



**POTENTIALITIES OF AGRARIAN HERITAGE
AS A REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
APPLIED TO THE MICROREGION OF
CANOINHAS, SANTA CATARINA, BRAZIL**

**POTENCIALIDADES DO PATRIMÔNIO AGRÁRIO COMO
ESTRATÉGIA DE DESENVOLVIMENTO REGIONAL APLICADA
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ABSTRACT

The dynamism of the cultural heritage category has shaped numerous conceptual variables over time. However, the process has left some heritage assets underidentified and unrecognized. Agrarian heritage assets exemplify this, as historical marginalization has repeatedly affected the rural world and its protagonists. Over the past decade, researchers have started to fill this gap by establishing the agrarian heritage category, which recognizes the value of agrarian heritage assets under the premise that agriculture is culture. Recently, the discussion about this concept and its application has expanded beyond Europe and reached the Global South, particularly Brazil. In Brazil, scholars have actively worked to operationalize this concept. This article analyzes *caívas* as an example of agrarian heritage in the Canoinhas microregion and explores their potential as a strategy for sustainable regional development. The research applies a qualitative approach, combining an extensive literature review on the central topics, a systematic document review, and fieldwork that included in situ studies of *caívas* within the defined territorial scope. The findings identify a wide range of agrarian heritage assets within the *caívas*, where preserving productive activities proves essential for their conservation. This study concludes that *caívas* represent a clear example of agrarian heritage and that this heritage category offers significant potential for application, especially in territories seeking alternative strategies for regional development.

Keywords: Agrarian Heritage, Regional Development, Microregion of Canoinhas, Santa Catarina, Brazil.

RESUMO

A dinamicidade da categoria patrimônio cultural resultou na constituição de inúmeras variáveis conceituais ao longo do tempo. No entanto, alguns bens patrimoniais seguiram carentes de identificação e reconhecimento. Esse foi o caso dos bens patrimoniais agrários, os quais historicamente foram alvo de um processo de marginalização, que reiteradamente impacta o mundo rural e seus protagonistas. Ao longo da última década essa lacuna vem sendo preenchida por meio da constituição da categoria de patrimônio agrário, a qual permite a valoração dos bens patrimoniais agrários a partir da premissa de que a agricultura é cultura. Mais recentemente, o debate acerca deste conceito e de sua aplicabilidade transcendeu as fronteiras europeias e chegou ao Sul global, em especial ao território brasileiro, onde pesquisadores têm trabalhado na sua operacionalização. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar as *caívas* como exemplo de patrimônio agrário na microrregião de Canoinhas, investigando o potencial desses espaços como estratégia de desenvolvimento regional sustentável. Para tanto, empregou-se uma abordagem qualitativa, marcada por ampla revisão bibliográfica sobre os temas centrais da pesquisa, sistemática revisão documental e saídas a campo para estudos *in loco* das *caívas* localizadas no recorte territorial previamente definido. Entre os principais resultados obtidos destaca-se a identificação de um amplo conjunto de bens patrimoniais agrários presente no âmbito das *caívas*, cuja manutenção da atividade produtiva consiste em condição fundamental para sua preservação. Conclui-se que as *caívas* efetivamente configuram exemplo de patrimônio agrário e que esta categoria

Palavras-chave: Patrimônio Agrário, Desenvolvimento Regional, Microrregião de Canoinhas, Santa Catarina, Brasil

INTRODUCTION

The concept of cultural heritage has shifted over time, incorporating new categories that reflect cultural dynamics and diversity. However, agrarian heritage assets still face marginalization, which leads to a lack of recognition for traditional agrarian practices as integral components of local culture and identity. This issue is evident in the Canoinhas microregion of Santa Catarina, where *caívas*—multi-use areas that include agroforestry management, grazing, and yerba mate extraction—face threats from increasing mechanization and land concentration. These factors devalue family farming and exacerbate rural social exclusion.

Given this context, this article aims to analyze the *caívas* as an example of agrarian heritage in the Canoinhas microregion and to investigate the potential of these spaces as a strategy for sustainable regional development.

The recognition of a given asset as cultural heritage marks the beginning of its protection process, which initiates actions for the conservation, promotion, and dissemination of these assets. This process can be enhanced through initiatives such as agritourism and the production and commercialization of



products derived from family farming, driving territorial development based on sustainable practices.

Thus, this study adopts a qualitative approach that includes literature review, document analysis, and field study. It demonstrates that preserving agrarian heritage strengthens cultural identity and community belonging while promoting economic and environmental sustainability in the region.

The application of the agrarian heritage category highlights the value of agrarian activities, and the individuals involved in them, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable links in the sector: traditional and environmentally sustainable practices and their practitioners—peasants, herders, and small landowners—through family-based production. Comparative studies between the region under analysis and territories in Spain have effectively illustrated this dynamic (Tomporoski e Tabasco, 2019; Tomporoski, 2020).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of regional development, as the recognition of agrarian heritage serves as a lever for development strategies. It introduces a distinct protective purpose, which involves the productive use or integration of heritage as a driver of development. “This allows heritage to be linked to development strategies or productive activities, especially at the local level” (Ruiz, 2015, p. 57). Furthermore, the article offers a perspective that integrates culture, economy, and sustainability into the planning of public policies aimed at strengthening rural communities and reducing regional inequalities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article stems from research that uses a qualitative approach as its methodological foundation, organizing three key procedures: investigating, interpreting and analyzing data, and writing up the research findings. The researchers conducted a literature review during the first phase to explore the central themes of the study. In the second phase, they carried out systematic document research to collect and analyze all available or accessible sources. They complemented this step with field visits to investigate *caívas* in situ in the Canoinhas Microregion.

The research team analyzed and interpreted the collected data to complete the third stage of the methodological procedure, which involved writing this article. This article is structured into three sections. The first section defines the concept of agrarian heritage and outlines its main characteristics,



focusing on the process of establishing this conceptual framework. This framework originates from the research conducted by Professor Jose Castillo Ruiz and his team. Next, the study introduces the previously selected territorial focus: the Mixed Ombrophilous Forest (FOM), located in the southern region of Brazil, along with its remnants preserved through historical use, known as *caívas*. The section also examines the scale of these remnants and the legal debates surrounding their use. Finally, the study demonstrates that the set of productive and sociocultural practices associated with these heritage assets, the *caívas*, constitutes a tangible example of agrarian heritage within Brazilian territory.

This study establishes criteria for analyzing and selecting data in its systematic document review to ensure a contextualized approach to agrarian heritage, focusing specifically on the *caívas* of the Canoinhas microregion in Santa Catarina. The researchers prioritize documents based on their historical and cultural significance, environmental sustainability, connection to traditional agrarian practices, and territorial and socioeconomic perspectives. Through this analysis, the study examines how agrarian activities in the *caívas* act as drivers of sustainable regional development.

The researchers began by identifying documents that address the traditional practices of *caívas* and their value as agrarian heritage, using historical and cultural relevance as the primary criterion. This approach aligns with Castillo Ruiz's (2015) concept of agrarian heritage. They prioritized documents detailing agricultural practices, yerba mate management, wood utilization, and cattle raising within the *caívas*. These records reveal the intrinsic link between agrarian heritage and local cultural identity, emphasizing the importance of preserving and valuing these traditional practices within the territory.

Moreover, the researchers examined documents that explore the environmental sustainability dimension and highlight the role of *caívas* in ecological conservation. We based this analysis on the studies of Hanisch *et al.* (2016, 2021), who emphasize the function of *caívas* as multi-use areas that promote biodiversity and act as ecological corridors. Using this criterion, we selected sources that demonstrate the significance of *caívas* in preserving native species and strengthening sustainable soil management practices. Ruiz's (2015) concept of sustainability applied to agrarian heritage further reinforces the protection of these areas. This concept extends beyond cultural assets to include the natural resources within these spaces, fostering territorial development that respects



local ecological limits.

In addition, we analyzed the territorial and socioeconomic aspects of the Canoinhas microregion, focusing on land tenure dynamics and the economic impacts of traditional agricultural activities. This analysis drew on the perspectives of Riedl (2021) and Oliveira (2021) on regional development, which emphasize the valorization of endogenous resources as a means to promote local economic growth and social cohesion. Notably, these methodological criteria align with the concepts explored in this article, ensuring that the data analysis provides an integrated understanding of agrarian heritage in the context of sustainable development and regional cultural identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The notion of heritage originates etymologically from the Latin term *patrimonium*, meaning that which belongs to the father or head of the family and could be exclusively bequeathed through a will (Funari & Pelegrini, 2009, p.11). During the medieval period, the concept evolved to incorporate a religious element, serving as an important symbolic and collective reference. In response, the elite actively implemented the process of monumentalizing churches and constructing cathedrals. Starting with the Renaissance, the notion of heritage incorporated emerging humanism and began to oppose theocentrism, although it retained its aristocratic character.

This long and tumultuous trajectory took a significant turn in France, where thinkers and leaders developed the modern concept of heritage. Following the French Revolution (1789), they implemented measures to foster the creation of citizenship. During the absolutist period, society had no concept of citizenship, so leaders worked to provide mechanisms that allowed individuals to share values, customs, and a supposedly common origin.

Simultaneously, with the rise of nation-states, the concept of heritage evolved to align with the idea of belonging to a nation or, more specifically, with the process of “inventing” a group of citizens who were expected to share a common language, cultural traits, origin, and territory—even if they had never truly done so. In the early decades of the 20th century, the meaning of heritage became deeply influenced by nationalism. The two world wars, and especially the rise of Nazi-fascism, revealed its use as a tool for constructing a mythical common past designed to consolidate and safeguard the interests of specific social



groups in the present.

The period following the Second World War (1939–1945), marked by the establishment of the United Nations (UN) on October 24, 1945, and the creation of UNESCO three weeks later as the UN agency responsible for Education, Science, and Culture, was also pivotal for discussions on cultural heritage. During this time, broader and less restrictive approaches to the concepts of culture and, consequently, heritage emerged. Furthermore, new social actors with diverse characteristics and interests began to play active roles at the core of political and social debates.

It is essential to highlight that the intensification of social movements, particularly the incorporation of environmental issues, significantly expanded the concept of heritage. This evolution integrated the notion of nature alongside culture, consolidating the recognition of human and environmental diversity as fundamental values to be promoted. Consequently, the concept gradually encompassed a broader spectrum of heritage domains, including those of local, municipal, and traditional community significance.

In the Brazilian context, the historical transformation of the concept of heritage followed parameters similar to those observed internationally. Initially, efforts focused on the restricted preservation of movable and immovable assets deemed significant to the nation's history. It can be argued that the dominant heritage perspective underlying public policies implemented in Brazil throughout the 20th century prioritized cultural assets associated with elites, European immigrants, and their descendants, while undervaluing the cultural assets of the "subaltern" (Thompson, 1984, p. 13–14) and non-white populations. Scholars and policymakers began questioning this trend during Brazil's redemocratization in the 1980s, following twenty-one years of civil-military dictatorship (1964–1985). Throughout this process, they incorporated new interpretations of culture and heritage, focusing greater attention on groups historically marginalized within Brazilian society. The 1988 Federal Constitution marked a significant advancement by recognizing intangible cultural heritage. This recognition was further reinforced with the implementation of Decree nº. 3,551 in 2000, which created the registry of intangible cultural assets (Fonseca, 2001).

These social, political, and cultural transformations emphasized that communities must shape cultural heritage to reflect their sense of belonging and recognition, including the cultures of non-dominant social groups. Consequently, society must value heritage through evolving social interactions, recognizing the critical relationship between culture and the identity of different peoples.



This analysis of the trajectory of the concept of cultural heritage—both in international and Brazilian contexts—reveals a dynamic process through which societies have incorporated social and cultural transformations over time, broadening the scope of heritage to address these changes. Despite this progress, policymakers have systematically excluded a specific group and the practices it develops from the expanded definition of cultural heritage. They have ignored agriculture, along with its techniques, knowledge, and sociocultural practices, within both international and Brazilian frameworks, thereby omitting this domain from heritage policies. This exclusion reflects a broader context of devaluation and prejudice directed at rural communities in the realm of heritage policymaking. By failing to recognize that “agriculture is culture” (Ruiz, 2015, p. 36), policymakers continue to marginalize rural contributions to cultural heritage.

This exclusion deepens the precarious conditions that agricultural workers endure in various regions of the world. Mechanized production undermines the viability of small rural properties, replaces traditional production with intensive methods, concentrates land ownership—a persistent issue in Brazilian society—and drives rural depopulation, leading to the abandonment of the countryside. These dynamics produce far-reaching consequences, as observed, for example, in Spain. This scenario clearly endangers the immense heritage intrinsically linked to agrarian activities. In response to this socioeconomic context and the incalculable heritage value embedded in the agrarian world and its practices, a group of researchers, led by Professor Jose Castillo Ruiz of the University of Granada, introduced the concept of agrarian heritage as a new framework for heritage studies.

This conceptual category encourages active reflection on assets eligible for heritage designation, linking them to agrarian practices carried out directly by agricultural workers and grounded in socio-historical commitments. The concept assigns significant importance to assets actively used in contemporary, productive agrarian practices. By emphasizing this characteristic, it protects living agro-systems and rejects the notion that heritage designation requires fossilizing the protected asset. Within this framework, farmers sustain both productive processes and the agrarian value of these assets (Ruiz, 2015, p. 37).

In this context, the protection of agrarian heritage actively contributes to regional and territorial development. Preserving and promoting this heritage strengthens the identity and sense of belonging within a community or region. By safeguarding cultural elements, traditions, and local expressions, it fosters



pride and deepens residents' connection to their place of origin. This cultural identity creates favorable conditions for regional development, enhancing social cohesion and promoting civic engagement.

Territorial and regional development interconnect as evolving processes that emphasize the continuous nature of progress rather than discrete stages. These approaches actively consider the specific characteristics of each territory or region, including its history, culture, economy, and natural resources.

Both territorial and regional development recognize that development processes extend beyond a single territorial scale. These processes actively draw on intra-, extra-, and supraterritorial dynamics, including interactions with neighboring territories, connections to regional centers, and broader economic and social relationships. Additionally, they leverage territorial resources and assets as key drivers of development. Regional development promotes balanced economic, social, and environmental growth within a specific geographic area. Policymakers implement strategies to strengthen the local economy, enhance the population's quality of life, and reduce regional disparities (Riedl, 2021; Oliveira, 2021).

Regional development goes beyond the economic dimension by prioritizing social well-being and improving the quality of life for residents in the region. Policymakers focus on providing adequate public services and advancing social inclusion, equal opportunities, and human development. Stakeholders, including local governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local communities, actively cooperate to achieve these goals, highlighting collaboration as a critical element of the process (Riedl, 2021; Oliveira, 2021).

Territorial development actively promotes sustainable development at the local level by emphasizing the endogenous potential and resources of a specific territory. In contrast, regional development adopts a broader approach, integrating multiple territories and requiring stakeholders and local governments to coordinate and collaborate effectively (Dallabrida, 2021).

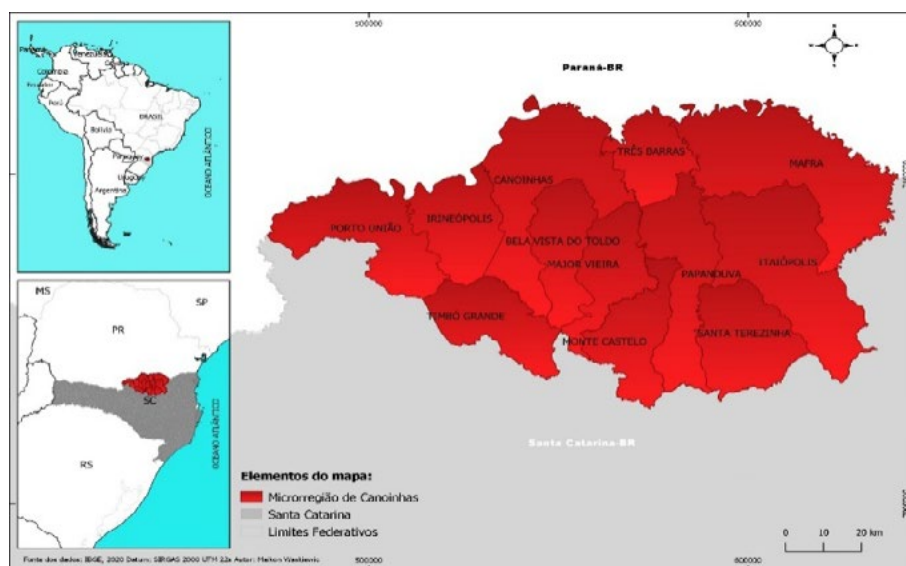
Safeguarding Agrarian Heritage actively drives the economic development of a region. By protecting traditional management and labor techniques, along with their associated traditions, rural workers increase their capacity to generate income, which improves the quality of life for both the community and the region as a whole. Heritage education further empowers local communities to take an active role in preserving and valuing their practices. This engagement promotes civic participation, social inclusion, and sustainable regional development. This focus is pivotal and serves as a sine qua non condition for



maintaining the agrarian heritage example presented in this study: the case of *caívas* in the Canoinhas microregion, Santa Catarina..

Although the state of Santa Catarina—compared to the other 26 federative units—holds the third-highest Human Development Index (HDI) (IBGE, 2010), an analysis of the Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) highlights significant asymmetries and socioeconomic disparities among its 20 microregions. The Canoinhas microregion ranks 18th (third-to-last) in the state’s MHDI ranking. Historical, social, political, and economic processes tied to extractive production, land concentration, and income inequality have driven these low indicators. These ongoing issues continue to harm regional society and obstruct development strategies. Thus, the MHDI supports the conclusion that the Canoinhas microregion remains a stagnated territory within the state of Santa Catarina (Tomporski & Marchesan, 2016).

Map | Canoinhas Microregion. Figure 1



IBGE, 2020

Twelve municipalities form the Canoinhas microregion, located in the northern plateau of Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil. These municipalities span a total area of 9,420.322 km² and accommodate a population of 243,782 inhabitants. Of this total, approximately 82,000 individuals (around one-third) live in rural areas, while about 162,000 (two-thirds) reside in urban areas (IBGE, 2014).

Land disputes and social conflicts over land ownership and use stand out as defining features of the Canoinhas microregion. In the early 20th century, this region became the stage for the Contestado War (1912–1916), one of the largest social movements in Brazilian history. The conflict arose as peasant communities resisted the destruction of their way of life and the appropriation of their lands by American railroad and logging companies, as well as by large landowners (Tompsonski & Bueno, 2017). At the height of the conflict, the local population faced more than half of the Brazilian Army's troops, approximately 7,000 soldiers, in addition to local police forces. By the end of the war, estimates suggest that tens of thousands of people had perished (Machado, 2004). The local population became the target of a genocidal process aimed at eliminating potential centers of resistance while also enacting “ethnic cleansing” in the region, erasing the presence of the non-white caboclo population. The Brazilian government's development projects, supported by public policies grounded in racial ideologies, favored Central European immigrants as the ideal workforce for territorial development (Bazzanella, Marchesan & Tomporoski, 2020).

In the decades following the war, the conflict profoundly impacted the population of this microregion, altering the preexisting social, political, and economic relations in those municipalities. These changes left indelible marks on the region's society. It is reasonable to identify four prevailing factors in this microregion that actively hinder the implementation of territorial development strategies: (i) the trauma associated with the social conflict and the genocide against the caboclos instills feelings of shame in the local population, actively silencing discussions about the movement and the peasants' struggle; (ii) the ongoing expansion of land ownership concentrates property under the control of large landowners and multinational corporations; (iii) the region continues to rely on an economic model rooted in forestry-based extractivism, primarily for paper and cellulose production; and (iv) the remaining elites, responsible for the violence that marked the Contestado in previous decades, perpetuate aggressive labor exploitation (Tompsonski, 2016).

The maintenance and expansion of a production model focused on extractivism drive an increasing demand for land dedicated to forest plantations of species such as *eucalyptus* and *Pinus elliottii*. This demand has intensified land concentration among large corporations and raw material suppliers. As a consequence of this production model, many small farmers—particularly those engaged



in family farming and agroecological production—have abandoned food production and shifted to forestry cultivation. This shift has weakened soil use and inhibited the diversification of agricultural production (Tomporoski, Dallabrida & Marchesan, 2019).

To highlight the prevailing land structure in the Canoinhas microregion, researchers cross-referenced data to analyze the distribution of occupied land relative to the number of agricultural establishments, segmenting the analysis by property size. It is observed that, despite 94.77% of agricultural establishments having an area equal to or less than 100 hectares, these properties occupy only 45.07% of the total land area. Conversely, a mere 5.23% of establishments occupy 54.93% of the total area. Furthermore, 41.83% of the properties are smaller than 10 hectares and account for only 4.97% of the total area. Alarmingly, less than 1% of the properties occupy nearly one-third of the total land area. Considering this last fact and, broadly speaking, that just 5% of properties occupy nearly 55% of the total area, researchers identify a striking process of land concentration in the microregion under analysis (Tomporoski, 2019). This context substantiates the previously mentioned arguments that the prevailing extractivism and production model actively drive land concentration in the Canoinhas microregion, Santa Catarina.

The distribution of land and agricultural resources directly influences local, regional, and national development, as well as efforts to reduce poverty in Brazil. High levels of land concentration actively hinder development, particularly at the municipal level. A study conducted by the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam) demonstrates that municipalities with lower land concentration achieve higher Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) scores and lower income concentration. Conversely, municipalities with higher land concentration report lower per capita GDP. These findings confirm that greater land concentration intensifies income inequality and, consequently, exacerbates overall inequality (Oxfam, 2016, p. 14).

The peculiarities of the Canoinhas microregion - its socioeconomic profile and the resulting social inequality - require efforts to implement sustainable development strategies that can gradually reduce these disparities. These efforts must harness the territory's potential by utilizing its endogenous elements - specific local resources - and promoting greater participation of local actors



in driving the desired development process. This process draws on the region's heritage elements, which shape its territorial identity (Plaza, Cañizares, & Pulpón, 2017, p. 17).

In recent years, scholars have expanded the debate surrounding heritage processes, introducing new categories and types of heritage, such as agrarian heritage. This category increases the analytical capacity of existing academic tools and builds on the Charter of Baeza (Ruiz, 2012), which states: "Agrarian heritage consists of the set of natural and cultural, tangible and intangible assets, generated or utilized by agrarian activity throughout history" (Ruiz, 2015, p. 452).

Researchers in Spain, particularly over the past decade, have advanced the international dissemination and adoption of agrarian heritage as a theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing and managing agrarian assets. They have explored agrarian heritage through various dimensions and approaches, both within Spain and at an international level.

THE AGRARIAN HERITAGE

In a work published in 2015, a group of Spanish researchers, led by Professor José Castillo Ruiz, Chair of Art History at the University of Granada, introduced a new category of cultural heritage. This typology integrates the appropriate recognition of assets generated by agrarian activity. Its practical application serves as a tool for intervention in rural spaces and, more importantly, as an effective and viable mechanism to address the serious challenges currently facing rural activity: (i) food security and sovereignty; (ii) environmental degradation; (iii) privatization and commodification of common goods; and (iv) loss of cultivated biodiversity, among others (Ruiz & Yanez, 2015, p. 24).

The concept of agrarian heritage refers to the identification of the values and meanings associated with agrarian assets, which are essential to the history of human civilization. These include elements such as cultivated biodiversity, the coevolution of society and nature, food systems, the configuration of urban and territorial structures, thought, philosophy, religion, and social, political, and economic organization, among others (Ruiz & Yanez, 2015, p. 12). Additionally, it encompasses all perspectives and approaches to agrarian assets that involve some form of recognition, valuation, promotion, support, respect, preservation, or even protection. The definition of agrarian heritage incorporates a broad range of assets:



(...) bienes muebles (utensilios, aperos o herramientas utilizados para la labranza, transporte, almacenaje y manufactura de los cultivos y el ganado, documentos y objetos bibliográficos, etc.), bienes inmuebles singulares (elementos constructivos considerados singularmente: cortijos, huertas, centros de transformación agraria, graneros, cercados, eras, etc.), bienes inmuebles de conjunto o lineales (paisajes, asentamientos rurales, sistemas de riego, agroecosistemas singulares, vías pecuarias, caminos, etc.), patrimonio inmaterial (lingüística, creencias, rituales y actos festivos, conocimientos, gastronomía y cultura culinaria, técnicas artesanales, tesoros vivos, etc.) y patrimonio natural y genético (variedades locales de cultivos, razas autóctonas de animales, semillas, suelos, vegetación y animales silvestres asociados, etc.) (Ruiz, 2012, p. 33).

Although the *Charter of Baeza* serves as a normative document that enables the international dissemination of the concept of agrarian heritage and facilitates its application to agrarian assets in any country, the body of research that established the parameters considered by the Charter was published in 2015 in the work titled *El Patrimonio Agrario: la construcción cultural del territorio a través de la actividad agraria*. Throughout the text, the authors articulate the purpose of the concept of agrarian heritage, which aims to provide an integrated perspective. This approach considers agrarian assets within their interrelated aspects, collectively, to avoid the fragmented and decontextualized recognition of these assets. The processes of singularization can also create obstacles, as prioritizing certain aspects of a product over others assigns a secondary role to agrarian activity. This approach subordinates and obscures the significance of the agrarian sector (Ruiz, 2015, p. 29).

The identification, recognition, and valuation of agrarian heritage assets—commonly referred to as “heritagization”—actively generate benefits for a given territory when implemented. This process of heritagization enhances protective measures and fosters development initiatives, often through the allocation of governmental or external resources. It also promotes the dissemination of these assets within the territory itself, facilitating a comprehensive and integrated perspective of agrarian heritage. Beyond its economic potential, this process strengthens the recognition and reinforcement of territorial self-representation and identity, both by external individuals and institutions and by the local residents themselves.

Moreover, the process of heritagization tends to enhance the self-esteem and sense of belonging of workers engaged in agrarian activities, strengthening their connection to a specific place and its identity. For other individuals not directly involved in agrarian work—such as the urban population of the territory where these assets have been identified—this process fosters appreciation that promotes awareness and



respect for both agrarian activities and the individuals who carry them out.

Therefore, assets eligible for heritagization through the concept of agrarian heritage—as previously discussed—must demonstrate a direct connection to agrarian functions performed by farmers, as well as possess historical significance. Notably, assets used in current and productive agrarian practices—such as the *caívas*, the example under analysis—can also qualify for protection.

The process of heritagization in the context of agrarian heritage actively facilitates the identification, recognition, and valuation of agrarian heritage assets, which are intrinsically connected to other elements within the territory. In the short term, this process tends to raise societal awareness about the significance of these assets, as well as enhance the value of agrarian activity—often regarded as having low socioeconomic status. Ultimately, it promotes the recognition and appreciation of the individuals, both women and men, who dedicate themselves to agricultural work (Tompsonski & Lachmane Maia, 2020).

The initial movement, carried out through the proposed application of agrarian heritage, actively contributes to fulfilling one of the key aspects outlined in its concept: raising societal awareness about the importance of the assets to be preserved, thereby justifying their existence and recognition. This feature holds particular significance for the territory under analysis, which experienced a violent social conflict in the early 20th century, the repercussions of which still affect its population. Agrarian heritage, therefore, possesses the capacity to strengthen the elements that shape the cultural identity of a given territory, while also fostering processes of sustainable territorial development (Ruiz & Yanez, 2015; Tomporoski & Tabasco, 2019).

It is important to emphasize that the *Charter of Baeza* highlights attributes associated with agrarian activity, which fulfills a fundamental right that remains unacknowledged in many societies: the right to food and food sovereignty, enabling a healthy, just, and cooperative life (Ruiz, 2012). In alignment with this principle, agrarian heritage promotes more balanced relationships between territory and productive labor by respecting the rational use of available environmental resources. Moreover, it is distinguished by its origin in a historical process of transformation shared by society and the environment.

The following section will present the case of the *caívas*, which, as argued in this article, meets the criteria established in the debate on the concept of Agrarian Heritage and serves as a significant example of agrarian heritage located in southern Brazil.



“HISTORY, SECURITY, AND TRADITION”: THE CAÍVAS AS A SET OF CULTURAL PRACTICES

As previously analyzed, the *caívas* located in the Canoinhas microregion represent an ecosystem associated with the Mixed Ombrophilous Forest. These areas, recognized on rural properties as multi-use zones, support activities such as timber harvesting, yerba mate extraction, and the collection of fruits and medicinal herbs. Preservation of these spaces occurs through the maintenance of various native tree species, alongside pastures used for raising cattle, sheep, and horses for family purposes (Hanisch *et al.*, 2016). Figure 2 illustrates the *caívas* areas.

Figure 2 | *Caívas*.



Epagri, 2020

The term *caíva* originates from uncertain roots. The *Aurélio* Dictionary of the Portuguese Language traces it to the Tupi language, defining it as “land unsuitable for cultivation” (Ferreira, 1999, p. 2128). However, etymological analysis of ancient Tupi vocabulary identifies the closest term as *kaáaiba*, meaning “bad vegetation” (Carvalho, 1987). This interpretation suggests that the term does not convey a negative connotation but rather describes a forested area distinct from the usual, potentially referring to an open, low, sparse, or minimally forested environment. Rural inhabitants of the region where the term is used cannot definitively explain its meaning. Researchers suggest that the term initially carried a different sense and was later appropriated to designate and distinguish a specific spatial fragment with particular characteristics.

In the Canoinhas microregion, *caívas* serve as an important economic alternative for small and medium-sized rural properties. They provide pastures for much of the year and serve as environments for yerba mate extraction and the presence of *Araucária* trees (a native species that produces *pinhão*). However, their existence has become increasingly overlooked, particularly due to the growing capitalization of rural properties, which adopt intensive land-use techniques that significantly reduce forested areas. These changes occur at the expense of traditional management methods, which government sectors, agribusiness, and even younger generations of *caíva* owners often view as outdated and unprofitable.

It is important to emphasize that the Charter of Baeza (2012) underscores agroecological and environmental values in its ongoing global struggle—manifested locally—against predatory agricultural practices. These practices, as noted by Ruiz (2015, p. 43), “have caused so many destructive effects on the environment, on cultivated biodiversity, on human nutrition, and on the rights of farmers and indigenous peoples.”

Beyond productive purposes, many of these forested environments, recognized as *caívas*, remain preserved for reasons that extend beyond economic use. They embody the preservation of a way of life rooted in traditional practices dating back centuries, tied to the presence of Indigenous populations, the lifestyle of the *caboclo* communities, and the assimilation of these productive techniques by Central European immigrants who began settling in the region in the mid-19th century.

These methods - or more precisely, this way of life - are characterized by the use of forests for free-range animal husbandry, yerba mate harvesting, and the collection of fruits and medicinal plants. This system closely aligns with Renk’s (1997, p. 97) concept of the *roça cabocla*, which divides the land into “planting lands” (*terras de plantar*) and “grazing lands” (*terras de criar*). From this perspective, *caívas* can also be considered forest remnants of the *terras de criar*. However, the most significant aspect of the relationship between this traditional way of life and the *caívas* lies in the connections these communities established with the physical and geographic space, thereby creating a heritage-based meaning for these environments.

Throughout history, different civilizations and societies have established diverse relationships with space, deriving meaning from and interpreting the natural and cultural elements that define it, thereby conceiving distinct spaces characterized by a variety of sociocultural features. Since cultural



heritage, in its conceptualization, comprises the natural and social characteristics that emerge from human perception and interaction, agrarian heritage arises from human relationships formed within the framework of agrarian production. The *caívas* intersect with distinctive categories of cultural heritage and, due to their connection with agrarian issues, are inherently linked to the constitutive elements of Agrarian Heritage.



The translation is academic and formal, but parts of the text (e.g., “**provide significant insights,**” “**are spaces of tradition**”) lean toward a descriptive tone rather than fully active voice. Here’s a revised version with a stronger active voice while maintaining academic rigor:

Mello and Peroni (2015), by defining *caívas* through the perceptions of family farmers who maintain them on their properties, actively contribute to a deeper understanding of these remnants of Mixed Ombrophilous Forest¹ from a heritage perspective. Their findings, based on interviews with 28 families, identify at least 11 management practices for *caívas*. The most common practices include “gathering of firewood from fallen trees and branches, cattle grazing on native pastures in the forest understory, the trimming of the herbaceous layer, and the extraction of *erva-mate*.” (Mello & Peroni, 2015, p. 6). The authors’ most significant contribution to conceptualizing *caívas* as heritage assets lies in their argument that these spaces form a mosaic—a gradient of landscapes altered by continuous cultural and legal changes throughout history. Despite these transformations, *caívas* persist as preserved spaces because they embody tradition.

In this context, the authors referenced here present and discuss the concept of *caíva* as a work in progress (Föetsch, 2014; Hanisch *et al.*, 2016; Hanisch *et al.*, 2021; Mello & Peroni, 2015). These studies contribute significantly by identifying *caívas* as agrarian cultural assets characteristic of many small and medium-sized rural properties in the Canoinhas microregion. However, researchers still need to refine the

1 The Mixed Ombrophilous Forest, also known as the Araucaria Forest, constitutes a forest ecosystem primarily located in southern Brazil. Researchers refer to it as “ombrophilous” due to its reliance on regular rainfall and “mixed” because of its diverse tree species, with the Araucaria serving as the dominant species. This forest represents a transitional zone between the Atlantic Forest and the Southern Grasslands. It features a dense tree canopy with tall, slender trees and supports a rich variety of flora and fauna (Parizotto *et al.*, 2019).

defining characteristics of these assets further.

Defining *caívas* as agrarian heritage assets—products of human interaction that reflect societal characteristics—places them within the framework of social relations. These relations arise from shared goals and interests or the sense of belonging to a specific group, territory, or way of life. Thus, *caívas* exemplify cultural heritage that extends beyond economic utility. They integrate cultural and social dimensions and serve as a fundamental element of the sense of belonging that a population associates with its territory. Moreover, rural populations in the territory preserve *caívas* as significant heritage assets through social bonds that sustain their cultural relevance and identity.

Thus, scholars define *caívas* by three key characteristics that transcend purely economic uses, emphasizing their high degree of social acceptance and recognition. First, Indigenous communities established *caívas* as part of their cultural traditions, which the local population later shaped and adapted over time. European immigrants further assimilated these practices, enriching their cultural significance. Second, communities maintain *caívas* as lived, shared, and reinterpreted spaces across generations. Families preserve these areas through emotional bonds and a strong sense of belonging, whether to the territory itself or to familial and ethnic groups that, for many years, have relied on *caívas* to subsist or supplement their income. Finally, communities use *caívas* as forested areas that sustain traditional daily practices. These areas provide firewood for cooking, milk for family consumption and artisanal dairy production, and medicinal herbs for treating illnesses through teas and traditional healing rituals.

These aspects are not limited to the material dimension; they also encompass the intangible dimension, as they are exercised through perceptions that attribute meaning to that agrarian patrimonial asset. They therefore reside in the realm of the imaginary and emotions. Consequently, the *caívas* can be regarded as a set of cultural practices materialized in the use and preservation of an environment, a cultural asset, which provide a sense of belonging to the populations that maintain them. In summary, they are integral to the understanding of territory as heritage, for the farming families of the Microregion of Canoinhas, “the *caívas* are more than just cultivation areas. They are history, security, and tradition” (Hanisch, *et al.*, 2016, p. 171).

In a territory marked by historical processes that, as previously demonstrated, imposed feelings of shame and silence upon the peasants and their descendants, hindering the implementation of sustainable



development strategies, the strengthening or affirmation of their territorial identity represents an important recognition and applicability of the concept of agrarian heritage.

The *caívas*, in addition to being a clear example of agrarian heritage and areas of productive systems, function as spaces of connection between forest remnants, acting as ecological corridors for biodiversity, which is inherently a highly valuable function. Furthermore, they can also contribute to greater ecological stability of the agricultural systems in their vicinity. The positive influence of forest remnants on the sustainability of agricultural landscapes has been demonstrated by the increased presence of natural enemies and reduced pest attacks in the surrounding crops (Boetzel *et al.*, 2018), as well as through the provision of ecosystem services such as water preservation and erosion reduction.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The dynamic nature of the concept of cultural heritage has led scholars to create other heritage categories that aim to value human activities with a wide range of characteristics. Among the most recent variations of this concept, researchers have highlighted a new category, which is still in the process of consolidation and searching for its own normative framework, suited to its specificities. This new category is agrarian heritage, which was developed just over a decade ago and holds significant potential, especially for territories seeking sustainable development processes.

The intensification of the debate surrounding agrarian heritage has catalyzed efforts to apply its principles across various global regions. This endeavor particularly focuses on areas historically subjected to processes that marginalized rural communities and agricultural laborers. In this context, the *caívas* in the Canoinhas Microregion, Santa Catarina, Brazil, exemplify agrarian heritage.

Researchers have expanded the debate on agrarian heritage to facilitate its application in diverse regions worldwide, focusing particularly on territories shaped by historical processes that marginalized rural areas and agrarian laborers. This approach highlights the *caívas* in the Microrregion of Canoinhas, Santa Catarina, Brazil, as an exemplary case of agrarian heritage.

The *caívas* demonstrate a profound rationality in the use of natural resources, contributing significantly to environmental preservation, particularly through the conservation of local forest species within a biome that has lost 99% of its original coverage. Furthermore, they embody the resilience of



long-standing sociocultural practices deeply rooted in the peasant way of life in that territory. These practices are evident in the continuation of essential productive and sociocultural activities, including cattle raising, dairy production, yerba mate extraction, firewood collection, and the management of medicinal herbs widely used in therapeutic practices of a religious nature.

Finally, it is essential to highlight the intrinsic potential of this new heritage category and its applicability, which enables the recognition of historically marginalized cultural practices originating from rural areas, as well as their protagonists - individuals who work tirelessly in agrarian production. Their efforts sustain urban life while creating cultural expressions of significant heritage value. The application of this heritage category to other marginalized territories, often located in the Global South, not only fosters recognition by the central countries within the current socioeconomic model but also holds potential to elevate the status of farmers whose labor and existence are systematically devalued worldwide.

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on regional development by expanding the understanding of agrarian heritage as a catalyst for sustainable development. By demonstrating how the *caívas* in the Microrregion of Canoinhas can be interpreted not merely as ecological remnants but as cultural and economic assets, this study highlights an often-overlooked aspect in the literature: the appreciation of traditional agrarian practices as a cornerstone of territorial cohesion and cultural identity. This perspective aligns directly with territorial development studies advocating the utilization of endogenous resources, as proposed by authors such as Riedl (2021) and Oliveira (2021). It underscores the economic, cultural, and environmental value of these spaces in informing public policies aimed at inclusive and balanced growth.

The analysis of the *caívas* as agrarian heritage reinforces the notion that regional development must transcend conventional economic indicators and incorporate sociocultural elements that promote long-term sustainability. In this regard, the findings align with the concepts of Castillo Ruiz (2015), who defines agrarian heritage as a category that integrates cultural identity and environmental preservation. These insights provide the literature with new perspectives for exploring regional development through a multidimensional approach.

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