910 e o início da década de 1970, através de elementos kitsch, para compreender a sua influência no consumo turístico em massa e no processo de gentrificação, no início do século XXI. Nossa metodologia é de caráter exploratório, descritivo e explicativo, com análise bibliográfica. As fontes utilizadas envolvem documentos escritos e iconográficos diversos, presentes nas obras de pesquisadores e/ou memorialistas locais. As conclusões da pesquisa nos permitem afirmar que o desenvolvimento do turismo kitsch e dos meios próprios de produzir e ordenar o espaço urbano de Gramado, a partir do início da década de 1970, esteve ligado à memória das práticas culturais e de representação social desenvolvidas pela elite de origem imigrante, formada no local quando este ainda era Quinto Distrito de Taquara, e de cujo grupo veio suas primeiras lideranças políticas. Quando rápidas transformações sociais e urbanas, decorrentes da industrialização do país, ameaçavam descaracterizar a identidade local, apagando a memória que a fundamentava, a Prefeitura Municipal decidiu selecioná-la, enquadrá-la e divulgá-la.

Palavras-chave: Gramado; Identidade; Memória; Invenção das tradições; Turismo kitsch.

Una verdadera Europa en el extremo sur de Brasil: turismo kitsch y producción de espacio urbano en Gramado (RS)

Resumen

El municipio de Gramado (RS), uno de los principales destinos turísticos de Brasil y América Latina, se ha vuelto conocido nacional e internacionalmente por su propia identidad urbana. En este sentido, el objetivo general de nuestra investigación será analizar la construcción de la identidad de Gramado por parte de autoridades públicas y privadas, entre los años 1910 y principios de los años 1970, a través de elementos kitsch, para comprender su influencia en el consumo turístico masivo y en el proceso de gentrificación, a principios del siglo XXI. Nuestra metodología es de carácter exploratorio, descriptivo y explicativo, con análisis bibliográfico. Las fuentes utilizadas involucran diversos documentos escritos e iconográficos, presentes en los trabajos de investigadores y/o autores de memorias locales. Las conclusiones de la investigación permiten afirmar que el desarrollo del turismo kitsch y los medios específicos de producción y organización del espacio urbano de Gramado, desde principios de los años 1970, estuvieron vinculados a la memoria de las prácticas culturales y de las representaciones sociales desarrolladas por la elite de origen inmigrante, se formó en el lugar cuando aún era el Quinto Distrito de Taquara, y de donde provinieron sus primeros dirigentes políticos. Cuando las rápidas

transformaciones sociales y urbanas, derivadas de la industrialización del país, amenazaron con distorsionar la identidad local, borrando la memoria que la fundaba, el Ayuntamiento decidió seleccionarla, enmarcarla y difundirla.

Palabras clave: Gramado; Identidad; Memoria; Invención de tradiciones; Turismo kitsch.

1 Introduction

The spatial focus of this study is the municipality of Gramado, located in the mountainous region of Rio Grande do Sul, which today presents itself to the world as one of the main tourist destinations in Brazil and Latin America. This importance can be perceived in three ways. First, through the numerous awards that Gramado has received in recent years. Second, through recent quantitative data that reveal the scale of its tourism infrastructure, which is the largest in the state. Finally, this importance is also evident in the existence of a widespread “image” of Gramado that has been promoted by public and private actors for many decades through different media.

As a result, it becomes evident that, in the Present Time, there exists a tourist city with its own identity, nationally and internationally recognized by its visitors. This final product results from an amalgam of different elements manifested in the urban space of Gramado. Among these elements, one may highlight architecture, landscaping techniques and gastronomy inspired by Europe, events, commercial establishments selling local products, hotels, museums, theme parks, as well as an aura of peace and tranquility that evokes a return to the colonial period.

In this sense, the general objective of the research is to analyze the construction of Gramado’s identity by public and private authorities between the 1910s and the early 1970s, through kitsch elements, in order to understand its influence on mass tourist consumption and on the process of gentrification at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The specific objectives are: (1) to characterize and analyze the process of production of the city’s urban space based on the concepts of “gentrification” and “kitsch tourism”; and (2) to identify sociocultural elements that allow us to understand how the former district of Taquara, with colonial characteristics, and later the newly emancipated municipality, possessed from its earliest days a vocation for tourism.

The theoretical foundations of the study are based primarily on the concepts of “Gentrification,” “Liquid Modernity,” and “Kitsch Tourism,” alongside other secondary concepts. The concept of “gentrification” was coined by the English sociologist Ruth Glass in the 1960s to describe the phenomenon of the return of the middle class to central London, which displaced the working-class residents who previously lived there. Its popularization, however, is attributed to the Scottish geographer Neil Smith at the end of the 1970s. The term gentrification derives from *gentry*, an expression designating the middle class in England (GEVEHR; BERTI, 2017).

This phenomenon occurs when entrepreneurs acquire properties at very low prices, renovate them, and later sell them at profitable values, resulting in a process of “social recycling” in the area. As a consequence, suburbanization takes place, since

lower-income populations become unable to acquire real estate in central areas of cities. Thus, this concept is fundamental for understanding the transformations that occur in contemporary cities (GEVEHR; BERTI, 2017).

The concept of “Liquid Modernity” was proposed by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in the early 2000s and underpins his entire body of work from that point onward. For Bauman, the contemporary world is marked by the speed of change, uncertainty, confusion, anxieties, individualism, and also by the short duration of human relationships (BAUMAN, 2001).

The term *kitsch*, in turn, has multiple origins and meanings and is generally analyzed within Philosophy, particularly in the field of Aesthetics. The word emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and derives from the German *kitschen*, meaning “to make new furniture from old,” or from *verkitschen*, which carries a pejorative connotation, meaning “to deceive” or “to sell one thing in place of another.” It is therefore intrinsically linked to a relationship between the false and the authentic (MOLES, 1973).

From the perspective of Cultural History, Eksteins (1991) understands kitsch as a psychological consequence of the late and accelerated advance of Modernity, industrialization, and urbanization in Germany and the United States between the second half of the nineteenth century and the First World War. It is associated with depersonalization and with the reconstruction of cultural identity among individuals and territories following migration and economic enrichment. It therefore presupposes self-affirmation through aestheticization (beautification) and spectacularization of both the self and the environment (LIPOVETSKY; SERROY, 2015).

With regard specifically to Gramado, an important contribution from the field of Urban and Regional Planning is the master’s dissertation by Lopes (2014), which aimed to analyze how municipal public authorities addressed informal settlements in the urban areas of two tourist cities, Canela and Gramado. This work is particularly relevant because it demonstrates the existence of a process of gentrification in Gramado by analyzing settlements or “subdivisions” located in areas farther from the city center. In Geography, mention should also be made of the doctoral dissertation by Dalonso (2015).

Within studies more closely related to the issue of Regional Development, three works stand out. The first, by Vaccari (2006), sought to analyze the role of tourism in the municipalities of Gramado and Canela as a factor of regional development and the strategies adopted for its revitalization. The second, by Vidal (2015), aimed to analyze the phenomenon known as event tourism, focusing specifically on the Natal Luz event in Gramado. The third, by Berti (2018), is the one most closely related to the present study, as it analyzed twenty plots in the center of Gramado that underwent a process of gentrification, with the aim of understanding the mechanisms of urban space production and territorial ordering.

Given these considerations, this research adopts a qualitative approach. Its objectives allow us to state that it is simultaneously exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory in nature. In terms of procedures, it involves documentary and bibliographic analysis in light of the proposed theoretical framework. To address the historical elements of Gramado, we primarily use bibliographic sources, photographs, maps, and transcriptions of written documents.

2 The Production and Territorial Ordering of Gramado's Urban Space

Following the theoretical approach proposed by Lefebvre (2013), this research considers the power disputes surrounding the process of the “production of space.” To analyze space from the perspective of power relations presupposes the concept of “territory.” Haesbaert (2004) conceives territory as social space historically appropriated in a continuous manner. For the geographer, this process is multiple, since it can occur simultaneously in different ways, both through “appropriation” and “domination.” Appropriation is subjective and cultural-symbolic; it produces meanings and, by presupposing “lived space-time,” is characterized by the presence of multiple, complex temporalities endowed with different rhythms. In contrast, domination—typical of modern capitalist society—is political-economic in nature, concrete and functional, and, as a result of the manipulation carried out by its “agents,” tends to unify temporalities and confer a unifunctional character upon territory.

Space, within the dialectic of its production, being simultaneously product and producer, ends up influencing the economy, relations of domination, and the functioning of the superstructure (State, Culture, Religion, etc.), while also being influenced by them (LEFEBVRE, 2013). Thus, when comprehended in its totality of relations, space becomes the link that interconnects all these different aspects. Their fusion results in what the French author termed “spatial practice,” from which emerges the slow and interactive process of the “production of space.”

By contrast, Canclini (1990) challenges this notion of “homogeneity” in the Latin American context. He argues that the modernizing and unifying process did not fully prevail in the region; instead of a single modernity, there exist several unequal and combined processes of modernization. A direct consequence of this is what the author calls “multitemporal heterogeneity,” that is, the coexistence of different temporalities within the same space.

Along similar lines, Haesbaert—drawing on Milton Santos and his concept of the “unequal accumulation of times” within space—argues that the present can only be defined through its relationship with other temporalities, conceived “not only in the linear-evolutionary sense of temporality, but as the simultaneous coexistence of times of different durations” (HAESBAERT, 1997, p. 11). In later works, he coined the notion of “multiterritoriality,” a concept that explains the “complex movement of territorialization,” encompassing both the “concomitant experience of multiple territories” and “the construction of territorialization in and through movement” (HAESBAERT, 2007, p. 20).

The city constitutes a very specific form of social organization, endowed with equally specific needs—such as administration, security forces, tax collection and payment, and social and labor division—which profoundly distinguish it from forms of organization based on rural environments (BARROS, 2007). Since the dawn of civilization, the city has become the large, dense, permanent, and heterogeneous geographical and social space where crowds of strangers have the opportunity to encounter one another (WIRTH, 1967, in OLIVEN, 2010; SENNETT, 1978, in BAUMAN,

2001). More than a social center, however, the city has always been an economic, political, and cultural hub.

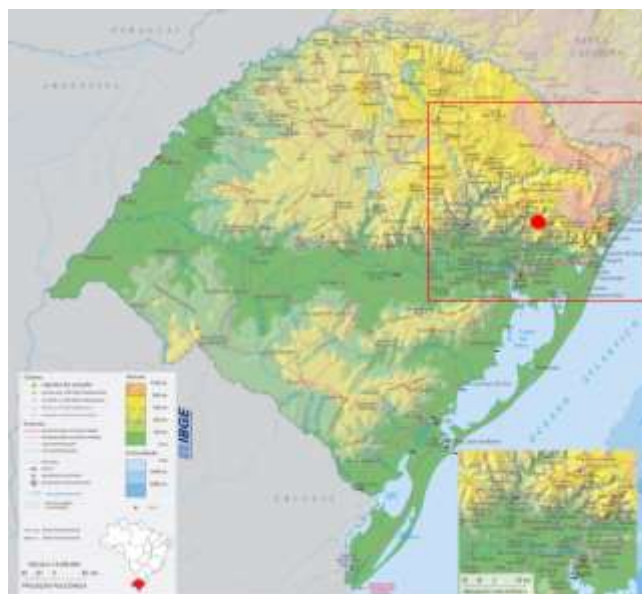
Giddens (1991) argues that modern modes of life, arising from transformations over the last three or four centuries, differ profoundly from traditional ones in both extent and intensity, and that no comparable precedents exist. Their distinctive characteristics include the speed and scale of change, as well as the presence of elements—political, economic, social, and technological—that were previously nonexistent.

For Haesbaert (2017), ordering space involves not only restricting mobility but also systematizing and regulating spatial organization. The geographer contends that, with the decline of disciplinary societies based on disciplinary ordering, what remains is the proposition of “processes of territorial containment,” through which “undesirable populations or subordinate classes are relocated in space in order to safeguard the ‘security’ of the territories of hegemonic groups” (HAESBAERT, 2017, p. 290).

3 The Scenario and Social Actors

Gramado is located at the higher altitudes of the Serra Gaúcha—approximately between 650 and 900 meters above sea level, according to Mendes Júnior (2002). The Serra Gaúcha forms part of the Northeast Region of Rio Grande do Sul and constitutes a small southeastern portion of the vast Southern Plateau, also known as the Northern Plateau of Rio Grande do Sul.

Figure 1 – Gramado, the Northeast Region, and the Northern Plateau of Rio Grande do Sul



Source: Prepared by the author (2023), adapted from: <https://www.brasil-turismo.com/rio-grande-sul/mapas/imagens/mapa-rs.jpg>. Accessed on October 14, 2023.

The map above shows that the city is surrounded by river valleys. Blum (1987) and Mendes Júnior (2002) point to other physical features, such as vegetation characterized by the presence of native forests (*Araucaria*, *gramimunha*, *xaxim*,

bamboo groves, etc.) and ground vegetation such as grasses. According to Blum (1987), Gramado's climate is mild and beneficial to health. Temperatures range between approximately 30°C in summer and -2°C in winter, although higher and lower temperatures may occasionally be recorded. During winter, frost and snow may sporadically occur, but the most common phenomenon is fog (or *cerração*) (BLUM, 1987; DAROS, 1993).

In this territory, still during the colonial period, the first arrivals were Portuguese and Azorean immigrants, who colonized primarily the navigable areas of the Central Depression around Porto Alegre and the Northern Coast, as well as the grasslands of the Campos de Cima da Serra. To varying degrees, these groups spread throughout the region toward the east (Santo Antônio da Patrulha) and north-northeast (the highlands), and were responsible for the “frontier of expansion,” that is, the clearing and preparation of space for future settlers (FERNANDES, 2008; 2011).

After the Portuguese-Azorean settlers who occupied the region during the colonial period, the imperial period, and the early decades of the Republic, German and Italian colonizers arrived. Germans began arriving from 1824 onward and settled mainly in the valleys of the Sinos, Taquari, and Paranhana rivers. Italians, in turn, arrived after 1875, settling on the Upper Plateau slopes, particularly around the Caí and Antas river valleys. Both groups constituted what is known as the “pioneer front,” implying social and spatial transformations driven by modernization and the commodification of production relations (FERNANDES, 2008). From the last quarter of the nineteenth century onward, intra-regional migration intensified toward the central areas of the selected quadrant, which were still sparsely populated and offered land available for purchase.

The toponym “Gramado” reveals that this territory—an extremely small southeastern portion of the vast plateau—was among the destinations of *tropeiros* (muleteers). This fact is widely accepted among local memorialists such as Marília Daros, Iraci Casagrande Koppe, and Mário Pizetta, who assert that, in the past, there was a large grassy field located on flat land, surrounded by trees and water springs, which gave the territory its name and reputation. From that point onward, the designation “Gramado” entered the vocabulary of the *tropeiros*, who used the site as a resting place (DAROS, 1993, 1995; DORNELES, 2001; PIZETTA, 1973).

In 1919, the train reached Gramado, arriving at the southern peripheral area known as Várzea Grande. Finally, in 1921, it reached the seat of the Fifth District. From then on, the area previously described as filled with “swamps and virgin forests” gradually acquired modern features, especially in the vicinity of the railway. According to Kern (2006, p. 26), “the train was not merely a means of transport that shortened distances, but also stimulated social relations, increased production, and energized the market, transforming the environment through which it passed in several respects.” In the specific case of Gramado, this mode of transport made it possible to connect the locality to regional commerce, led by Porto Alegre, as discussed by Reinheimer (2007).

In this context, Casagrande (2006) notes that in 1918 the former Bertolucci boarding house was transformed into the Hotel Bertolucci, Gramado's first hotel. In the 1930s, the Hotel Fisch was established, followed in the next decade by the Candiago and Sperb hotels. All four hotels were located sequentially along Borges de Medeiros Avenue (BEHREND, 1999). Even in the southern locality of Várzea Grande,

located 7 km from the district seat and where the train first arrived, a hotel was opened: the Hotel Casagrande.

During the 1920s, the Rio Grande do Sul politician Assis Brasil visited Gramado, referring to the locality as the “Brazilian Switzerland” (BLUM, 1987; DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; PIZETTA, 1973). He is said to have visited at the invitation of his local party supporter, the merchant Pedro Benetti, who hosted him at his commercial establishment. From its balcony, Assis Brasil reportedly delivered a speech and greeted his supporters (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993).

Thus, by the end of the 1930s, urban development had advanced to such an extent that Gramado already possessed, in addition to the hotels mentioned above, a post office (1918), a branch of the National Bank of Commerce (1918), electric lighting (1920), a Catholic school (1926), a cinema (1929), a primary school (*grupo escolar*) (1930), a pharmacy (1930), the São Pedro Parish Church (1935), a hospital (1937), a café (a precursor of the *colonial cafés*), three commercial establishments, and three artisanal industries (wicker furniture, wine, and assorted beverages). These developments enabled the locality to be elevated to the status of a *vila* by State Law No. 7,199 of March 31, 1938 (BLUM, 1987; PIZETTA, 1973).

In this sense, the production of urban space triggered by the presence of the railway was so significant that certain economically favored groups decided that it was already possible to develop independently from Taquara, allowing them to occupy prominent political positions. In 1948, the first attempt to emancipate the *Vila* of Gramado took place, although it was unsuccessful. Actual emancipation occurred in 1954, through State Law No. 2,522 (BLUM, 1987).

On the other hand, although the largest migratory flow occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there was another wave of German immigration in the early twentieth century, especially after the end of the First World War in 1918. This new wave further strengthened Gramado’s sociocultural composition, now with greater refinement and influence. A cultured elite arrived, whose members built parks, artificial lakes, and adopted landscaping techniques such as the planting of diverse flowers and exotic trees. Moreover, they planned a subdivision of summer residences for the regional elite and encouraged visitation to natural bathing sites such as waterfalls (BLUM, 1987; DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; BERTOLUCI, 1999; KNORR, 2000; SPARREMBERGER, 2000).

4 Kitsch Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as a “social, cultural, and economic phenomenon” (UNWTO, 2008, in PAKMAN, 2014, p. 18), which includes “the activities that people carry out during their travels and stays in places outside their usual environment for a consecutive period of time of less than one year” (UNWTO, 2016). These activities may have, among others, the following purposes: “1. Leisure, recreation, and holidays; 2. Visiting relatives and friends; 3. Business and professional reasons; 4. Health treatments; 5. Religion/Pilgrimages” (UNWTO, 2016).

Susana Gastal is one of the authors who, by advocating a new theoretical approach to contemporary tourism, understands it in this way, that is, by taking movement into account. She therefore prioritizes elements such as “travel,” “route,”

and “displacement,” which, according to her, are often set aside in favor of the fixed dimension represented by “tourist destinations.” In developing her theorization of tourism, Gastal (2005) draws on David Harvey (2005) and also emphasizes the intrinsic relationship between movement, time, and space. When addressing these concepts, the author follows the same line as Lefebvre (2013), conceiving them in concrete terms and through the relationships they maintain with the society that defines them. In this way, she interprets space as a “cultural construction” and time as something malleable, which acquires this characteristic through the numerous technologies that accelerate the speed of displacement.

The English sociologist John Urry is another author who conceives tourism from the perspective of movement. He analyzes this activity through the notion of the “gaze,” drawing inspiration from the typical analysis of the “medical gaze,” which diagnoses through the perception of small details and nuances. Moreover, one of the foundations of his theory is the interrelationship between the two dimensions of tourism mentioned by Gastal (2005): the mobile and the fixed. Thus, Urry (2001) refers to “tourist relationships” as the result of the association between displacement through space (travel) and the period of stay at the tourist destination, against the backdrop of social relations present in movement.

Kitsch tourism emerged from the 1970s onward, within the context of a world previously globalized by modern capitalist economics, with England as its first major diffuser since the eighteenth century and the United States from the twentieth century onward. The numerous means of transport and communication that emerged over time arose from the need to shape space in order to facilitate economic activities, especially industrialization and trade. The main consequence of this process was the massive production of urban spaces across the globe and the progressive reduction of rural areas. Furthermore, as a major articulator of these transformations, the bourgeoisie rose economically and politically and, over the last fifty years, has become the principal practitioner of kitsch tourism as part of a cultural identity.

The emergence and consolidation of contemporary tourism also stem from Romanticism (SANTOS, 2017), with the bourgeoisie as its main practitioner. This rising class did not cease to imitate and disseminate old aristocratic habits, such as a taste for food, clothing, and exotic places (LE GOFF, 1983). As holders of “leisure time,” they used tourism as a “symbol of wealth” and status (BARBOSA, 2002), aiming at self-affirmation through the construction of a bourgeois identity.

The “invented traditions” and “framed memories” that emerged with the new modern order came precisely to fill the “void” left by what had been destroyed. The main difference was that, from that point onward, this process occurred in a much more imposing and mechanically repetitive manner and, although it contained artistic elements, these became artificial, requiring excessive appeals to emotions and sensory experiences in order to be accepted. This occurred because such practices were no longer spontaneous cultural habits of society, given that both societies and their cultures had long been in a process of disintegration (or were practically dead). This is why Eksteins (1991) refers to Romantic kitsch as a “mask of death.”

The notion of kitsch arose in this context in Munich around 1860. There are two linguistic explanations in the German language for its origin. The first asserts that

it derives from *kitschen*, meaning “to make new furniture from old,” while the second traces it to *verkitschen*, with a pejorative connotation meaning “to deceive” or “to sell one thing in place of another.” In this way, the author demonstrates how kitsch is “authentically false,” that is, in its eagerness to imitate, it is simultaneously permeated by falsity and authenticity (MOLES, 1973).

On the other hand, Moles (1973) also argues that kitsch is much more than something material. It emerges in modern industrial bourgeois society as a sociocultural phenomenon. From then on, a “kitsch way of being” was constituted, which could materialize in the visual arts, painting, sculpture, literature, objects, music, architecture, and so on—“everything can serve as a carrier of kitsch (*Kitschträger*)” (MOLES, 1973, p. 11).

Moreover, in the twentieth century—especially from the 1970s onward—kitsch also acquired an economic connotation. From that point on, it became increasingly present in goods and services created specifically for consumption, including tourism. The consequence of this process was a transformation of social relations, which began to be mediated by representations of reality: scenarios and objects that contain the “kitsch way of being” (MOLES, 1973). Thus, human beings progressively ceased to come into contact with reality itself and instead interacted with aestheticized and spectacularized representations of that reality.

In Brazil, tourism first appeared as a political concern during Getúlio Vargas’s *Estado Novo*. From 1937 to 1945, tourism was incorporated into the state apparatus of the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP), which encompassed, in addition to tourism, propaganda, radio broadcasting, cinema, theater, the press, and other auxiliary services (SCHWARCZ, 2015).

The second time tourism appeared on a national scale as a public policy occurred during another authoritarian and national-developmental period: the Civil-Military Regime (1964–1985). In this context, the American historian Glen Goodman explains how tourism was incorporated into the conceptions of economic development and national integration during this period. According to Goodman (2018), modernization through industry proceeded alongside that of other sectors, such as tourism, and as early as 1966 two central bodies were established to manage tourism-related actions: the National Tourism Council and the Brazilian Tourism Company (EMBRATUR).

The period between the late 1960s and the early 1970s—marked by both transformations and uncertainties for the Brazilian population—ushered Gramado into a new phase of its history, although this phase is not the main focus of the present research. The young municipality reinvented itself by taking advantage of the national wave of investments, incentives, and, above all, the new orientation of tourism. In order to create an identity, the memory of German and Italian foreign influences—silenced during the *Estado Novo*, when the tourism ideal focused on Brazilian *mestizaje* involving Indigenous peoples, Black populations, and Portuguese heritage, as well as on Bahian and Carioca regional identities—was recovered. It is from the elements that make up this set of identity references that the following section will proceed.

5 The Actors and the Assembly of the Scene: the Elite, Hydrangeas, and the Mansion as Aesthetic Issues

The *Hymn to Gramado*, in its final stanza, emphasizes that tourists in the first half of the twentieth century came to what was then the Fifth District of Taquara attracted by the “riches of Mother Nature” and in search of “health in the mountain air.” This perception is shared by local historiography, which points to the existence, during this period, of a seasonal form of tourism—summer vacationing—carried out during the three summer months, as well as what is currently known as “health tourism” (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; BEHREND, 1999; RIEGEL, 2000).

Also during this pre-emancipation period, due to the mobility provided by the railway, Gramado attracted significant private investments in artisanal industry, commerce, and services. These sectors of the economy, together with agriculture and livestock activities, complemented one another in what the hymn itself describes as a “single applied effort” aimed at welcoming these summer visitors.

It is within this context that a cultured Germanic elite emerged in Gramado. These Germans arrived either to spend the summer or to establish permanent residence throughout the first half of the twentieth century, especially after the end of the First World War in 1918. They were either born in Germany or descended from Germans previously settled in Porto Alegre, São Leopoldo, Novo Hamburgo, and Taquara. They held a wide range of professions, including teachers, clerks, military officers, physicians, painters, surveyors, musicians, pharmacists, as well as a dentist and a tailor (BLUM, 1987; DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; BERTOLUCI, 1999; KNORR, 2000; SPARREMBERGER, 2000).

This Germanic elite was considered cultured, first, because some of its members arrived directly from Germany with this background, such as the teachers Maximiliano Hahn and Bruno Boelter, the physicians Carlos Nelz and Richard Sturmhoeffel, and the painters Julius Schmincke and Maximiliano Kaspar. Second, others had been raised within affluent and cultivated German families, such as the district clerk João Leopoldo Lied, his wife Osvaldina Panitz Lied, the teacher Amélia Bossle Boelter, and her sister Nenê (wife of Cláudio Pasqual). Finally, some were born in Brazil—such as Oscar Knorr and the surveyor Leopoldo Rosenfeldt—but had returned to their parents’ country of origin to study and maintained cultural and social ties there (BLUM, 1987; DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; BERTOLUCI, 1999; KNORR, 2000; SPARREMBERGER, 2000).

Romantic ideals influenced even local toponymy, as seen in the decision to maintain the name “Gramado” instead of adopting “Dinizópolis,” as mentioned in local historiography. The name “Dinizópolis” had initially been suggested as a tribute to the mayor of Taquara, Diniz Martins Rangel, but the toponym “Gramado” ultimately prevailed (BLUM, 1987; PIZETTA, 1973). In addition to its origins in *tropeirismo*, this local designation reinforced the close relationship with nature.

Members of this cultured elite promoted and carried out arborization and landscaping initiatives in Gramado, introducing a wide variety of flowers—such as azaleas, orchids, roses, and especially hydrangeas. They also planted other exotic plants and trees, including cypresses, poplars, pines, and German oaks, among others (BLUM, 1987; DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; BERTOLUCI, 1999; KNORR, 2000; SPARREMBERGER, 2000).

This elite was also responsible for building parks, such as Parque Knorr, owned by Oscar Knorr, and Parque Hotel, developed by Leopoldo Rosenfeldt. Rosenfeldt

further led the construction of two artificial lakes—the Joaquina Rita Bier Lake and the Black Lake (*Lago Negro*)—and inaugurated an era of summer residences through the administration of the Vila Planalto subdivision. He also encouraged visits to natural bathing sites, such as waterfalls, by creating a tourist itinerary.

The Vila Planalto subdivision was conceived by a society of heirs aiming to sell, in the form of residential plots for vacationers, the remaining portions of land belonging to the brothers Henrique and Luiz Bier, who had owned extensive properties in Gramado since the nineteenth century. When sales were placed under the responsibility of Leopoldo Rosenfeldt, the objective was explicitly to attract “only those who had the financial means to build here,” thereby establishing a high standard of quality for construction (BERTOLUCI, 1999, p. 63). In 1937, on the day Vila Planalto was inaugurated, approximately twenty-seven individuals arrived in Gramado by automobile via the railway. These visitors included prospective land buyers, representatives of the German-language press—among them journalists from *Neue Deutsche Zeitung* and *Volksblatt*—as well as local and Taquara-based political figures. By that time, thirty-six of the planned two hundred plots had already been sold (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; KOPPE, 2018).

To stimulate the sale of plots, Leopoldo Rosenfeldt produced, in 1938, the first tourist itinerary of Gramado, entitled “*Gramado: the Marvel of Summer Vacationing.*” Written in Portuguese and German, the itinerary contained photographs and descriptions of Gramado’s tourist attractions—especially natural ones—praised regional and local personalities such as Colonel João Corrêa Ferreira da Silva and the clerk João Leopoldo Lied, and also included advertisements for the main local tourism services, such as hotels, artisanal industries, and commercial establishments. Rosenfeldt also promoted Gramado in Porto Alegre and other cities throughout the state (BERTOLUCI, 1999; KOPPE, 2018).

By contrast, Behrend (1999) and Bertoluci (1999) argue that the development of Vila Planalto occurred primarily during the Second World War (1939–1945). According to these authors, this was because beaches were closed for reasons of national security, and Germans were prohibited from traveling to the coast. As a result, Gramado became an attractive alternative for summer vacationing, drawing members of the Germanic elite of Rio Grande do Sul, including families such as Gerda, Oderich, Neugebauer, and Renner (RIEGEL, 2000; CASAGRANDE, 2006; KOPPE, 2018).

Another prominent member of this Germanic elite who arrived in Gramado during this period, around 1940, was Oscar Knorr, who had served as a representative for several companies of German origin, including Siemens and Mercur. Through the influence of Leopoldo Rosenfeldt, Knorr acquired five hectares of land at one of the highest points of what is now the municipal center, overlooking the Quilombo Valley. There he built a Bavarian-style mansion and a garden filled with exotic trees and plants, especially hydrangeas—an area that would later become known as Parque Knorr (KOPPE, 2018). Ilga Korndörfer Knorr, Oscar Knorr’s wife, described the construction and features of the mansion as being rich in references to Germanic identity, which her husband had acquired during his travels.

This appreciation of nature, aesthetics, and beauty—intrinsic to the actions of this cultured Germanic elite—reveals the extent to which Romantic thought influenced the structuring of Gramado as a tourist destination already in the first half

of the twentieth century. After emancipation, these Germans became influential in local political decision-making, either as politicians themselves or as advisors to elected officials. Riegel (2000) notes that the landscaping initiatives of Leopoldo Rosenfeldt, Carlos Nelz, and Oscar Knorr played a decisive role in sustaining tourism after emancipation and in facilitating Gramado's transition into a new phase.

6 The Construction of the Spectacle: Parades, Festivals, and the Media as Issues of Social Representation

The origins of the spectacularization of Gramado, as well as of its aestheticization, must also be sought in the pre-emancipation period. Present today in urban spaces through kitsch tourism, this desire to transform the city into a spectacle is linked to the memory of cultural practices and forms of sociability developed by the elite of immigrant origin that took shape in the locality. This elite rose economically before 1954, when the territory was still known as the Fifth District of Taquara. During this period, its members absorbed diverse cultural references, especially Germanic ones. From this synthesis, a distinct *modus vivendi* “of Gramado” gradually emerged. From this recently formed elite came Gramado's first political leaders, who began to advocate for municipal emancipation.

In this context, a cultural association was founded in Gramado in 1915: the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense*. At the time, although still a small and recently established settlement, the seat of the Fifth District of Taquara was inhabited by “a few families with very strong social characteristics” (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 22). The association soon became a “symbol of social life, a second home for the Gramado family” (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 148). By bringing together the “social elite of Gramado” (PIZETTA, 1973, p. 54), the venue became a “stage for elegant events” (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 22).

One of the founding members of the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense* was the district clerk João Leopoldo Lied, born in São Leopoldo. Lied drafted the association's first statutes and served as its president for eleven consecutive years. His wife, Osvaldina Panitz Lied—born in Porto Alegre and raised from the age of twelve in São Leopoldo—had been educated in an environment of “enormous cultural capital” (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 147). She frequented the *Sociedade Orpheu* in São Leopoldo, a central space of sociability for the Germanic elite, where she participated as an actress in an artistic group and as a musician, playing the zither and performing in concerts and salons. Together, the couple endeavored to teach good manners and rules of sociability to the association's members, including how to speak, eat, and sit properly, as well as prohibiting the use of boots and weapons during events (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993).

The elite that made up the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense* organized both internal and external events. Within the association's headquarters, dances, *bolão* tournaments, tea gatherings, and birthday celebrations were held, many of them attended by summer visitors. The dances were animated by foreign or regional orchestras and local bands, and often included the crowning of queens. Fashion, music, and other cultural expressions present at these social events were influenced by European—especially Germanic—Gaúcho, Brazilian, Latin American, and North

American traditions, many of which were mediated by cinema, installed in the district in 1929 (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993).

Externally, the members of the association promoted street parades and open-air events. These included walking or horseback outings, picnics, and outdoor musical gatherings, all highly appreciated by summer visitors, who were described as being “enthusiastic admirers of nature” (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 50).

By contrast, it was not only the elite that engaged in spectacularization; the general population did so as well, at least on four documented occasions. In 1919, residents gathered around the Várzea Grande Station and the stationary train—decorated at the front with flowers and the phrase “Salve 1º de junho”—to celebrate its arrival, as evidenced by an existing photograph. Three years later, when the railway reached the seat of the Fifth District, the population paraded through the streets, as also recorded in photographs (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 124). A decade later, in 1934, in the presence of numerous local and regional political leaders and accompanied by the local musical ensemble *Banda Flor da Serra*, a “large mass of people” gathered for the inauguration of the garden at Major Nicoletti Square (DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993, p. 48). Finally, in 1953, shortly before the emancipation plebiscite, many residents witnessed their daughters—future nuns and students of the local religious school—singing the *Hymn to Gramado* (PIZETTA, 1973). Additionally, the spectacularization of the populace was common in the numerous *kerb* celebrations and patron-saint festivals held in rural areas.

The population, the elite, and the summer visitors all engaged in spectacularization. What did they have in common? They were all *arrivistes*, seeking an identity while projecting themselves toward the future. In Bauman’s theorization (1998), *arrivistes* are “those who have arrived,” who are already “in the place” but are not yet fully “of the place.” Moving from one geographical space to another, they attempt to escape the difficult reality of the present by anticipating a better future existence, even if it is never fully achieved. The psychological consequence of this condition is the constant search for an ideal identity. In this quest, Bauman explains, the fear of being ridiculed and stigmatized for what they truly are—“nomads” and “newcomers”—compels them to turn life into a “stage,” to become “actors,” and to perform “roles” (BAUMAN, 1998, pp. 92–95).

The elite of Gramado, composed of *arrivistes* rapidly transformed into “newly wealthy” individuals, initially underwent a kind of “civilizing process.” With the assistance of the cultured Germanic elite—the “old rich”—these German and Italian colonists, whose social ascent had been rapid and recent, gradually refined their habits. Through participation in the events of the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense*, their rural and supposedly “barbaric” customs were transformed into urban and “civilized” ones.

Summer visitors, another group involved in this process, were also *arrivistes* and “newly wealthy” in origin. They represented the last generation of German immigrants to accumulate wealth in the northeastern region of the state, particularly in Porto Alegre. This enrichment resulted from the industrialization that began in Rio Grande do Sul during the final decades of the Empire and the early Republic, driven by river navigation and the railway. Summer vacationing in Gramado constituted this group’s primary form of leisure. In this “summer resort,” they constructed an identity

by spectacularizing themselves amid natural beauty and consuming products from local agro-industries.

During the 1940s and 1950s—marking the final years of Gramado as the Fifth District of Taquara and its first years as an autonomous municipality—three figures stand out: Walter Bertolucci, Leopoldo Rosenfeldt, and Oscar Knorr. The first descended from Italian *arrivistes* who had settled in the area due to the railway, rose economically, and participated in the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense*. The latter two belonged to the cultured Germanic elite that had established itself in Gramado during the interwar period (1918–1939) and throughout the Second World War (1939–1945).

Bertolucci, Rosenfeldt, and Knorr—well known in the region and connected to influential figures even at the national level—played a central role in the gestation and birth of the municipality. Walter Bertolucci maintained ties with prominent politicians from his party, the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB), such as Leonel Brizola, João Goulart, and Unírio Carrera Machado, as well as with journalists affiliated with the same party, including Carlos Bastos. Through these political connections, he secured an emancipation amendment for Gramado from the State Constituent Assembly, led the emancipation movement, and was elected the first mayor following the plebiscite (BERTOLUCCI, 2019). Rosenfeldt, in turn, was connected to the regional Germanic elite, while Knorr maintained relationships with Brazilian politicians, journalists, diplomats, writers, and artists, who frequently stayed at his mansion. Together, through meetings held at the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense*, the three conceived the municipality's first major event: the *Hydrangea Festival (Festa das Hortênsias)* (BERTOLUCCI, 2019; DRECKSLER; KOPPE, 1993; KOPPE, 2018; PIZETTA, 1973).

The *Hydrangea Festival* was held for the first time on December 7 and 8, 1958, in the gardens of Oscar Knorr's mansion and in the facilities of the *Sociedade Recreio Gramadense*. Gramado's first major event was the second in a broader “wave” of festivals held in municipalities across the region, inspired by the *Grape Festival (Festa da Uva)* of Caxias do Sul, which had been revived in 1950 after its suspension in 1938 during the Estado Novo. Preparations included the formation of an organizing committee and the sending of invitations even to distant locations (BERTOLUCCI, 2019; PIZETTA, 1973; RIEGEL, 2000). In testimony recorded by Bertolucci (2019), local memorialist Iraci Casagrande Koppe—who lived through these events—reported that the then mayor, Walter Bertolucci, stated that through the festival he intended to “capitalize on our natural beauty” (BERTOLUCCI, 2019, p. 12).

The second *Hydrangea Festival* took place three years later, between January 6 and 8, 1961. From then until 1977, the event was held biennially, when it was discontinued during the municipal administration of 1977–1983. After this interval, the festival was revived by the subsequent administration and held on two additional occasions (1984/1985 and 1986/1987), before being definitively discontinued. Over twelve editions, the duration of the event ranged from two to forty-four days, always during the summer, beginning in December or January, or spanning both months (PIZETTA, 1973; BLUM, 1987).

On August 26, 1950, Gramado appeared for the first time in a national media outlet, *O Cruzeiro* magazine, in an article entitled “Girls in the Mountains of Rio Grande do Sul.” The publication highlighted natural beauty, cheerful young women, and German and Italian cuisine as the main attractions for summer vacationing in the

Serra Gaúcha. It also emphasized the means of access—the federal highway connecting Porto Alegre to the region—which at that time was already almost entirely paved (GUIMARÃES; KEFFEL, 1950). Over the following five years, Gramado appeared in regional newspapers on three occasions: once as a promising summer resort and twice as a recipient of first-place awards in agro-industrial exhibitions.

An examination of the sources therefore allows us to state that from 1958 onward, media presence became a constant feature in the young municipality. However, it was the set of events that occurred in the early 1970s that proved decisive in opening the curtains of the spectacle—long rehearsed since before 1954, when Gramado was still the Fifth District of Taquara—to Brazil and the world. Symbolic events such as the inauguration of the Bavarian-style gateway on the Nova Petrópolis route, public concern with commissioning and launching a book of memories about the young city, the opening of a high-standard hotel on Borges de Medeiros Avenue, the creation of municipal symbols, and, above all, the emergence of a micro-event—the Film Festival—within the main event marked the beginning of a new phase in Gramado’s tourism.

Subsequently, two additional events would emerge years later within the *Hydrangea Festival*: the *Colonial Festival (Festa da Colônia)* and *Natal Luz*. Furthermore, amid Brazil’s transition toward an increasingly urban and bourgeois society, the inauguration of two European-style architectural elements—the gateway facing visitors arriving from the capital via BR-116 and the high-standard hotel on the city’s main avenue—also served as symbolic indicators of the new urban orientation and of the new category of visitors the city would seek to attract from that point onward.

7 Final considerations

The territory of Gramado took shape from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, at the center of four economic zones that were largely isolated from one another. To the north were the Italian colonies; to the west and south, the German colonies; and to the east, the Campos de Cima da Serra. Initially, Gramado functioned as a temporary lodging site for merchants who connected these four directions—*tropeiros*, traveling salesmen, and cart drivers. Gradually, as the frontier advanced into the previously empty center, Gramado became a promising locality that soon turned into a “center of immigrants.”

The railway, which arrived in 1919, brought dynamism to the region and played a key role in attracting immigrants and their descendants who were already established in the surrounding colonies. The presence of this modern means of transportation transformed Gramado into an “arriviste settlement,” which would rapidly urbanize from that point onward through the presence of these immigrants and their enterprises.

Our analysis shows that members of the Gramado elite sought to create an image of themselves—for themselves and for others. Only by developing behaviors perceived as distinctly “of Gramado” could they truly be recognized as the “elite of Gramado” and launch themselves into political life. However, as *arrivistes*, they found themselves compelled to deny aspects of their own origins. They thus assumed a kitsch identity and social representation that was aestheticized, spectacularized, and hybrid, drawing on multiple cultural references from the past but imbued with an

appearance of purity—an identity whose “spirit” remains present in the city to this day.

Finally, we identified that from the 1970s onward, when rapid social and urban transformations resulting from the country’s industrialization threatened to dissolve this identity by erasing the memory upon which it was founded, the Municipal Government decided to “frame” it by commissioning two historiographical works about Gramado: *Gramado: Yesterday and Today* (1973) and *Gramado Simply Gramado* (1987). The first work launched the municipal symbols, narrated the history of the first major event—the *Hydrangea Festival*—and highlighted the city’s natural beauty along with its vocation for artisanal industry. The second consolidated the Bavarian style and formalized three new events: the Film Festival, the *Colonial Festival*, and *Natal Luz*.

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Daniel Luciano Gevehr. Pós-doutor em História. FACCAT. Professor titular do Programa de Pós-graduação em Desenvolvimento Regional. Avenida Oscar Martins Rangel, 4500, bairro Fogão Gaúcho, Taquara – RS. danielgevehr@faccat.br.

Eduardo da Silva Weber. Graduando em História e bolsita FAPERGS. FACCAT Avenida Oscar Martins Rangel, 4500, bairro Fogão Gaúcho, Taquara – RS. eduardoweber@sou.faccat.br.

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CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE CADA AUTOR

Conceituação (Conceptualization): Daniel Luciano Gevehr e Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Curadoria de Dados (Data curation): Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Análise Formal (Formal analysis): Daniel Luciano Gevehr e Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Obtenção de Financiamento (Funding acquisition): FAPERGS.

Investigação/Pesquisa (Investigation): Eduardo da Silva Weber

Metodologia (Methodology): Daniel Luciano Gevehr.

Administração do Projeto (Project administration): Daniel Luciano Gevehr.

Recursos (Resources): Daniel Luciano Gevehr e Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Software: Microsoft Word.

Supervisão/orientação (Supervision): Daniel Luciano Gevehr.

Validação (Validation): Daniel Luciano Gevehr e Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Visualização (Visualization): Daniel Luciano Gevehr e Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Escrita – Primeira Redação (Writing – original draft): Daniel Luciano Gevehr e Eduardo da Silva Weber.

Escrita – Revisão e Edição (Writing – review & editing): Daniel Luciano Gevehr.

Fontes de financiamento: FACCAT / FAPERGS.