

## ***City and culture: the Centro-Gare Creative District as an experience of the contemporary development process***

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### **Abstract**

The present article aims to reflect on the revaluation of the territory of the Centro-Gare Creative District in Santa Maria-RS and its sociocultural, economic and political specificities as a strategy for the contemporary development process. The Creative District is an initiative of several organizations that seek to value memory and identity combined with the city's sustainable development perspectives. We observed that Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare promotes sustainable development by integrating cultural and economic practices that value local identity and promote social inclusion, attracting investments and tourists, generating employment and income for the community, while revitalizing urban areas, improving the infrastructure. However, based on the analysis of online media records between 2022/23, we observed that there is a concentration of efforts on heritage revitalization and the creation of attractive public spaces, which is important at first, but requires actions that generate mobilization and more effective involvement of social actors to consolidate the project.

**Keywords:** Culture. Identity. Centro-Gare Creative District. Sustainable Development.

## **Cidade e cultura: o Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare como experiência do processo de desenvolvimento contemporâneo**

### **Resumo**

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo refletir sobre a revalorização do território do Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare em Santa Maria-RS e suas especificidades socioculturais, econômicas e políticas como estratégia para o processo de desenvolvimento contemporâneo. O Distrito Criativo é uma iniciativa de diversas organizações que buscam valorizar a memória e a identidade aliadas às perspectivas de desenvolvimento sustentável da cidade. Observamos que Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare promove o desenvolvimento sustentável ao integrar práticas culturais e econômicas que valorizam a identidade local e promovem a inclusão social, atraindo investimentos e turistas, gerando emprego e renda para a comunidade, ao mesmo tempo que revitaliza áreas urbanas, melhorando a infraestrutura. Porém, a partir da análise dos registros midiáticos online entre 2022/23, observamos que há uma concentração de esforços na revitalização patrimonial e na criação de espaços públicos atrativos, o que é importante em um primeiro momento, mas precisa de ações que gerem uma mobilização mais efetiva dos atores sociais para a consolidação do projeto.

**Palavras-chave:** Cultura; Identidade; Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare; Desenvolvimento Sustentável.

## **Ciudad y cultura: el Distrito Creativo Centro-Gare como experiencia del proceso de desarrollo contemporáneo**

### **Resumen**

El trabajo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre la revalorización del territorio del Distrito Creativo Centro-Gare en Santa Maria-RS y sus especificidades socioculturales, económicas y políticas como estrategia para el proceso de desarrollo contemporáneo. El Distrito Creativo es una iniciativa de varias organizaciones que buscan poner en valor la memoria y la identidad combinadas con las perspectivas de desarrollo sostenible de la ciudad. Observamos que el Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare promueve el desarrollo sostenible integrando prácticas culturales y económicas que valoran la identidad local y promueven la inclusión social, atrayendo inversiones y turistas, generando empleo e ingresos para la comunidad, al mismo tiempo que revitalizan las áreas urbanas y mejoran la infraestructura. Sin embargo, a partir del análisis de los registros de los medios online entre 2022/23, observamos que hay una concentración de esfuerzos en la revitalización del patrimonio y la creación de espacios públicos atractivos, lo cual es importante en un principio, pero requiere acciones que generen una movilización más efectiva. de actores sociales para consolidar el proyecto.

**Palabras clave:** Cultura. Identidad. Distrito Creativo Centro-Gare. Desarrollo Sostenible.

## **1 Introduction**

Looking at a territory goes far beyond reflecting on political and economic issues; it also means understanding how communities are formed, how they interact,

and how they evolve within certain spaces, rediscovering the sense of place and community as a space filled with life and culture. In this sense, a territory is not only a geographically delimited area but also a space imbued with cultural, historical, and social meaning. For a territory to exist, it is necessary for the community to identify with its spaces and to establish networks - interconnections and relationships among various actors. According to Albagli (2004), territory, in addition to being a material or concrete space, is also a web of social relations, a field of historically constructed forces. To stimulate territorial development, it is essential to strengthen bonds of identity and cooperation with the aim of capitalizing on “*o que as pessoas identificam que o território tem de “seu”, suas especificidades culturais, tipicidades, natureza enquanto recurso e enquanto patrimônio ambiental, práticas produtivas e potencialidades econômicas*” (Albagli, 2004, p. 63).

There are many possible approaches to thinking about the identity of a territory. Here, we look through the lens of communication at the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG) project, an initiative of several organizations from the city of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, which seeks to enhance local memory and identity while aligning with sustainable development perspectives. A creative district represents a geographic area or a region within a territory where creativity, innovation, and culture converge to generate economic, social, and cultural development. These districts promote the transformation of urban areas, shaping them into attractive regions for businesses, tourists, and local talent, while also strengthening the community’s identification with its territory.

Creative districts generate multiple social, economic, and environmental contributions, particularly in Latin America. In a survey conducted by Teixeira, Piqué, and Ferreira (2022), 63 Creative Districts were identified worldwide, 15 of which are in Latin America: four in Colombia, three in Argentina, one in Chile, one in Trinidad and Tobago, one in Jamaica, and five in Brazil (Distrito Criativo Passagem de Mariana – MG; Vitória – ES; Porto Alegre – RS; Centro-Gare – RS; and Florianópolis – SC). Additionally, according to Moretini (2023), the Distrito Criativo Sé/República – SP, created in 2014, also deserves mention, although it was not included in the aforementioned mapping.

In addition to creative districts, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) also stands out, implementing the 2030 Agenda for Development through culture and creativity. The network seeks to promote cooperation and to recognize creative practice as one of the strategies for economic, social, cultural, and environmental development. According to UNESCO (2023)<sup>1</sup>, the network includes 350 cities in over 100 countries, representing seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music. Fourteen Brazilian cities are part of the network: 1. Gastronomy - Belém (PA), Florianópolis (SC), Paraty (RJ), Belo Horizonte (MG); 2. Design - Brasília (DF), Curitiba (PR), Fortaleza (CE); 3. Crafts and Folk Art - João Pessoa (PB); 4. Music - Salvador (BA), Recife (PE); 5. Film - Santos (SP), Penedo (RJ); 6. Literature - Rio de Janeiro (RJ); 7. Media Arts - Campina Grande (PB).

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <<https://www.unesco.org/pt/articles/55-novas-cidades-passam-fazer-parte-da-rede-de-cidades-criativas-da-unesco-no-dia-mundial-das>>. Accessed on: October 14, 2024.

Our investigation focuses on the relationship between communication and development within the area encompassed by the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare of Santa Maria, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, aiming to understand the city's cultural identity through memory and online media records. To that end, we begin with a theoretical reflection on communication, development, and identity, followed by a conceptual discussion on the notion of Creative Districts. Next, we present the history of Santa Maria as an effort to value memory as a strategy for development, and finally, we analyze the online media records related to the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare.

## **2 Communication, Development, and Identity: a look at Culture**

The relationship between development, identity, and culture is complex and interdisciplinary. In this sense, communication will be used as a guiding thread to connect reflections that are crucial for understanding contemporary society.

Communication is a broad field of study that originates from the Social and Political Sciences and concerns itself with multiple contexts and social actors. Within its scope are the studies of Media and Culture. The media enable the (re)production of meanings within a culture - and within society itself - which is plural, diverse, and constantly transforming. Culture is a whole way of life (Williams, 1979), in which meanings are (re)produced and expressed through symbolic representations circulating in the social sphere. According to Hall (2016), culture refers to the exchange and production of meanings among the members of a society.

In this regard, communication is essential for articulating the cultural dimension within territorial development processes. Traditionally, in the context of territorial development, communication was viewed for many years through the lens of mass communication research, *“essencialmente vinculada a estratégias desenvolvimentistas, com o intuito de interpretar a função social dos meios de comunicação na sociedade”* (Felippe & Brandt, 2016, p. 46). Over time, communication came to be valued beyond its technical and mass-media aspects, embracing a strategic dimension that mediates economic, cultural, social, and political issues. Moreover, communication places individuals as protagonists of social transformation, fostering dialogue and social mobilization.

In a certain way, culture and development are intrinsically connected. Felippi and Brandt (2016) explain that the city, the region, and the nation-state are formed through cultural expressions and conditions, since culture is also a practice of meaning-making permeated by power relations. Issues related to the cultural dimension of territorial development are complex and manifest themselves in multiple ways across territories. It is also within territories that the cultural specificities of certain groups are materialized. Therefore, it is possible to identify how individuals relate to their environments - how identities are constructed within specific spaces.

It is precisely when we focus on identities that we find an important intersection between communication and development, particularly through culture. Felippi and Brandt (2016) contextualize that this interweaving lies in identities, subjectivities, hybridities, meaning-making processes, social representations, consumption, and power relations that permeate historical, political, and economic

contexts—essential factors for understanding culture. In this sense, communication expresses new ways of seeing, perceiving, and engaging with the cultural dimension. For territories to be understood as spaces of meaning production and negotiation, it is necessary to comprehend the different ways of life without disregarding the diverse producers and receivers involved in these processes.

Following this line of thought, Grimson (2010, p. 3) explains that “*cultura alude a nuestras prácticas, creencias y significados rutinarios, fuertemente sedimentados, mientras la identidad se refiere a nuestros sentimientos de pertenencia a un colectivo,*” revealing the close relationship between culture and identity. Therefore, investigating identity is fundamental for the development of a territory. These identities represent the set of values, traditions, customs, and practices that characterize a social group, reflecting its history and way of life. Identities contribute to the territory by fostering identification and a sense of belonging among individuals, the city, and its spaces. When people share a common culture, they feel part of a larger community, which enables the strengthening of social bonds, connections, and mobilization toward a common goal.

From this perspective, when local culture is used as a development strategy, it contributes to the preservation of historical memory by keeping knowledge alive across generations. This process of cultural transmission is vital for maintaining a territory’s identity and for valuing its spaces, thereby building a sense of tradition.

Furthermore, identity plays a significant role in the economic development of a region. Cultural festivals, local crafts, and traditional cuisine are examples of cultural productions that - alongside their history, hospitality, and the meanings constructed through communicational processes - attract tourists and stimulate the local economy. In addition, valuing local culture can generate employment and income for the population, improving residents’ quality of life. Therefore, cultural identity is an essential element for territorial development, encompassing the historical, economic, and social dimensions of a region.

Within this theoretical framework emerge the ideas of the Creative District: delimited and defined areas within an urban territory that are transformed through collaboration among people, fostering the exchange of knowledge and the development of new ideas and practices. These transformations intensify cultural activity, creating a network of services that brings together businesses and creative initiatives within an attractive environment (Testoni, 2018). According to Teixeira, Piqué, and Ferreira (2022), creative districts can be understood as regions of innovation, characterized by the presence of creative enterprises that integrate with local culture, thus driving both cultural and economic growth in the region.

Moreover, creative districts value history, customs, and urban heritage, re-signifying areas that were previously neglected. As a result, they become attractive spaces for creative individuals and foster a strong sense of belonging (Wittmann & Testoni, 2019). According to Moretini and Lopes (2021), the local productive arrangements within these districts derive from development processes aimed at making the territory more productive and profitable, with a focus on specialization, innovation, and cooperation among local actors—where participation is regarded as a fundamental value.

Globally, creative districts reflect the cultural and historical evolutions of societies while simultaneously impacting the localities in which they are situated.

They promote the economic, social, cultural, and creative growth of communities by offering spaces for the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and collaborations (Via Conhecimento, 2022).

These districts foster an environment of innovation, facilitating the exchange of ideas and collaboration among various creative sectors, which in turn encourages the emergence of new organizations and drives local economic growth. Moreover, creative districts promote sustainable development by integrating cultural and economic practices that value local identity and foster social inclusion. As a result, they attract investment and tourism, generating employment and income for the community while revitalizing urban areas, improving infrastructure, and enhancing residents' quality of life.

Conversely, in some cases, the regeneration of a given area within a territory—as proposed by creative districts—can lead to a process of gentrification if not carefully planned. This process involves the sanitization of revitalized spaces, resulting in increased living costs and real estate speculation, attracting new residents while making it difficult for former ones to remain. According to Alcântara (2018, p. 1),

*O termo refere-se a processos de mudança das paisagens urbanas, aos usos e significados de zonas antigas e/ou populares das cidades que apresentam sinais de degradação física, passando a atrair moradores de rendas mais elevadas. Os “gentrificadores” (gentrifiers) mudam-se gradualmente para tais locais, cativados por algumas de suas características - arquitetura das construções, diversidade dos modos de vida, infraestrutura, oferta de equipamentos culturais e históricos, localização central ou privilegiada, baixo custo em relação a outros bairros -, passando a demandar e consumir outros tipos de estabelecimentos e serviços inéditos. A concentração desses novos moradores tende a provocar a valorização econômica da região, aumentando os preços do mercado imobiliário e o custo de vida locais, e levando à expulsão dos antigos residentes e comerciantes, comumente associados a populações com maior vulnerabilidade e menor possibilidade de mobilidade no território urbano, tais como classes operárias e comunidades de imigrantes.*

To prevent this, it is essential that the field of communication be involved in the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG) in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, serving as a strategic manager and mediator of cultural and social demands. It is through communication that meanings are (re)produced and the various actors within the territory are mobilized. This understanding is fundamental to comprehending how identities within a territory are shaped and how development is structured. Therefore, culture emerges as an indispensable element for territorial development, influencing values, behaviors, and practices—in other words, the reproduction of meanings—playing a central role in defining the potential and direction of a region's development.

### **3 Memory and Identity: Historical Appreciation of the City of Santa Maria**

The territorial identity of Santa Maria, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, is deeply shaped by its rich cultural history, academic significance, and active

participation in historical events. Santa Maria began as a small settlement called “*Santa Maria da Boca do Monte*”<sup>2</sup>, strategically located in a transit region. Its development was driven by the arrival of European immigrants and the construction of railways in the nineteenth century, which consolidated the city as an important railway hub in the state. The railway brought the first economic cycle that generated progress and transformed the city into a commercial and service center.

Today known as the “City of Culture”<sup>3</sup> and the “Heart of Rio Grande” due to its central geographic location within the state, Santa Maria is a hub of education and culture. It is home to the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), one of Brazil’s leading higher education institutions, which attracts a large number of students and fosters an atmosphere of youthfulness and innovation. This marked the city’s second cycle of development with the creation of UFSM. In addition, Santa Maria hosts eight institutions of higher education: Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), Franciscan University (UFN), Integrated College of Santa Maria (FISMA), Methodist College of Santa Maria (FAMES), Pallottine College of Santa Maria (FAPAS), Law School of Santa Maria (FADISMA), College of Health Sciences (SOBRESP), and Lutheran University of Brazil (ULBRA).

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2021)<sup>4</sup>, Santa Maria is the fifth most populous municipality in the state, with approximately 285,000 inhabitants. The city is also known as the “City of the Xis”<sup>5</sup> - a reference to its emblematic sandwich - hosting an annual gastronomic and cultural festival.

Santa Maria has a series of historical buildings that define its identity, including the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Conception and the Theatro Treze de Maio, as well as a collection of neoclassical and Art Déco<sup>6</sup> heritage sites. The city is also renowned for the Vila Belga, which reflects the architecture and lifestyle of Belgian workers who settled in the region in the early twentieth century for the construction of the railway. These architectural and cultural elements are central to the city’s identity, viewed through the lens of its spaces as cultural heritage, highlighting a blend of influences that have shaped the development of the territory over time. In 2000, the Viação

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<sup>2</sup> According to an article by Eduardo Rolim published by APUSM, “O nome de Santa Maria da Boca do Monte aparece pela primeira vez em documento oficial do ano de 1809. O nome surgiu da composição do antigo oratório jesuítico com a denominação indígena da antiga picada que dava acesso a São Martinho. Os índios chamavam essa picada de ‘caá-yuru’ (boca do mato). Os espanhóis que primeiro aqui chegaram adotaram o mesmo nome: em espanhol – Boca do Monte. Os portugueses, que vieram 150 anos depois, continuaram a usar a denominação já consagrada”. Available at: <<https://apusm.com.br/noticiaswp/historia-a-fundacao-de-santa-maria-artigo-de-eduardo-rolim>>.

<sup>3</sup> Established by Law No. 1322, of July 15, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> IBGE. Available at: <<https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/rs/santa-maria/panorama>>.

<sup>5</sup> “Xis” is a popular sandwich in Brazil, particularly in the southern region. The name is an adaptation of the English word cheeseburger. Law No. 6.879, of March 26, 2024, recognizes the Municipality of Santa Maria as the City of the Xis and includes the Festival do Xis de Santa Maria (Santa Maria Xis Festival) in the City’s Official Event Calendar, to be held annually, preferably during the second half of November.

<sup>6</sup> Art Déco is an artistic movement that emerged in Europe in the 1920s and reached Santa Maria in the 1940s. The Art Déco style is characterized by straight lines, typography, symmetry, and the pursuit of perfection. In Santa Maria, there are 16 examples of this architectural movement located along Avenida Rio Branco (Rio Branco Avenue). The avenue holds the largest continuous collection of Art Déco buildings in Latin America.

Férrea Station—now called the Gare—was declared a historical heritage site of Rio Grande do Sul<sup>7</sup> and is currently under renovation, with completion expected in 2025.

In a new cycle of territorial development, the creation of the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG) points to a possible new stage of transformation for Santa Maria's historic and cultural downtown area. Officially launched in April 2022, the DCCG is the result of cooperation among various social actors, both public and private, as well as the local community, with the purpose of promoting urban development through the creative economy. Among its main goals is the revitalization of the city's Historic Center, aiming to transform it into an open, popular, and convivial public space that fosters sustainable development (PMSM, 2022).

The creative economy comprises a set of economic activities based on creativity and cultural expression, using creativity as a tool for producing goods and services. Its main characteristic is achieving results through a collaborative culture, seeking to actively engage the public in the creation or improvement of goods and processes, thus generating value exchange and diverse experiences (Gomez & Oliveira, 2016). According to the United Nations (2023), this is still a developing concept, as it lies at the intersection of knowledge, technology, intellectual property, ideas, and human creativity. Furthermore, culture and creativity hold non-monetary value capable of fostering dialogue among people and stimulating development. The UN (2023) also highlights that the creative economy is a dynamic sector that drives global development, representing **6.2%** of jobs worldwide and **3.1%** of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In June 2024, Brazil's Ministry of Culture issued Normative Instruction No. 13 under the Lei Rouanet (Rouanet Law), recognizing territories with creative vocations as strategic spaces for building an economic development agenda through culture and establishing mechanisms for financial support in these territories<sup>8</sup>.

According to the State Secretariat for Planning, Governance and Management of Rio Grande do Sul (Secretaria de Planejamento, Governança e Gestão do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul – SPGG, 2024), Rio Grande do Sul is the fifth Brazilian state with the largest number of enterprises in the creative economy sector, totaling 30,987 establishments—equivalent to **6.8%** of all establishments in the state and **7.6%** of those in the sector nationwide. Moreover, the creative economy segment with the highest number of enterprises in the state is Information and Communication Technology (ICT), accounting for **21.8%** of the total.

In April 2022, the city of Santa Maria approved Law No. 6615/2022<sup>9</sup>, which established the Programa de Desenvolvimento da Economia Criativa de Santa Maria (Santa Maria Creative Economy Development Program). The law aims to consolidate the creative economy as a strategic axis of the city's development policy; expand financial resources for creative sectors; stimulate the creation and growth of innovation and creativity hubs within the municipality; strengthen Santa Maria's

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<sup>7</sup> Established by IPHAE Ordinance No. 30, of October 26, 2000.

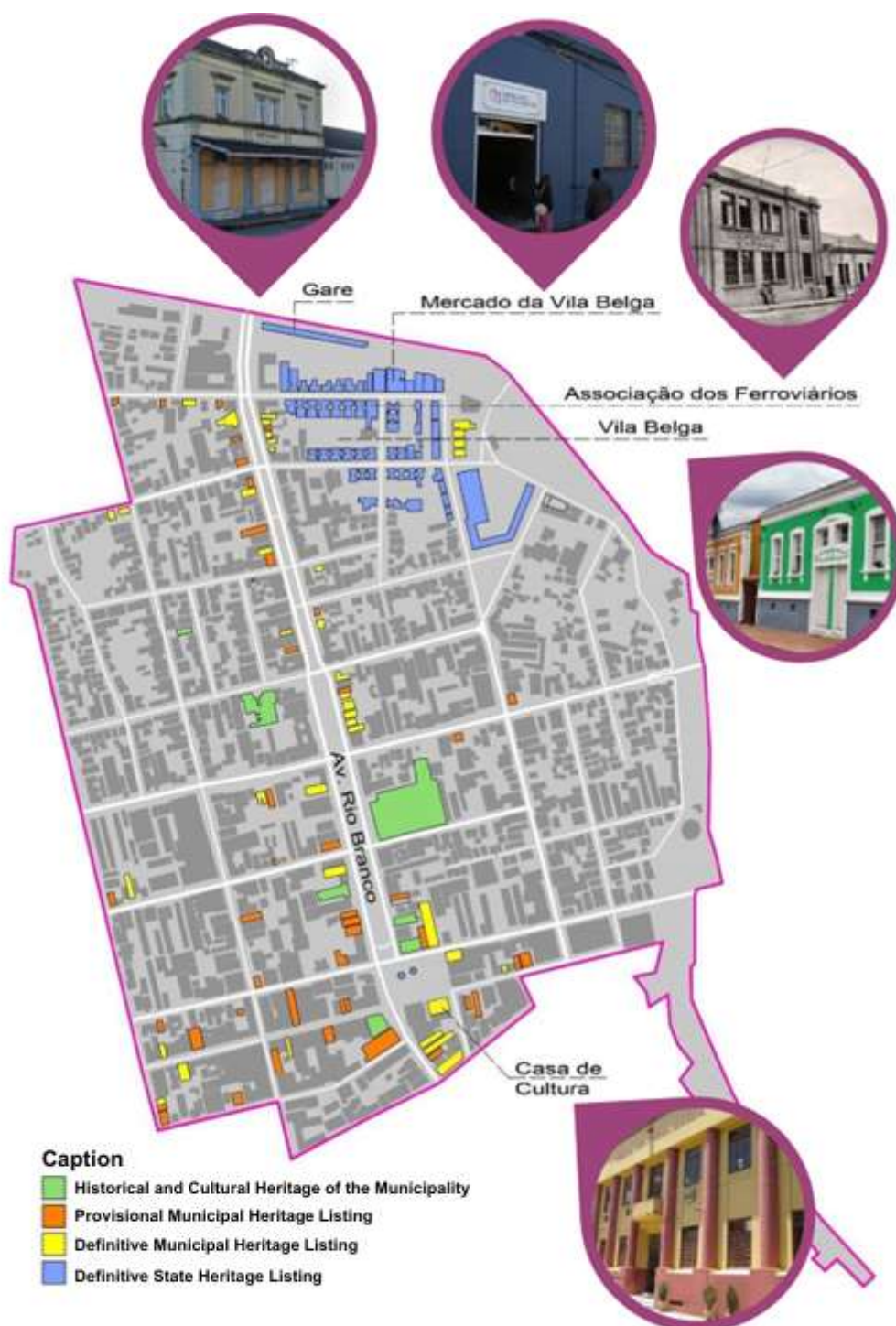
<sup>8</sup> Available at: <<https://www.gov.br/cultura/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/territorios-criativos-passam-a-ser-elegiveis-em-financiamentos-oriundos-dos-incentivos-fiscais-da-lei-rouanet>>. Accessed on: November 5, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <<https://camara-sm.rs.gov.br/atividades-legislativas/legislacao/lei/81134/lei-n--6615-2022>>. Accessed on: October 15, 2024.

brand as a creative hub in the state, the country, South America, and Mercosur; and foster the development of creative enterprises, among other objectives.

Building upon these initiatives, the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG) has gained momentum, defining an important area of the city that encompasses Santa Maria's central, historical, and cultural region (Figure 1). Furthermore, envisioning expansion to other areas of the territory, the DCCG's governance body imagines that Santa Maria will eventually be recognized not only for its creative district but as a creative city as a whole.

Figure 1 – Region of the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare



Source: Prepared by the authors (adapted from Socal and Romano (2024)).

The Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG) is organized into four committees: Governance and Public Policy; Natural and Built Environment; Creative Economy; and Identity and Cultural Resources. The Governance and Public Policy Committee seeks active social participation and interaction among diverse actors, providing a democratic and accessible environment aimed at developing creative and innovative

ideas through the sharing of knowledge and resources. The Natural and Built Environment Committee focuses on the preservation and appreciation of spaces and historical heritage. The Creative Economy Committee is dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship and innovation by supporting the creative industries. Meanwhile, the Identity and Cultural Resources Committee seeks to enhance local culture and history, social inclusion, and diversity, fostering an environment conducive to art and the generation of new ideas.

From this, we can infer that the identity of the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare is composed of the history of Santa Maria, represented today through the spaces and heritage sites that make up its landscape, such as the Gare (Viação Férrea), Vila Belga, Catedral de Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Cathedral of Our Lady of the Conception), Teatro Treze de Maio (Thirteen May Theater), Praça Saldanha Marinho (Saldanha Marinho Square), the Art Déco architectural ensemble on Avenida Rio Branco, Casa de Cultura (currently under renovation), Sociedade União dos Caixeiros Viajantes – SUCV Building (under renovation), Clube Caixeiral (in decay), Calçada Salvador Isaia (Salvador Isaia Promenade), Parque Itaimbé (Itaimbé Park), and the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria – Prédio da Antiga Reitoria (Federal University of Santa Maria – Former Rectorate Building). These elements, when considered individually, may not be highly representative; however, when grouped together within the movement of the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare, they form a shared sense of purpose that values the santamariense community and fosters identification and a sense of belonging among the various actors and their spaces.

Based on the foregoing, and in an effort to understand the representation of the DCCG in its identity construction, we turn our attention to online media, analyzing news reports related to the DCCG between 2022 and 2023.

#### 4 The Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare in Online Media

Our investigation is based on an exploratory study in the field of media production, aiming to understand the construction of the DCCG's identity in online media. To this end, we searched for online news media containing records that mentioned the DCCG, identified through the Google News platform<sup>10</sup>. We found 44 news articles<sup>11</sup> published in the following online outlets: Diário de Santa Maria<sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>10</sup> Google News is a tool that gathers news from thousands of sources around the world. It organizes articles by topic to provide quick access to reliable websites and news outlets, helping to prevent the spread of fake news. The platform has its own news policy and a set of editorial guidelines for article pages, which limits the news content available in the search engine. Available at: <[https://support.google.com/news/publisher-center/answer/6204050?visit\\_id=637375408719583337-906074398&rd=1](https://support.google.com/news/publisher-center/answer/6204050?visit_id=637375408719583337-906074398&rd=1)>.

<sup>11</sup> At this stage, our search was conducted using the keywords “Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare” and “Distrito Criativo” + “Santa Maria” to compose our corpus, applied in Google’s search engine through the Google News search format.

<sup>12</sup> NEWCO SM Empresa Jornalística Ltda, known as Diário de Santa Maria, began operations in 2016, offering print editions, digital platforms, and products such as Bei (a news portal focused on public safety), Revista Persona, TV Diário, and Rádio CDN. Available at: <<https://diariosm.com.br/>>. Accessed on: October 15, 2024.

Claudemir Pereira<sup>13</sup>, Paralelo 29<sup>14</sup>, Jornal Cidades<sup>15</sup>, Grandes Nomes da Propaganda<sup>16</sup>, Correio do Povo<sup>17</sup>, Revista News<sup>18</sup>, the Secretaria de Cultura – SEDAC (State Secretariat of Culture), and the Federação das Associações de Municípios do Rio Grande do Sul – FAMURS (Federation of Associations of Municipalities of Rio Grande do Sul).

In a second exploratory phase, we searched for news articles that mentioned locations composing the historic center of the city of Santa Maria, also through the Google News platform: Gare, Vila Belga, Calçada Salvador Isaia (Salvador Isaia Promenade), Praça Saldanha Marinho (Saldanha Marinho Square), Parque Itaimbé (Itaimbé Park), and Avenida Rio Branco (Rio Branco Avenue). We found 177 news articles representing actions linked to the DCCG between 2022 and 2023—even if not mentioning the district directly, yet still related to it—across the same outlets listed previously, with the addition of GZH<sup>19</sup>, Bei Notícias<sup>20</sup> and Alcir 61<sup>21</sup>.

We organized and categorized the total of 221 news articles using content analysis (Bardin, 2011), resulting in six categories (Figure 2): 1) Public Policy and International Relations; 2) Revitalization and Urban Projects; 3) Historical Heritage; 4) Creative Economy and Entrepreneurship Initiatives; 5) Celebrations and Events; 6) Artistic and Cultural Interventions.

Figure 2 – Methodological Process

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<sup>13</sup> Claudemir Pereira is a journalist who graduated from UFSM in 1983 and has owned the news website of the same name since 2005. Claudemir is also the anchor of the daily program Sala de Debate on Rádio CDN (since 2002) and writes a weekly column of political news and analysis for the Diário Santa Maria. Available at: <<https://claudemirpereira.com.br/>>. Accessed on: October 15, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Website featuring current affairs, political coverage, elections, and major news from Santa Maria and the surrounding region. Available at: <<https://paralelo29.com.br/>>. Accessed on: October 15, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Since 1996, Jornal Cidades has been dedicated exclusively to highlighting the achievements of municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul. The newspaper covers each region's economy and also serves as a platform for publishing public procurement notices. Available at: <<https://www.jornaldocomercio.com/jornal-cidades>>.

<sup>16</sup> For over 20 years, Grandes Nomes da Propaganda (Great Names of Advertising) has been the most traditional online platform covering excellence in advertising and communication in Brazil. Available at: <<https://grandesnomesdapropaganda.com.br/>>.

<sup>17</sup> Correio do Povo is a Brazilian daily newspaper in tabloid format belonging to the Record Group, with circulation in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. It was founded on October 1, 1895, by journalist Caldas Júnior, then 27 years old. Available at: <<https://www.correiodopovo.com.br/>>. Accessed on: October 15, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> The Revista News portal was founded in late 2017 and publishes news about politics, economy, culture, health, education, sports, leisure, and more. Available at: <<https://revistanews.com.br/>>.

<sup>19</sup> GZH was launched in September 2017 and is the digital journalism brand of the RBS Group. It includes content produced by Zero Hora and Rádio Gaúcha, as well as exclusively digital productions. The newspaper Zero Hora, founded in 1964, is the largest in Rio Grande do Sul and the fifth largest in Brazil. Available at: <<https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/praticas-editoriais/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Bei Notícias is a news portal affiliated with the Diário Group.

<sup>21</sup> Alcir 61 is a news portal focused on the cities of Santa Maria and Júlio de Castilhos, created by João Alcir Vandair Batista.



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Next, we related the categories created to the DCCG Committees (Figure 2): Governance Committee – Public Policy and International Relations; Natural and Built Environment Committee – Revitalization, Urban Projects, and Historical Heritage; Creative Economy Committee – Creative Economy and Entrepreneurship Initiatives; and Identity and Cultural Resources Committee – Celebrations, Local Events, and Artistic and Cultural Interventions.

Our first step was to examine the number of news articles within each category and their distribution. We observed a significant concentration of coverage around the city’s revitalization movement- 51% of the articles - primarily involving public works overseen by the Natural and Built Environment Committee, such as the renovation of Calçadão Salvador Isaia (Salvador Isaia Promenade), Praça Saldanha Marinho (Saldanha Marinho Square), and the Gare, as well as improvements in lighting along Avenida Rio Branco (Rio Branco Avenue), the Concha Acústica (Acoustic Shell), among other spaces. This revitalization process, focused on structural transformation, seeks to make the city more attractive and sustainable, consequently improving residents’ quality of life and sense of safety within their environment. This finding highlights a movement still in its early stages of operation—the DCCG is approximately two years old—whose latent focus lies in enhancing the city’s infrastructure, recovering public spaces, and transforming the urban environment to provide greater safety and well-being.

It is important to emphasize that the information disseminated in the media reflects ongoing revitalization processes within the DCCG. This means it is still too early to assess whether gentrification is taking place in the territory, as there is insufficient information to confirm or deny its occurrence. However, this is a concern that must be considered in territorial development processes.

A second point to highlight is the relatively low number of news articles related to the “Governance” - 2% - and “Creative Economy” - 5% - committees. Furthermore, in the articles categorized under “Public Policy and International Relations,” we observed efforts aimed at structuring and professionalizing the

DCCG's actions, though they are largely tied to governmental representation—led by the Prefeitura de Santa Maria (Municipal Government of Santa Maria/RS). Meanwhile, within the category “Creative Economy and Entrepreneurship Initiatives,” we note that the actions reported do not necessarily represent the actual work of the Creative Economy Committee, as many activities are not publicly available in the media despite being carried out. These are actions of public interest, meaning they should be accessible to society. This raises questions about the lack of communication professionals working within the DCCG to promote public communication, especially given that the local santamariense community is interested in matters related to the district—issues that are of public relevance but are not effectively reaching the public.

When examining the news related to the Identity and Cultural Resources Committee, we observed a significant concentration of actions focused on Local Events - 30% -, along with those categorized as Artistic and Cultural Interventions - 9%. We understand that these actions play an important role in the city's development, as they attract visitors and enrich the tourist experience by allowing contact with the authentic culture of the region, immersing participants in traditions and local history. Moreover, events and artistic and cultural interventions foster sociability and new connections, which contribute to the construction of belonging and identification with the territory.

Among the events and artistic interventions identified are: Festival do Xis, Carnaval, Calourada (student welcome festival), Feira do Livro (Book Fair), Brique da Vila Belga (Vila Belga Street Market), artistic performances, Parada LGBT Alternativa (Alternative LGBT Parade), Parada do Orgulho (Pride Parade), Santa Summit, and the Seminário Regional de Artesãos (Regional Artisans' Seminar). Some of these cultural productions originate directly from the DCCG movement—such as Santa Summit—while others have evolved into local traditions, such as the Feira do Livro and Brique da Vila Belga, which continue to operate independently of promotional efforts.

It is also important to highlight that such actions related to events and artistic interventions only truly contribute to the identity of a territory when the community is mobilized and engaged—that is, when residents feel a sense of belonging to the initiatives and connection to the territory. Belonging is generated when the community is involved in the process of territorial development and identifies with it. This includes participation in decisions regarding the use of space, as well as in events and cultural practices that represent local diversity.

Therefore, we understand that the DCCG's development movement is in a process of growth and maturation and will likely unfold through at least three stages: heritage revitalization, the creation of attractive public spaces, and the social mobilization of the actors who make up the territory. Based on our analysis of online media records, the DCCG's current efforts appear to be concentrated on heritage revitalization and the creation of attractive public spaces. Thus, as a next step in the territory's development, we expect community engagement to be addressed more effectively.

## 5 Final Considerations

Revisiting some key reflections, our investigation sought to examine the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG) of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, through the lens of communication and development, focusing on media production based on online media records. As the guiding thread of this research, we emphasize communication as an essential element for understanding the articulating processes of territorial development—particularly in strengthening identity. Furthermore, the cultural identity of a territory is shaped by values, traditions, and practices, with the media playing a central role in the (re)production of these meanings.

Historically known as the “City of Culture”, Santa Maria’s history is deeply connected to the creation of the railway, which initially gave rise to spaces such as the Gare and the Vila Belga. In a second moment, the founding of the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM) and other higher education institutions marked another cycle of development, followed by the establishment of the Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare (DCCG). In this sense, the DCCG stands as a relevant territorial unit with multiple potentialities and the primary goal of revitalizing the historic center, recovering and valuing the city’s images and symbols, promoting sustainable development, and mobilizing social actors and segments in a collective effort.

At the same time, the DCCG raises concerns regarding gentrification, since the revitalization of degraded and central urban spaces often serves as a stage for the displacement of working-class populations to the margins, while attracting higher-income groups. For this reason, we emphasize the importance of public policies and actions aimed at minimizing such impacts, ensuring that lower-income populations can remain in these spaces and develop alongside the territory.

From the analysis of online media records about the DCCG, we observed a concentration of news related to urban revitalization, revealing a focus on heritage renewal and the creation of attractive public spaces—key and initial stages in a broader process of territorial transformation. However, identity construction and the sense of belonging are equally important dimensions that must permeate all stages of territorial development. For this to occur, actions are needed that actively mobilize the community and connect it to the territory—from decisions about the use of spaces, to DCCG governance, and through cultural practices—encouraging a mediated and participatory process of collective construction.

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Submetido em: 29/11/2024

Aprovado em: 27/11/2025

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