



Creative rural territories: from geographical proximity to the construction of social proximity

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Abstract

This article analyzes initiatives of sustainable territorial development in Brazilian rural territories based on the concept of specific territorial resources. The research problem concerns the mismatch between the wide range of existing empirical experiences and the limited theoretical appropriation of this concept by territorial actors and public managers. The objective is to examine the relevance and adaptive capacity of the creative territories approach, originally developed in the European context, when applied to rural realities marked by socioeconomic and environmental inequalities. The theoretical framework draws on the approaches of territorial proximity and the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services. Methodologically, the study combines a literature review with results from exploratory empirical research conducted in four rural territories located in the states of Santa Catarina, Paraná, Maranhão, and Pará, including interinstitutional seminars and field visits. The results indicate that the valorization of material, immaterial, and human territorial resources strongly depends on social proximity, collective action, and the articulation among multiple actors. The article concludes that strategies based on territorial specification and plural governance systems can strengthen sustainable territorial development projects in rural Brazil.

Keywords: Sustainable territorial development. Collective action. Territorial governance. Territorial specification.

Resumo

O artigo analisa iniciativas de desenvolvimento territorial sustentável em territórios rurais brasileiros a partir do conceito de recursos territoriais específicos. O problema de pesquisa refere-se ao descompasso entre a multiplicidade de experiências empíricas existentes e a limitada apropriação teórica desse conceito por atores territoriais e gestores públicos. O objetivo é examinar a pertinência e a capacidade adaptativa do enfoque dos territórios criativos, originalmente formulado no contexto europeu, frente a realidades rurais marcadas por desigualdades socioeconômicas e ambientais. O referencial teórico apoia-se nas abordagens da proximidade territorial e da Cesta de Bens e Serviços Territoriais. Metodologicamente, o estudo combina revisão bibliográfica com resultados preliminares de pesquisas empíricas de caráter exploratório realizadas em quatro territórios rurais dos estados de Santa Catarina, Paraná, Maranhão e Pará, incluindo seminários interinstitucionais e incursões a campo. Os resultados indicam que a valorização de recursos territoriais materiais, imateriais e humanos depende fortemente da proximidade social, da ação coletiva e da articulação entre múltiplos atores. Conclui-se que estratégias baseadas na especificação territorial e em sistemas de governança plurais podem fortalecer projetos de desenvolvimento territorial sustentável no meio rural brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento territorial sustentável. Ação coletiva. Governança territorial. Especificação territorial.

Resumen

El artículo analiza iniciativas de desarrollo territorial sostenible en territorios rurales brasileños a partir del concepto de recursos territoriales específicos. El problema de investigación se refiere al desajuste entre la amplia diversidad de experiencias empíricas existentes y la limitada apropiación teórica de este concepto por parte de actores territoriales y gestores públicos. El objetivo es examinar la pertinencia y la capacidad adaptativa del enfoque de los territorios creativos, formulado originalmente en el contexto europeo, frente a realidades rurales marcadas por desigualdades socioeconómicas y ambientales. El marco teórico se apoya en los enfoques de la proximidad territorial y de la Cesta de Bienes y Servicios Territoriales. Metodológicamente, el estudio combina una revisión bibliográfica con resultados de investigaciones empíricas de carácter exploratorio realizadas en cuatro territorios rurales de los estados de Santa Catarina, Paraná, Maranhão y Pará, incluyendo seminarios interinstitucionales y visitas de campo. Los resultados indican que la valorización de recursos territoriales materiales, inmateriales y humanos depende fuertemente de la proximidad social, de la acción colectiva y de la articulación entre múltiples actores. Se concluye que las estrategias basadas en la especificación territorial y en sistemas de gobernanza plurales pueden fortalecer proyectos de desarrollo territorial sostenible en el medio rural brasileño.

Palabras clave: Desarrollo territorial sostenible. Acción colectiva. Gobernanza territorial. Especificación territorial.

1 Introduction

Since the late 1970s, rural Brazil has been the stage for numerous counter-hegemonic development projects, initially led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in partnership with social and labor movements. After four decades of experimentation, several projects, previously called alternative, have expanded their socio-productive and geographic scales. Social coalitions have advanced to involve public and private actors, as well as to form associative entities with greater capacity

for political negotiation and market participation. Although a systematized national inventory of these experiences does not yet exist, different studies have highlighted the presence of territorialized sustainable rural development initiatives in various regions of the country, involving diverse forms of collective organization and social construction of markets (Cazella et al., 2019; Medeiros; Sablayrolles; Cazella, 2021; Tecchio et al., 2021; Froehlich; Roque, 2022). These cases invariably mobilize specific territorial resources, but often without the social actors involved recognizing the complexity and potential of this concept to enhance their empirical actions. In many rural territories, deviant and creative sustainable territorial development projects coexist with the hegemonic actions of economic development (Gasselin et al., 2021).

In some rural Brazilian territories, initiatives initially considered marginal or alternative have become important territorialized markets, linking products, services, cultural heritage, and specific environmental resources. Studies conducted in different regions of Santa Catarina show that family-run agro-industries, territorially based tourism services, and collective strategies for valuing local products have contributed to income generation, employment, and the strengthening of territorial dynamics, while simultaneously reinforcing mechanisms for environmental preservation and cultural appreciation (Ramos et al., 2024; Ribeiro; Capellesso; Cazella, 2024; Capellesso; Ely; Wichert, 2026).

This article aims to understand the distinct facets of this concept, originally conceived for the socioeconomic realities of Western Europe, and to evaluate its relevance to diverse territorial contexts marked by profound social inequalities. This reflection therefore takes into account the socio-adaptive purpose of both the academic community and public managers as well as territorial actors involved in the conception and implementation of sustainable territorial development actions in Brazil, especially in rural areas.

From a methodological point of view, this article has a theoretical-analytical and exploratory character, combining a specialized bibliographic review with partial results of empirical research carried out in four Brazilian rural territories, located in the states of Santa Catarina, Paraná, Maranhão, and Pará. The choice of these empirical situations did not follow criteria of statistical representativeness, but rather the identification of experiences that demonstrate processes of valuing specific territorial resources, building territorialized markets, and mobilizing forms of collective action aimed at sustainable territorial development. The selected territories present significant sociocultural, environmental, and institutional diversity, allowing for the exploration of different modes of activation and specification of territorial resources.

Empirical research was conducted within the framework of interinstitutional projects linked to the Amazon +10 Initiative, involving research teams from different Brazilian universities. Between 2024 and 2025, a series of working seminars, methodological planning meetings, exploratory field visits, direct observations, and dialogues with territorial organizations, local leaders, producers, service providers, and representatives of public and associative institutions were carried out. As a data production strategy, a semi-structured interview guide common to the four territories investigated was collectively constructed. The instrument included questions related to mobilized territorial resources, forms of governance, cooperation dynamics, market building, cultural and environmental heritage, and

perspectives on sustainable territorial development. Inspired by relational qualitative approaches, the guide maintained sufficient flexibility to incorporate the historical, sociocultural, institutional, and environmental specificities of each investigated context, allowing emerging categories and themes to be explored in depth during fieldwork.

The systematization of empirical materials involved organizing field notes, interviews, institutional documents, and secondary information produced in the territories. The analytical treatment was guided by the framework of the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services (BTGS) approach, especially through the categories of social proximity, territorial specification, multi-actor governance, social construction of markets, and valorization of specific territorial resources.

Rather than establishing comparisons between cases or constructing territorial typologies, the analysis sought to identify relationships, convergences, tensions, and singularities present in the different experiences investigated. From this perspective, territories were understood as unique socio-spatial configurations, resulting from their own historical trajectories and distinct forms of articulation between actors, resources, and institutions. The interpretative effort therefore focused on identifying elements capable of contributing to reflection on the possibilities, limitations, and adaptations necessary for mobilizing the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services approach in Brazilian rural realities marked by high territorial diversity.

Beyond this introduction and concluding remarks, the first part of the article discusses examples of French rural territories, whose reflections are at the origin of the concept of specific territorial resources, followed by a second part that delves deeper into the theoretical bases of this concept. The third part identifies potential specific territorial resources present in four cases of Brazilian rural territories, in which research on the subject is being conducted.

2 Creative rural territories: the social construction of territorial resources

The notion of creative territories adopted here is based on the study by Glon and Pecqueur (2016, p. 12)¹, for whom imagination, creativity, the exchange of experiences, and new ideas fostered in these territories lead to an understanding of the dual nature of territorial proximity: one geographical, resulting from the fact that social actors are spatially close, and another social. “An individual can be geographically close to their neighbor without this generating exchanges of ideas, meetings, dynamic processes, initiatives, or particular actions.” The constitutive proximity of the territory is, therefore, simultaneously geographical and social, which allows for the conception of collective actions of appropriation and valorization of specific territorial resources.

This dual proximity underlies a wide range of original forms of social organization and the conception of sustainable territorial development projects. From the earliest formulations inspired by industrial districts to the most recent studies on the subject, it is clear that the initiatives are not restricted to the economic

¹ Throughout this article, excerpts originally published in Brazilian Portuguese have been rendered into American English using a free translation approach to preserve the contextual intent and readability.

field in the classical sense of the term. The organization of a music festival or other forms of cultural events, the mobilization of knowledge and traditions, the maintenance of quality of life, and the protection of the environment and biodiversity are, very frequently, at the heart of innovative territorial dynamics.

Actions of this nature are not limited to marketing purposes, as they generate other motivations on the part of their organizers and even on the part of the visitors. This conjunction of commercial and non-commercial interests configures a socio-ecological system of social actors based on the triad of social proximity, collective intelligence, and specification of territorial resources (Hirczak; Janin; Lapostolle, 2022; Cazella; Dorigon; Pecqueur, 2022). At the heart of this system lies the dual concern for socio-environmental equity. An example cited by the authors, which reinforces the conjunction of economic and socio-environmental motivations, concerns the Geographical Indication (GI) of Saint Nectaire cheese from Auvergne². Created in 1955, the producers of this cheese have taken on new challenges, mostly aimed at reinforcing respect for tradition and environmental preservation. Genetically modified corn and other feed supplements are prohibited, and grazing in native pastures is encouraged for at least 160 days a year. Because it is a mountainous region, the animals are kept in stables during the winter months. A partnership with a Regional Natural Park has increased the product's visibility, and a local breed is undergoing rehabilitation.

The collective brand *Prove Ardèche (Goûtez l'Ardèche)*, in turn, was conceived in 1991, on the initiative of the Agricultural Office of the Department of Ardèche, but over time it incorporated the service and commerce sectors into its governance system. The brand's name was inspired by diffuse actions already occurring in the territory, such as restaurant menus and producer advertisements, which used the slogan *Goûtez l'Ardèche*. Over time, the public authorities acted to improve and give greater institutional density to the initiative. The brand consolidated collective governance mechanisms and the definition of territorial quality standards, involving producers, service providers, and consumers in the shared construction of criteria for differentiating products and services associated with the territory.

The brand's origin is also linked to a sustainable territorial development initiative promoted by the Department focused on revitalizing the chestnut, naturally produced in the region. The process of reviving this product took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after decades of neglect. This initiative involved producers, processors, and restaurant owners, but also had the support of the professional team from the Regional Natural Park. *Monts d'Ardèche*, an organization that began its activities around the same time (Peyrache-Gadeau; Perron; Janin, 2016).

These French examples of creative rural territories enabled the formulation, in the early 2000s, of the theoretical-methodological approach of the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services (Pecqueur, 2001). This approach encompasses actions by territorial actors who value, in an articulated way, products and services of differentiated quality, incorporating the territory's setting, represented by its

² Products and services with a Geographical Indication (GI) originate from defined geographical areas that have a reputation for quality assured by both production standards and traditional practices. Inspired by European law, Law No. 9.279 in Brazil recognizes a GI as a collective intellectual property asset, eligible for official registration by the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI - Instituto Nacional da Propriedade Industrial, in Brazil).

natural, historical, and architectural heritage, and traditional know-how. These actors belong to diverse socio-professional categories and, over time, a territorial governance system has been built by multiple actors, whether they are public officials, producers and private service providers, or associative forms of these two categories of actors (Cazella et al., 2019; 2020; Medeiros; Sablayrolles; Cazella, 2021, Milan; Cazella, 2022; Froehlich; Roque, 2022; Capelesso et al., 2022).

The motivating element consists of providing a heterogeneous supply of products and services of territorial quality, capable of generating income of territorial quality. For Campagne (2016), income, in the sense of classical economists, represents revenue earned without the need for additional work. Income of territorial quality is the result of two types of quality: the intrinsic quality of products and services and the quality of the territory itself, arising, in particular, from its differentiating attributes revealed and valued by multi-stakeholder initiatives. The conception of the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services approach was preceded by reflections on procedures for specifying territorial resources, which became a foundational concept of this approach.

More than replicable models, the valorization of specific territorial resources depends on the historical construction of social proximities, the coordination between multiple actors, and the capacity for territorialization of cultural, environmental, and productive assets. These elements provide important analytical references for reflecting on Brazilian rural contexts marked by strong socio-spatial heterogeneity.

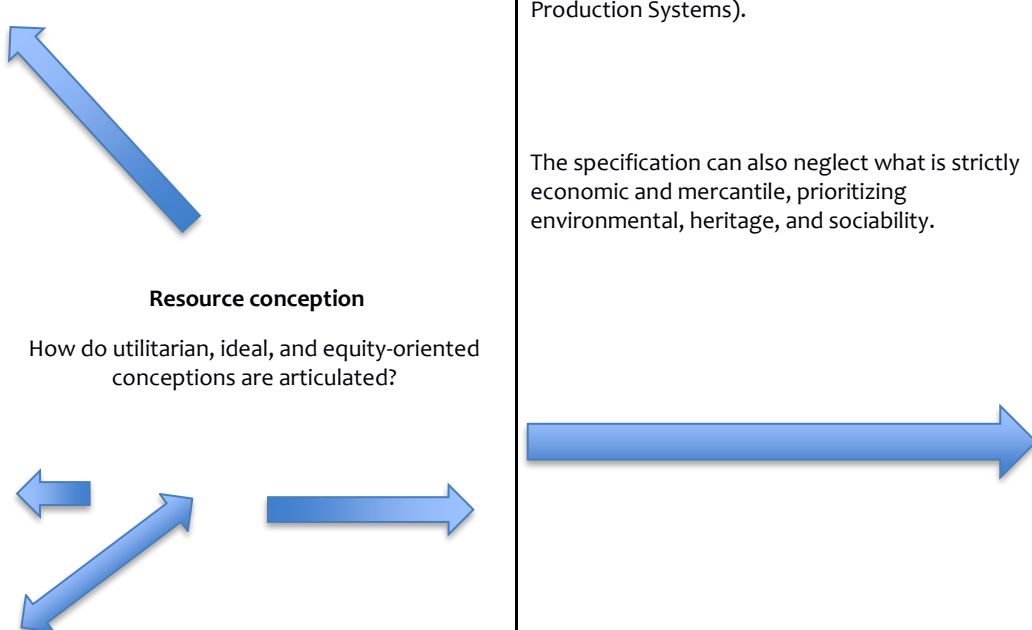
3 Valuing specific territorial resources: the desirable coalition of multiple actors

Table I below summarizes more than two decades of empirical research and theoretical debates, beginning with the pioneering study by Colletis and Pecqueur (1993) on what is currently termed “specific territorial resources”. This type of resource is not limited to the productive field, as it also encompasses sociocultural, environmental, patrimonial, and symbolic dimensions of territories. Although market rationality often predominates in contemporary development strategies, it frequently fails to account for the diversity of territorialized initiatives observed in different contexts (Gumuchian; Pecqueur, 2007; Glon; Pecqueur, 2016; Cazella et al., 2019; Tecchio et al., 2021). This perspective engages with Latin American interpretations of territory that emphasize its socially constructed and relational nature, marked by historical power asymmetries (Santos, 2000; Haesbaert, 2004).

The three types of resources considered in this analysis – material, immaterial, and human – are discussed according to utilitarian, ideal, and equity conceptions, which respectively correspond to distinct modes of valorization: exploitation, activation, and specification. Material resources have a spatial objectification that is easily perceptible when compared with immaterial resources. In the utilitarian view, market motivations predominate, and material resources represent the priority locus of action strategies. In this view, exploitation corresponds to the most recurrent mode of valorizing resources and, consequently, to the most superficial one. Thus, there is a partial valorization of the range of territorial resources, prioritizing economic relations with limited scope for negotiation or for the adoption of

measures aimed at mitigating the negative externalities of this type of valorization on the environment and the social fabric of the territory.

Table I: From the unequal valorization of resources to their territorial specification

Types of resources	Socio-systems (Intentions and their expressions)					
	Conception			Modes of resource valorization		
	Utilitarianism	Ideal	Equity	Exploitation	Activation	Specification
	Strictly mercantile view	Key role of the imaginary, memory, spiritual and symbolic representations	Pursuit of social and environmental justice	Partial valorization of resources within a mercantile perspective and without negotiation of induced effects	Intermediate stage	Overall and specific valorization of resources with the emergence of territorial specificities
Material resources Objectified in space. e.g. a forest, a company, a landscape.	 Resource conception How do utilitarian, ideal, and equity-oriented conceptions are articulated?			From the most superficial initiative (exploitation) to the most advanced (specification). The specification may be based on all or part of the resources from an economic and mercantile perspective, or only partly mercantile (e.g., Local Production Systems). The specification can also neglect what is strictly economic and mercantile, prioritizing environmental, heritage, and sociability.		
Immaterial resources Objectification less perceptible or more difficult to perceive. e.g. information, air, landscape, knowledge, culture, research.						
Human resources Existing or potential competencies, capacity for initiative and action, experiences and life trajectories.						

Source: Glon and Pecqueur (2016), authors' free translation.

The ideal conception, in turn, corresponds to an intermediate sphere between the two extremes (utilitarianism and equity) and is associated with the human resources of each territory and their collective ways of conceiving and activating resources, especially those of an immaterial nature. “The beauty of a forest landscape, of a mountain range, the air at the seashore rich in iodine and in the forest in the morning impregnated with the smells of humus correspond to the ideal conception of resources” (Glon; Pecqueur, 2016, p. 20). In this conception, the imaginary, historical memory, and spiritual and symbolic representations gain meaning and prominence, acting as a counterpoint to excessive utilitarianism.

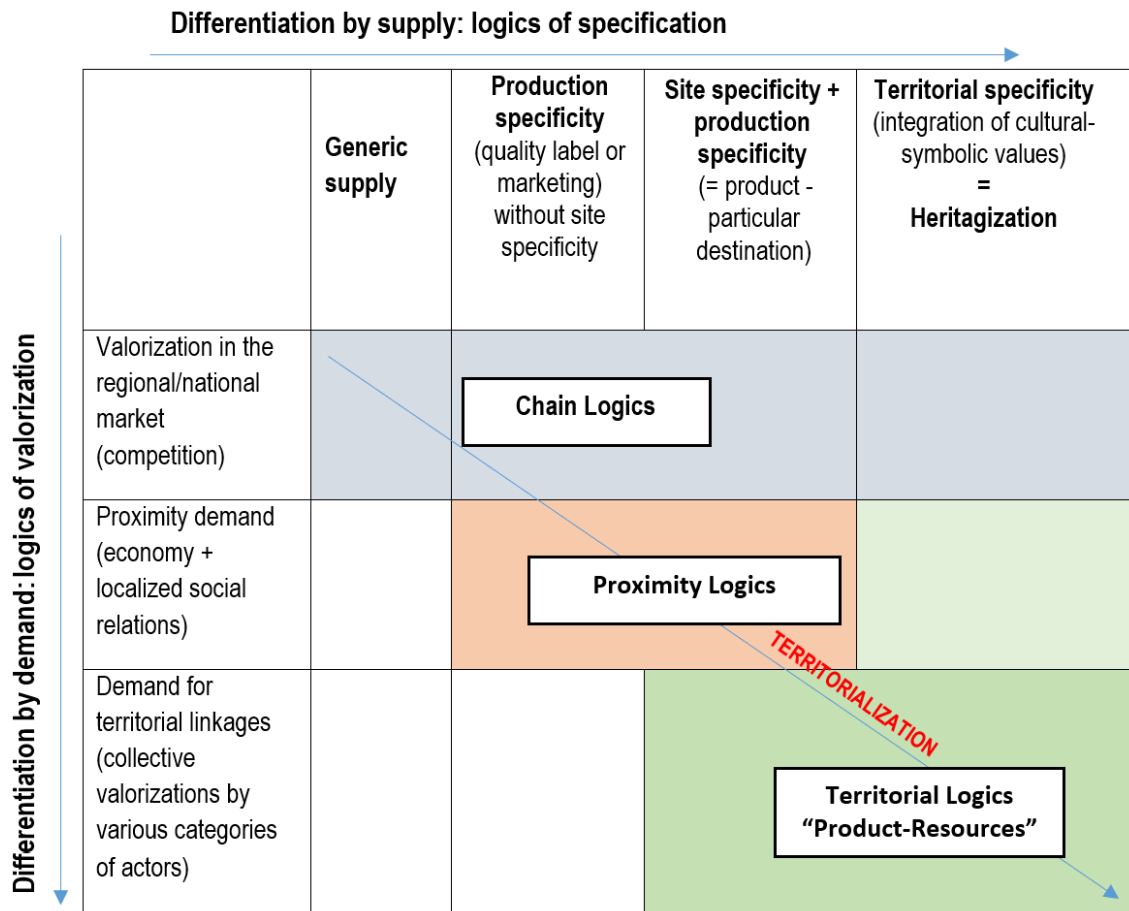
In the third conception, the activation of specific territorial resources occurs through actions that seek greater equity. By integrating elements aimed at sociocultural inclusion and the reduction of social inequalities, as well as environmental protection in a broader sense, this conception corresponds to a more distributive and equitable form. Thus, the specification of territorial resources represents a more complex mode of territorial valorization, articulating economic, sociocultural, environmental, and patrimonial dimensions. From this perspective, specification processes tend to involve denser forms of social coordination, collective construction of meanings, and territorialized governance mechanisms. Moreover, territorial specification processes do not occur linearly or consensually, frequently involving disputes over the legitimate uses of resources, forms of territorial representation, and the distribution of generated benefits.

This analysis reaffirms the understanding that territories constitute complex and heterogeneous social configurations, in which distinct rationalities, interests, and forms of resource appropriation coexist. Territorial dynamics are traversed by cooperative relationships, but also by conflicts, institutional disputes, and socio-spatial inequalities that condition the possibilities of territorial valorization. In this sense, processes of crisis, economic transformation, and institutional reconfiguration tend to produce adaptations in forms of governance, socio-political representations, and collective development strategies. Greater or lesser territorial creativity is associated with the capacity of groups of actors to formulate new ideas, build collective learning processes, and establish interactions with diverse actors, allowing for the conception of unprecedented initiatives for the specification and valorization of territorial resources. The capacities of human resources to provide new skills based on past experiences and contemporary initiatives of coalitions of territorial actors are profoundly differentiated.

Figure 1, conceived by Perron and Janin (2020), helps us to understand the forms of resource differentiation, based on the logics of specification and valorization. Differentiation by supply presents a gradient of specification ranging from the supply of generic products, without attributes or differentiating specifications, to the supply of products with notable quality associated with the specific characteristics of the territory. In the latter situation, the mobilization of cultural and symbolic values is evident and adds to the intrinsic quality of the products. In the interval between these two extreme situations – generic supply and territorial specificity – there is a gradient of forms of specification frequently associated with the use of quality labels and marketing initiatives of differentiated production systems, without explicit links to the territory being incorporated. The

linking of production systems to sites or locations where production takes place occurs in a manner lacking cultural and symbolic values.

Figure 1: Resource characterization: differentiation based on supply and demand



Source: Perron and Janin (2020), authors' free translation.

Differentiation based on demand presents three modes of valorization, according to the existing relationships between products and services and space. This type of differentiation has, at one extreme, an undifferentiated demand of the regional or national market and, at the other, a demand with strong territorial ties. Between these two poles lies proximity demand, which incorporates elements associated with the local economy and localized social relations. Proximity demand includes relationships of mutual knowledge between producers and consumers, with marked informality in commercial transactions, especially of food products.

The last line of Figure 1, in turn, incorporates a closer relationship between producers or service providers and consumers, which is obtained as a result of a social construction that includes the participation of resource "producers". In the case of food, these producers are not limited to the socio-professional category of farmers. There is a diversity of other actors linked to economic, associative, public, and socio-cultural activities. According to Perron and Janin (2020, p. 113), the diagonal line in this diagram "reflects a logic of territorialization considered here as the collective construction of actors engaged in a territorial valorization of resources". For the same product, different forms of valorization can be adopted, ranging from integration into the national or even international market, to more territorially

grounded initiatives. This is the case of the Ardèche chestnut, marketed through national and international channels, but also within the territorial market. In these cases, the links with cultural, gastronomic, and tourist activities of the territory are diverse and essential.

In the Brazilian context, such territorialization processes occur in profoundly unequal ways, conditioned by asymmetries in infrastructure, access to public policies, organizational capacities, and distinct historical forms of territorial integration into markets. This heterogeneity reinforces the importance of understanding territorial experiences not as replicable models, but as context-specific social constructions.

4 Case studies in Brazil on the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services: inventories of specific territorial resources

Adapting the BTGS approach to Brazilian realities requires considering the profound socio-spatial inequalities and heterogeneity of existing territorialities in the country. In this sense, the debate engages with contributions from the field of regional development and Latin American territorial studies, especially those related to multiterritoriality (Haesbaert, 2004), the unequal use of territory (Santos, 2000), the territorial dynamics of rural development (Favareto, 2007), and forms of territorial governance. In this last part of the article, the intention is to reflect on whether, within the tangle of territorial diversity, theoretical and empirical lessons can be glimpsed that can serve as inspiration for actors in other territories, while still undergoing adaptive dynamics. The main reason for carrying out this reflection is linked to the implementation of a research project funded by the Amazonas +10 Initiative of the Brazilian National Council to State Funding Agencies (CONFAP - *Conselho Nacional das Fundações Estaduais de Amparo à Pesquisa*, in Brazil).

In this specific case, the team consists of researchers from Pará, Maranhão, Paraná, and Santa Catarina, thus highlighting the existence of profound differences in various dimensions – socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural – between the states of the South and the North of the country. From the research project's inception, it was understood that existing sustainable territorial development initiatives in the research territories of the Southern states, although more aligned with the theoretical approach of BTGS, would not be considered models to be directly implemented in the Amazonian context. In addition to environmental and productive differences, the Amazonian territories present historical specificities related to forms of land occupation, the presence of traditional populations, infrastructural limitations, and the distinct institutional capacities of local actors. These characteristics impose specific challenges on the processes of territorial resource valorization and the construction of collective development strategies.

Furthermore, many of the territories investigated can be understood as peripheral territories, characterized by infrastructure limitations, low institutional density, difficulties in accessing markets, and a strong dependence on public policies. In these situations, the valorization of specific territorial resources does not depend exclusively on economic initiatives, but also on the capacity for articulation between local organizations, social movements, public institutions, and multi-scalar cooperation networks.

This approach was adopted in the project with the aim of evaluating its theoretical and practical relevance to different Brazilian contexts. The adaptive purpose was already embedded in the objectives of previous research. The study by Cazella et al. (2020) represents a first analytical effort in this direction by pointing out five aspects of the BTGS approach that need to be rethought to better adapt it to Brazilian socioeconomic, environmental, and institutional conditions:

- i) include in the analysis territorial actors that are not part of the main socio-technical networks of agricultural production chains, including those based on sustainable production systems and short marketing circuits;

- ii) to discuss obtaining Territorial Quality Income detached from the assumption that this income stems from the consumer's consent to pay more for differentiated products and services, in order to include in the analysis model the different social categories of consumers in the territories;

- iii) address environmental sustainability without disregarding traditional practices that are incompatible with the current challenges posed by climate change. "Sometimes, certain management practices, even if traditional, work against improving the [BTGS] scenario and require persuasive efforts regarding the advisability of local actors altering behaviors, traditions, and technical procedures built up over time" (p. 202);

- iv) to design plural territorial governance systems that include diverse actors, based on broad social coalitions, in order to better address the challenge of social inclusion;

- v) to design training programs for territorial actors in the art of inventorying and valuing specific territorial resources.

These adaptive procedures stem from the recognition that sustainable territorial development processes occur in contexts marked by profound regional and socio-spatial inequalities. As Santos (2000) argues, territory is appropriated and used unequally by different social groups, producing asymmetrical opportunities for access to economic, political, and symbolic resources. Territorial valorization processes are also traversed by tensions between different rationalities of action. In various Brazilian contexts, initiatives aimed at income generation and market insertion coexist with demands for environmental conservation, defense of cultural heritage, and affirmation of collective identities. Such tensions are not understood as external obstacles to sustainable territorial development, but as constitutive elements of the dynamics of territorial resource specification. From this perspective, adapting the BTGS approach to Brazilian realities requires considering not only the availability of territorial resources, but also the power relations, mechanisms of exclusion, and differentiated capacities for collective action that condition their appropriation, valorization, and reproduction.

Based on this understanding, the following section presents relevant elements from the four territories that comprise the empirical universe of the research, seeking to highlight their historical, sociocultural, and institutional particularities, as well as collective initiatives with the potential to influence the valorization of specific territorial resources. It is worth mentioning that the empirical situations presented below do not intend to constitute exhaustive case studies. Their role is to mobilize evidence produced in different Brazilian rural contexts to discuss

the explanatory capacity and adaptive limits of the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services approach.

The territory of the Seara Credit Cooperative, in the western region of Santa Catarina

Since the 1980s, farming families excluded from hegemonic systems of integration with large meat and dairy agro-industries have initiated socio-political actions to develop sustainable rural development projects. In 1989, the Association of Small Producers of Western Santa Catarina (APACO - *Associação dos Pequenos Agricultores do Oeste Catarinense*, in Brazil) was established with the support of progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. Its purpose was to support productive projects carried out by groups of farming families. In the early 1990s, the search for actions to strengthen different forms of cooperation focused on the organization of rural credit cooperatives. This initiative formed the basis for the conception of a national system of credit cooperatives that identifies itself as solidarity-based. The Seara Credit Cooperative (CrediSeara), established in 1994, currently has more than 6,000 members, most of whom are from farming families. This organization operates more intensely in six rural municipalities, which together have approximately 38,000 inhabitants.

In 2008, a forum was created that brings together nineteen organizations linked to socio-productive and cultural projects in family farming, with emphasis on decentralized cooperatives that are not part of the Organization of Cooperatives of Brazil, family agro-industrial collectives, a direct-to-consumer sales association, participatory certification of organic agriculture, rural family homes, and groups with diverse vocations – raw milk cheese production, phytotherapy, handicrafts, and tourist routes, among others. The participation of women farmers in the management of these initiatives is noteworthy; currently, CrediSeara is chaired by a woman farmer.

The organizational trajectory of the territory demonstrates that territorial development processes do not stem solely from the existence of differentiated productive resources, but from the historical construction of collective capacities and institutions capable of coordinating actions among different local actors. The establishment of APACO, CrediSeara, and later, the Forum of Family Farming Entities, demonstrates the relevance of collective action and institutional density in valuing specific territorial resources. From the perspective of the BTGS, this trajectory reveals that the specification of territorial resources results less from intrinsic product attributes and more from the actors' capacity to mobilize knowledge, build trust, and develop mechanisms for territorial cooperation.

Some results from previous research, conducted in other rural territories using the BTGS approach, revealed the centrality of family-run agro-industries in valuing specific tangible and intangible territorial resources (Cazella et al., 2019; Tecchio et al., 2025; Lauermann; Capellesso; Gazolla, 2022; Ribeiro; Capellesso; Cazella, 2024). An inventory of these agro-industries in the territory where CrediSeara operates identified the existence of 45 units, which mainly operate in formal marketing channels, and the same number of family processing units considered informal

(Cazella et al., 2024)³. The significant number of formal agro-industries is due to extensive work in establishing territorial health surveillance systems, with some of these family-run agro-industries using collective brands, such as Sabor Colonial, created in 2000 by APACO (Tecchio et al., 2025; 2023). Another initiative is community-based rural tourism, which has recently begun to be implemented in the territory.

The experience illustrates one of the central aspects of the BTGS approach: the articulation between tangible and intangible resources in the construction of territorial quality. Family-run agro-industries, collective brands, territorial health surveillance systems, and emerging rural tourism initiatives express a valorization process that combines the material attributes of products with intangible resources, such as territorial identity, trust, reputation, and local knowledge. These initiatives demonstrate that the generation of territorial value depends on the capacity for coordination among organizations, not only on product differentiation.

Despite the significant organizational capacity built up over the last few decades, the territory also reveals some of the limitations identified in the adaptations of the BTGS approach to the Brazilian reality. The Forum of Family Farming Entities can be understood as an embryonic territorial governance system, but its composition remains restricted to organizations linked to family farming. The lack of participation from members of the Indigenous land within the territory, as well as urban workers and immigrants employed in large meat processing plants, suggests that territorial valorization processes still face challenges related to expanding social inclusion and building plural coalitions. In this sense, this case study simultaneously demonstrates the potential of collective action for the valorization of territorial resources and the ongoing need to expand governance mechanisms to incorporate the social diversity present in the territory.

Marajó Archipelago – Pará

The largest fluvial-marine archipelago on the planet is home to approximately 564,000 inhabitants distributed across sixteen municipalities, twelve of which are part of the Marajó Environmental Protection Area (APA Marajó). Among these municipalities, Salvaterra stands out for its significant natural attractions, such as beaches, islands, and navigable rivers. This socioculturally diverse landscape includes eighteen quilombola communities, representing approximately 30.8% of the local population (IBGE, 2023)⁴. These communities are embedded in distinct sociopolitical contexts, many of them directly facing manifestations of contemporary neocolonialism, expressed through projects and initiatives that seek to exert economic, political, and cultural dominance over quilombola territories by the construction of highways, rice farms, and promoting buffalo breeding (Dias, 2024).

³ This survey only considered establishments that had specific areas for food processing, not including transformations for commercial purposes carried out in residential kitchens.

⁴ Currently, the following quilombola communities are recognized: Bacabal, Bairro Alto, Boa Vista, Boca da Mata, Caldeirão, Cururu, Deus me Ajude, Mangueiras, Paixão, Passagem Grande, Pau Furado, Providência, Rosário, Santa Luzia, Salvar, São Benedito, Siricari, and Vila União/Campinas.

The situation observed in Salvaterra demonstrates that the processes of valuing territorial resources do not occur in neutral contexts. On the contrary, the dispute between distinct territorial projects – on the one hand, those associated with agribusiness, infrastructure expansion, and conventional tourism; and on the other, the social reproduction strategies of quilombola communities – shows that the specification of territorial resources is deeply associated with power relations. In this sense, territorial resources are not only potential economic assets but also objects of political and symbolic dispute regarding the legitimate uses of the territory.

Buffalo farming, present in the region since the 18th century, is historically an activity of economic interest. In recent decades, the establishment of new agricultural enterprises, supported by tax incentives from municipal, state, and federal levels, has been promoted with the aim of improving the socioeconomic indicators of a region that ranks below national averages. Among the most notable ventures are large rice farms and initiatives to consolidate Marajó as a national tourist destination. These ventures have caused profound transformations in the territory, increasing the circulation of people from outside the region – unfamiliar with or detached from local realities. To facilitate agricultural production and tourism flows, infrastructure projects have been implemented, altering the socio-territorial dynamics of the region (Souza Meirelles Filho, 2014).

Since the 18th century, the Quilombola communities of Salvaterra have experienced processes of occupation and expropriation, with landowners disregarding their territories, restricting access to natural resources, and erecting fences that limit land use. In response, these groups have developed strategies of resistance and reinvention of their ways of life, promoting transformations in land use, income generation, and community organization (Costa, 2025). These transformations range from the spatial reorganization of productive activities to cultural practices, such as dances, festivals, and distinct expressions of Quilombola identity. From their internal perspectives, the communities have sought to assert their protagonism, both within their territories and in the municipal context. Among the various fronts of Quilombola action, the following stand out: mobilization for collective land titling, intensified from the first decade of the 21st century; the formation of internal and external alliances involving non-governmental organizations; the creation of residents' associations; and even the candidacy of community members for public office.

Buffalo cheese production remains a significant symbolic and economic reference, representing a specific territorial resource that drives the socioeconomic reproduction of many families. Despite the obstacles posed by sanitary, environmental, and fiscal regulations, buffalo cheeses and other dairy derivatives are highly valued by consumers (Valente da Cruz et al., 2020). The creation of a Geographical Indication (GI) for this type of cheese, however, highlights the leading role of large agricultural enterprises, even though daily production depends directly on the knowledge and techniques of Quilombola cheese masters, who are not involved in discussions and decision-making processes regarding the GI (Medeiros; Martins de Souza; Nelson, 2026).

This case reveals a tension and dissociation between those who possess the knowledge responsible for the product's specificity and those who control the institutional mechanisms for recognition, certification, and appropriation of the

generated value. Although Quilombola knowledge is central to the quality, reputation, and uniqueness of Marajoara cheese, the producers participate only marginally in the governance spaces associated with the GI. This situation indicates that the construction of specific territorial resources, in itself, does not guarantee socially inclusive territorial valorization processes. On the contrary, it reveals that the economic, symbolic, and political benefits resulting from the specification of resources can be unequally appropriated, reproducing historical asymmetries present in the territory.

The knowledge of the master cheesemakers, especially those from the São Benedito community, constitutes a fundamental intangible heritage for maintaining the quality and identity of the cheese produced in the region. Transmitted across generations, this knowledge structures artisanal practices that give the product its unique character and underpin its reputation among consumers. From the perspective of the BTGS, this constitutes a specific territorial resource of an intangible nature, whose reproduction depends on the continuity of cultural practices and local social networks. Paradoxically, even with their decisive contribution to the reputation of Marajoara cheese, the master cheesemakers – mostly salaried workers – occupy peripheral positions in decision-making processes related to its economic and institutional valorization.

Within this context of the development of neocolonial projects – characterized by the implementation of large-scale ventures, the expansion of agribusiness, and the reconfiguration of land use in a way that disregards local dynamics – two predominantly female organizations have emerged: the women's group Seeds of the Quilombo (Known in Brazil as *Sementes do Quilombo*) and the Quilombola Action and Resistance Collective (NARQ - *Núcleo de Ação e Resistência Quilombola*, in Brazil). These initiatives seek to reaffirm the importance of Quilombo cultures, promote income generation, and secure territorial rights, articulating strategies to address the economic and territorial transformations that affect the communities of Salvaterra.

Furthermore, these organizations engage in diverse cultural, economic, and educational activities derived from internal coordination within the territories. These movements emerge from continuous processes of collective organization that seek to preserve and strengthen Quilombo identity through diversified initiatives. In this scenario, *Sementes do Quilombo* and NARQ stand out as central drivers of these dynamics, promoting new forms of community action and contributing to the strengthening of traditional practices, income generation, and the guarantee of territorial rights (Costa, 2025; Lopes, 2024).

Sementes do Quilombo, with its activities rooted in the Mangueiras community, is dedicated to the production and sale of clothing that incorporates features and colors associated with Black and Marajoara identity through its artisan workshop. Beyond this economic activity, the group leads two important cultural collectives: “*Meninas de Mangueiras*”, a carimbó group formed by adult and elderly women, and a dance group aimed at young people in the community. Recently, they also structured and began managing a community library, expanding their reach in the educational and cultural fields (Costa, 2025).

NARQ, in turn, is composed of young quilombola women from the Vila União/Campinas community. The group works to value and preserve traditional

practices and knowledge, with special attention to youth and the strengthening of the local economy. Among its main actions is the Quilombola Fair, which brings together women farmers and artisans, promoting the circulation of agri-food products and strengthening networks of economic solidarity. The “*Quilombrincando*” project, coordinated by NARQ, is aimed at children in the community, offering educational activities that promote connections with ancestry and the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and values (Lopes, 2024).

The Quilombola Games, held annually during Black Awareness Week in November, represent a moment to celebrate resistance, value culture, and mobilize the community through sporting and cultural activities that strengthen ties among communities. During this week, cultural presentations such as dance, music, and carimbó are held, complemented by sporting events such as soccer, volleyball, tug-of-war, cross-country running, and the traditional Quilombola wrestling, also known as Marajoara wrestling. The Quilombola Games embody a collective way of overcoming the historical and contemporary expropriations faced by Quilombola communities, reaffirming belonging, ancestry, and the strength of cultural ties as legitimate forms of resistance.

Campos e Lagos Territory – Maranhão

This territory comprises a large floodplain crossed by the Mearim, Pindaré, Grajaú, and Pericumã Rivers, whose waters flood the natural fields during the rainy season. When the waters recede, lakes remain for much of the year. The territory is located in the Western Lowlands of Maranhão and consists of twelve municipalities, home to 326,069 inhabitants (IBGE, 2023)⁵. Costa Neto et al. (2014) identify five actions that have affected the Campos e Lagos region since the late 20th century: 1) extensive and predatory buffalo farming; 2) irrigation projects near riverbanks and fields, using chemical fertilizers and pesticides; 3) predatory fishing; 4) dredging and dams without environmental impact studies; 5) introduction of exotic species.

Historically, the government has prioritized other regions of the state, as the Campos e Lagos region is not suitable for agribusiness and large industries. In recent decades, however, the territory has begun to host private projects linked to conventional and productivist agriculture, generating numerous socio-environmental conflicts (Ferreira; Farias Filho; Ferreira, 2023). The local economy depends on family farming, babassu extraction, artisanal fishing, and small businesses and public services in urban areas. The rural population (56.5%) is larger than the urban population (43.5%). The territory is traditionally inhabited by quilombola communities, riverside dwellers, and babassu coconut breakers, who organize themselves through various associations, such as fishermen’s colonies and labor unions. The only Indigenous group is the Gamelas, once considered extinct at the beginning of the 20th century. Since 2014, however, descendants of this ethnic

⁵ The Baixada region was declared an Environmental Protection Area in 1991 and recognized as a Ramsar site in 2000, based on the Ramsar Convention (named after the Iranian city where it was signed in 1971). This convention recognizes the international importance of wetlands, especially as a habitat for waterfowl.

group have reorganized themselves into several communities, the main ones being Taquaritiua, in the municipality of Viana, and Capivari, in Penalva.

The relative marginalization of the territory in relation to conventional agricultural modernization strategies has contributed to the preservation of a wide range of specific territorial resources associated with the lifestyles of quilombola, riverside, Indigenous, and babassu coconut breakers communities. Unlike regions shaped by the productive homogenization of agribusiness, the Campos e Lagos territory has maintained a diversity of productive practices, ecological knowledge, and forms of social organization that constitute crucial foundations for future processes of territorial specification.

The unique ecosystem of lakes and lowland floodplains, surrounded by babassu palm forests in higher areas, allowed for the establishment of rice farms from the 18th century onward, accompanied by the arrival of groups of African people. The interaction between the original indigenous populations, the Portuguese, and the Africans, combined with the specific environmental conditions, gave rise to a population that calls itself “*baixadeira*” and that developed a distinctive culture. Over time, the local social groups have promoted a significant number of cultural events held every weekend throughout the year.

More than a cultural identity, the “*baixadeira*” condition expresses a historical relationship of co-evolution between society and environment, in which productive, dietary, festive, and organizational practices were shaped by the seasonal dynamics of the waters. From this perspective, the floodplains, lakes, babassu palm groves, and local knowledge are not isolated resources, but interdependent elements of a territorial system that confers uniqueness to the territory and potential for territorial valorization processes anchored in specificity.

The natural beauty combined with cultural events and festivities has created a territorial environment that establishes a large circulation of people and resources, although still poorly documented and mapped (Everton, 2025; Martins, 2023). These specific intangible territorial resources are strengthened during certain periods of the year, such as the rainy months of the first semester, when the lakes fill up, and become spaces for recreation, swimming, and boat trips. Although some tourism routes have been established, they still lack effective structuring and governance, as the activities remain largely informal, preventing them from attaining the status of genuine community-based tourism.

One event that aptly illustrates the cultural resources already in place – though still less visible than their significance for the territory merits – is the Cattle Drive Meeting⁶. This event, which takes place in the municipality of Matinha, brings together all cattle-herding groups from this and neighboring municipalities on June 26, continuing throughout the night until dawn the next day. In 2024, eighteen groups performed in the event space located in the central area of the municipal seat. Each year, the event attracts more people, inspiring other municipalities, such as Viana and Vitória do Mearim, to hold similar celebrations during the June festivities.

Beyond these cultural and festive expressions, products such as babassu by-products (oil, mesocarp flour, soap, and biscuits), honey from Apis bees, fish from

⁶ In the Campos e Lagos region, the *bumba-meu-boi*, a folklore characteristic of Maranhão, is called *Boiada*.

lakes and rivers, watermelon cultivated in floodplains, and buffalo milk cheese all demonstrate potential for valorization by local social groups. However, the mere existence of differentiated territorial resources is not sufficient to trigger sustainable territorial development processes. The absence of stable mechanisms for collective coordination, shared valorization strategies, and multi-actor governance spaces limits the transformation of these resources into territorially recognized assets. This case clearly illustrates the difference between the simple existence of resources and their effective activation and specification, as discussed in the BTGS approach.

The territory of the Association of Municipalities of Northern Paraná (AMUSEP) – Paraná

Long-standing studies on value chains in the family-based agricultural sector have become promising for collaborative research between territorial organizations within the Association of Municipalities of Northern Paraná (AMUSEP - *Associação dos Municípios do Setentrião Paranaense*, in Brazil) area and the State University of Maringá. The University's participation aligns with the Mixed Unit of Territory Development (UMDT, *Unidade Mista de Desenvolvimento Territorial*, in Brazil), an innovative initiative focused on shared governance among public actors, academia, extension services, and territorial civil society organizations, such as rural producer collectives, with the purpose of promoting sustainable territorial development.

AMUSEP encompasses thirty municipalities, home to more than 865,000 inhabitants, approximately 8% of the population of Paraná (IBGE, 2023). The UMDT project focuses on valuing family farming and products from the territory. From the perspective of BTGS, the UMDT can be interpreted as an institutional space for building organizational proximity and fostering articulation between actors who traditionally operate in a fragmented manner. Its relevance stems not only from project implementation, but also from its ability to promote territorial coordination processes aimed at identifying and valuing specific resources.

Discussions about the challenges faced in this territory reveal a diversity of models and strategies adopted over the years in the northern region of the state, initially occupied in the mid-20th century by immigrants from São Paulo and Minas Gerais motivated by the expansion of coffee cultivation (Bobato; Cunha, 2026). In more recent periods, efforts have diverged. On one hand, initiatives have promoted the hegemonic model of agro-industrial commodity production, focusing on monocultures (notably soybeans) and the broiler poultry chain, intensified by various public and private incentives. On the other hand, a significant number of family farming units engage in diversified food production that does not fit into this hegemonic model, revealing tensions in the strategies and actions adopted for territorial development (Laurenti; Soares Júnior; Costa, 2023). Consequently, family farming faces strong constraints, accompanied by a growing rural exodus, especially among young people who migrate from small municipalities and rural areas to the metropolitan region of Maringá, the main city in the territory, with approximately 430,000 inhabitants.

This coexistence of models highlights the presence of distinct territorial projects. On one side, a productivist logic prevails, oriented toward the generation of standardized agricultural commodities integrated into global agro-industrial chains.

On the other, initiatives linked to family farming persist, seeking to build valorization strategies based on productive diversification, proximity between producers and consumers, and the incorporation of territorial attributes into products. This tension directly relates to the contrast – discussed in the BTGS approach – between generic production processes and strategies for the territorial specification of resources. Field research identified key elements linked to the valorization of products from collectives of family farmers in the territory (Batista; Delgado, 2025). These include some specific initiatives and collective actions supported by agroecological and organic production systems; efforts to develop marketing channels that valorize family farming products beyond the institutional market; and the strengthening of women's collectives, especially those engaged in adding value through agricultural product processing.

In this sense, family-run agro-industries and rural tourism represent initiatives with great potential for adding value. More than complementary economic activities, these initiatives constitute potential vectors of territorial specification. The products processed by family-run agro-industries carry local knowledge, productive trajectories, and particular forms of social organization that can hardly be reproduced outside the territory. Their valorization therefore depends less on the scale of production and more on the ability to transform such attributes into elements recognized by consumers and other territorial actors.

The production and marketing of processed products, however, face several obstacles, including limited labor supply, financial capacity, and technical and managerial expertise. Institutionally, addressing bottlenecks related to the legal framework governing family-run agro-industries is directly associated with valuing specific territorial resources, particularly given constraints on market access. Through partnerships among public, associative, and private actors, various training courses and seminars on sustainable territorial development have been organized to foster reflection on these challenges and to strengthen the capacity of local actors to identify and articulate their resources, knowledge, skills, and goals. Although emerging opportunities are still incipient, the studies highlight that collective action, producer recognition, and the promotion of family-run agro-industries are hindered by governance limitations among actors operating at different levels within the territory.

The syntheses from the four research territories reveal the strong presence of specific territorial resources linked to agri-food products and community-based tourism, whose activation and valorization dynamics in both formal and informal markets vary significantly. Informality in food processing and marketing, far from being problematic, contributes to rural food security (Dorigon, 2022). Nevertheless, most territorial actors interviewed expressed the desire to operate in formal marketing channels. Regarding community-based tourism, cultural events stand out as drivers of intra-territorial tourism, attracting visitors from both the municipality and its surroundings. This type of tourism, however, is rarely considered or analyzed in discussions of sustainable territorial development.

Nevertheless, the existence of specific territorial resources – whether agri-food, cultural, environmental, or tourism-related – does not automatically lead to sustainable territorial development. In all cases, disputes have been observed over resource appropriation, institutional limitations to their valorization, and disparities

in the collective action capacities of local actors. While some territories exhibit more advanced coordination experiences and territorialized market construction, others remain at initial stages of resource activation. This diversity reinforces one of the central hypotheses of the BTGS approach: that territorial specification results less from the mere existence of resources and more from the capacity of actors to build shared forms of governance, recognition, and valorization of these resources.

Final Considerations

This article stemmed from the observation that the concept of specific territorial resources, although frequently used in sustainable territorial development initiatives in rural Brazil, still has limited theoretical and methodological appropriation by researchers, public managers, and territorial organizations. By discussing the foundations of the Basket of Territorial Goods and Services (BTGS) approach and comparing them with different Brazilian realities, the aim was to contribute to the understanding of the processes of construction, valorization, and governance of territorial resources, as well as to the improvement of sustainable territorial development strategies.

The conceptual assimilation by organizations that promote this form of development represents the first step toward adopting methodological procedures that qualify their actions. It involves strengthening territorial competencies in order to enhance local potential and overcome the persistent illusion among public managers of rural municipalities that the installation of large companies can generate jobs and income in small rural contexts. Given the socioeconomic and environmental realities of these municipalities, cooperation around shared territorial projects proves far more promising than the illusory intermunicipal competition for a supposed future driven by large corporations.

The relational perspective applied to the territories analyzed reinforces the understanding that there are no universal models of sustainable territorial development that can be reproduced in different contexts. The cases studied show that the valorization of specific territorial resources depends on their historical trajectories, the capacity for collective action of local actors, the existing institutional density, and the forms of governance built in each context. At the same time, they reveal that the processes of specifying territorial resources are permeated by power relations, mechanisms of exclusion, and disputes over the legitimate uses of the territory.

An analysis of the construction of specific territorial resources in creative rural contexts reveals that social proximity qualifies geographical proximity. In rural territories in the north of the country, this proximity materializes mainly through the dynamics of community mobilization and the promotion of a territorial identity that articulates cultural, economic, and social practices. In the case of quilombola communities, for example, collective initiatives integrate ancestral knowledge with new forms of social action, such as clothing production and the organization of fairs on Marajó Island. The creation of shared spaces – such as a community library, a quilombola fair, or an associative agro-industry of babassu coconut breakers – results from continuous mobilization processes in which territorial actors actively engage in

constructing resources that possess not only economic but also cultural and environmental value.

However, when integrating reflection on “specific territorial resources” with Quilombola ontology, it is necessary to recognize the profound interconnection between body, territory, humans, and non-humans. Quilombola ontology, marked by historical resistance and a relationship of belonging and reciprocity with the land, implies that these categories cannot be treated separately. The Quilombola body is not merely an economic or cultural agent, but is intrinsically linked to the territory, its flow, and its natural rhythms, as observed in cheese production, which depends on the knowledge transmitted by master cheesemakers. The body is inserted into the territory and is an active part of the construction of territorial resources, recognizing that non-humans – such as the land, animals, and plants – are equally participants in the process of creating and valuing territorial resources, whose characteristics cannot be dissociated from their socio-environmental relations. Therefore, the creation of Quilombola territorial resources, by encompassing cultural and environmental practices, reveals an integrative and relational vision.

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