

INTERMUNICIPAL CONSORTIUMS AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT- THE CASE OF VALE DO TAQUARI/RS/BRAZIL

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Vale do Taquari/RS/Brasil was settled by Italian, German and Portuguese immigrants at the very beginning. Taking into consideration the hardship the settlers had to face, the leadership that took place in those little communities showed an associative and entrepreneurship spirit. This made the development possible with the construction of churches, schools, hospitals, cooperatives, leisure clubs, roads and others at first. The first municipalities in the region were Taquari (1849), Estrela (1876), Lajeado (1891), Encantado (1915) and Arroio do Meio (1938). Such then fragmented themselves into new other municipalities along the XX century, originating a total number of 30 small counties in its majority with a population under 5.000 inhabitants. From 2004, however, the small counties returned to form groups once more, creating an Intermunicipal Consortium for the Development of Vale do Taquari. So, the question this research seeks to answer is what takes these small municipalities of Vale do Taquari, competitive to one another, regroup and create an Intermunicipal Consortium aiming the promotion of regional development. The data analysis shows that the intense and accelerated emancipation process, due to local political aspiration, generated in many cases extremely small municipalities in territorial area and almost inexpressive in financial terms with tax return and/or tax collection; situation which began to rely its "survival" on resources from the Municipal Participation Fund. This fact makes the small municipalities, here known as *lugares* (places), to articulate together around common challenges and hopes and start up *regiões* (regions) to face the big number of demands coming from the population needs and aspirations. This way, the need to create a new territorial and political base is instituted, strong enough to overcome political confrontation, especially in regards to planning common actions (intermunicipal) in strategic areas, such as urban infra structure, health and education, just to list a few; and in the search for the necessary resources to put it into practice, to make the regional development viable.

INTRODUCTION

Vale do Taquari was settled by Italian, German and Portuguese immigrants along the XIX century. Although the settlers had to face difficulties and hardship, the leadership that took place in the little communities showed an

associative and entrepreneurism spirit. This made the development possible with the construction of churches, schools, hospitals, cooperatives, leisure clubs, roads and others.

The first urban groups to be administratively organized were: Taquari (1849), Estrela (1876), Lajeado (1891), Encantado (1915) and Arroio do Meio (1938). The political organization of such municipalities brought them together and permitted an aggregated effort towards regional development.

It was due to this historical belief in association that, at the beginning of the 60's decade, mayors from nine municipalities organized the Vale do Rio Taquari Association (AMVAT) to seek through combined strong actions shared solutions to face the difficulties which arose in those days and that still arise nowadays. On the other hand, it also demanded state and federal resources reserved for important projects in the region.

In 1809, exactly 200 years ago, Rio Grande do Sul was formed by only four municipalities, Rio Pardo, Porto Alegre, Rio Grande and Santo Antonio da Patrulha. Today, in the year 2009, the State comes in third position in the country in municipalities' number, summing a total of 496. In 1850 there were 60 municipalities and this highlight the fact that over 41 years there's been created 56 new municipalities, mainly in the southern half of the State. However, between 1850 and 1980, a period of 130 years, other 163 new municipalities emerged bringing the total number of municipalities in the State to 223.

But it was in the period between 1980 and 1996, with the last emancipations, that the highest number of municipalities arose. In this short amount of time, 16 yeas only, 263 new municipalities emerged! This time around, the northern half of the State leads the process, especially in the so called old colonies and new colonies region.

This intense and accelerated emancipation process answering local political aspirations generated in many cases extremely small municipalities in territorial area and almost inexpressive in financial terms with tax return and/or

tax collection; situation which began to rely their “survival” on resources from the Municipal Participation Fund.

It is in such context that since 2004 two Intermunicipal Consortiums are created, CG8 and CG9, proposing a totally opposite way from the one taken until back then, that is, regrouping the small municipalities as a way to face the countless amount of demands imposed by the current reality and the imposing limits due to the extreme fragmentation, not only territorial but also the expressive fragmentation of social, economical and political interests that put at risk the promises which guaranteed support from the majority in regards to new municipalities emancipations. Somehow the need to rethink the territorial base becomes an imposition and makes the leaderships of small municipalities, and in many cases the same ones that had taken front at emancipations, to propose a regrouping movement to form a new territorial and political base, strong enough to taken on political divergences, particularly in respect to the planning of shared action (intermunicipal) in strategic areas, such as road network infrastructure, health, education, amongst others, and the search for the necessary resources to execute them.

In brief, throughout this text we have analyzed the process of the Intermunicipal Consortiums formation in Vale do Taquari region, with emphasis in the territorial-political reorganization implied in such.

1. CHARACTERIZATION OF VALE DO TAQUARI – RS REGION

Vale do Taquari is located in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul (southern Brazilian state) and is around 150 km distant from Porto Alegre. The region surrounds the Taquari river boarder and tributaries, totalizing 37 municipalities, summing up a total area of 4.821,1 Km² (1, 71% of the State). In 2007, according to a population head count by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) the Region count with over 316 thousand

inhabitants (2,99% of the Rio Grande do Sul State population) and demographic density was 65,6 inhabitant/km², while in the State it was 37,6 inhabitant/km².¹

The entire region is known and recognized by its unique aspects. In other words, the region shows and is identified by specific characteristics (economic, social, political, cultural, technological and environmental) which tells it apart from the other regions. It's the same with Vale do Taquari. The difference starts with the almost absolute predominance of the small property, being rural or urban. Over this little property base small businesses start up: small agricultural production, small size industry, small trade, small outsourcing services, and others. Small, yet dynamic regional businesses.²

The notion of community, seen and conceived as a family extension, became another differential to tell Vale do Taquari apart. Based on the tripod small business, family work and community life, a productive system (ideological, cultural, material) is structured and organized to shape and give meaning to a diversified economy, and differentiated communities (cultural and ethnically) and to a decentralized political administration over the 37 municipalities that form Vale do Taquari.

In 2006 Vale do Taquari Region's GDP Gross Internal Product achieved approximately R\$4.8 billion (3,05% of the State's GDP). The industry sector was responsible for 28,16 % of this total; outsourcing services for 62,57% and the farming sector for 9,27%. As for the GDP *per capita* the Vale came to R\$ 14.309,91 in 2006. Its geographic position – proximity to the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre (150km) and Caxias do Sul region (110km) – and the road-hydro-rail network system place Vale do Taquari in a strategic position favorable for a social economical development.

¹ MALLMANN, Lígia Margarete. *Gestão Empresarial: o papel das micro e pequenas Empresas no desenvolvimento do Vale do Rio Taquari/RS*. 2008. 98 p. Dissertação (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Desenvolvimento Regional – Mestrado e Doutorado) – Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul, Santa Cruz do Sul, 2008. p. 50.

² *Ibidem*, p. 51.

The region also displays good rates in the education area. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), literacy rates in the Vale was 93,27%. In accordance with the Rio Grande do Sul Statistics Yearbook in 2001 the region was holding the lowest rate of school evasion in the State: 1,95% in fundamental school and 3,15% in high school.

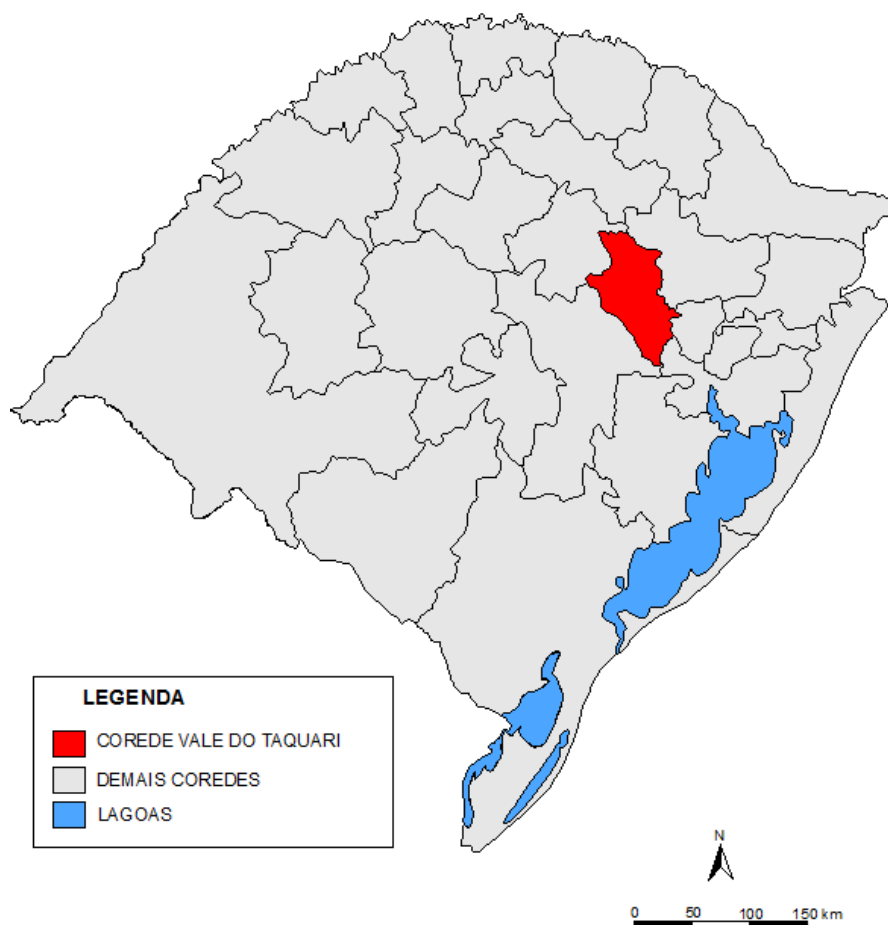
Vale do Taquari, like other regions, relies on political conciliation such ones that boost growth with local goals. The organization of the local society can transform the growth derived from central designation into positive effects, or even better, into development for the region. However, the region cannot be seen only as a geographic factor, but as a social role player, as live element of the planning process.

With the emancipation occurred in Vale to Taquari, AMVAT turned into an Association with 37 municipalities with the majority of them counting on less than 10.000 inhabitants.

Out of five starter municipalities Taquari, Estrela, Lajeado, Encantado and Arroio do Meio, thirty new ones were dismembered; all members of Vale do Taquari Municipal Association, as it may be observed in the following picture:

Picture 1

LOCALIZAÇÃO DO COREDE VALE DO TAQUARI NO ESTADO DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL



Fonte: www.fee.tche.br
Autor: ZANELLA, 2009.

2. THE INTERMUNICIPAL CONSORTIUM IN THE REGION'S DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

It's in a context of intense regional dynamics that, recently, eight municipalities of Vale do Rio Pardo (Forquethinha, Santa Clara do Sul, Progresso, Canudos do Vale, Boqueirão do Leão, Sério, Cruzeiro do Sul and Marques de Souza), all former Lajeado's municipalities, celebrated amongst themselves an Intention Protocol. This Protocol aims the implementation of a InTermunicipal Consortium for Sustainable and Integrated Development among the municipalities members of CG8 – CG8.

In the same context also an Intermunicipal Consortium for Sustainable and Integrated Development – CG9 is set, integrated by the municipalities Anta Gorda, Arvorezinha, Coqueiro Baixo, Doutor Ricardo, Ilópolis, Nova Brescia, Putinga, Relvado.

An apparent contradiction becomes evident: all the mobilization done around the need for emancipation as the only way to develop the place starts to confront itself with the limits imposed by an extreme fragmentation, not only territorial, but also an extreme fragmentation of social, economic and political interests which may jeopardize the promises that once guaranteed support from the majority to the emancipation of new municipalities. Somehow the need to rethink the territorial base becomes an imposition and makes the leaderships of small municipalities, and in many cases the same ones that had taken front at emancipations, to propose a regrouping movement to form a new territorial and political base, strong enough to taken on political divergences, particularly in respect to the planning of shared action (intermunicipal) in strategic areas, such as road network infrastructure, health, education, amongst others, and the search for the necessary resources to execute them.

This fact makes the small municipalities, here called *lugares* (places), to articulate together around common challenges and hopes and start up *regiões* (regions) to face the big number of demands coming from the population needs and aspirations; a population more and more attentive and active considering we are talking about municipalities counting on less than 10.000 inhabitants, but that show a crescent pressure in reason of the larger proximity in relation to the municipal authorities.

It's inserted in this context that Intermunicipal Consortiums for the Development of Vale do Taquari/RS appear, such, according to their pioneers have the objective to think and plan shared actions and interventions in the most diverse areas of public municipal policies.

Public consortiums were foreseen in the constitutional regime of 1891 known as contracts celebrated by states or municipalities; however when celebrated between municipalities needed state's approval and, when between states needed the Union's approval. The constitution of 1937 brought changes recognizing the municipal associations as juridical personality of public law; however no advance was seen in this period. Once more with the constitution of 1946 the federative cooperation starts debating and takes part in the state's role to promote regional and national development. But it's only in 1961 with the creation of the Extreme South Regional Development Bank (BRDE), an interfederative autarchy of Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul' states, that the first modern example of public consortium takes place in Brazil.

In the period from 1964 to 1988 the first administrative consortiums appear as mere collaboration pacts with no juridical personality.

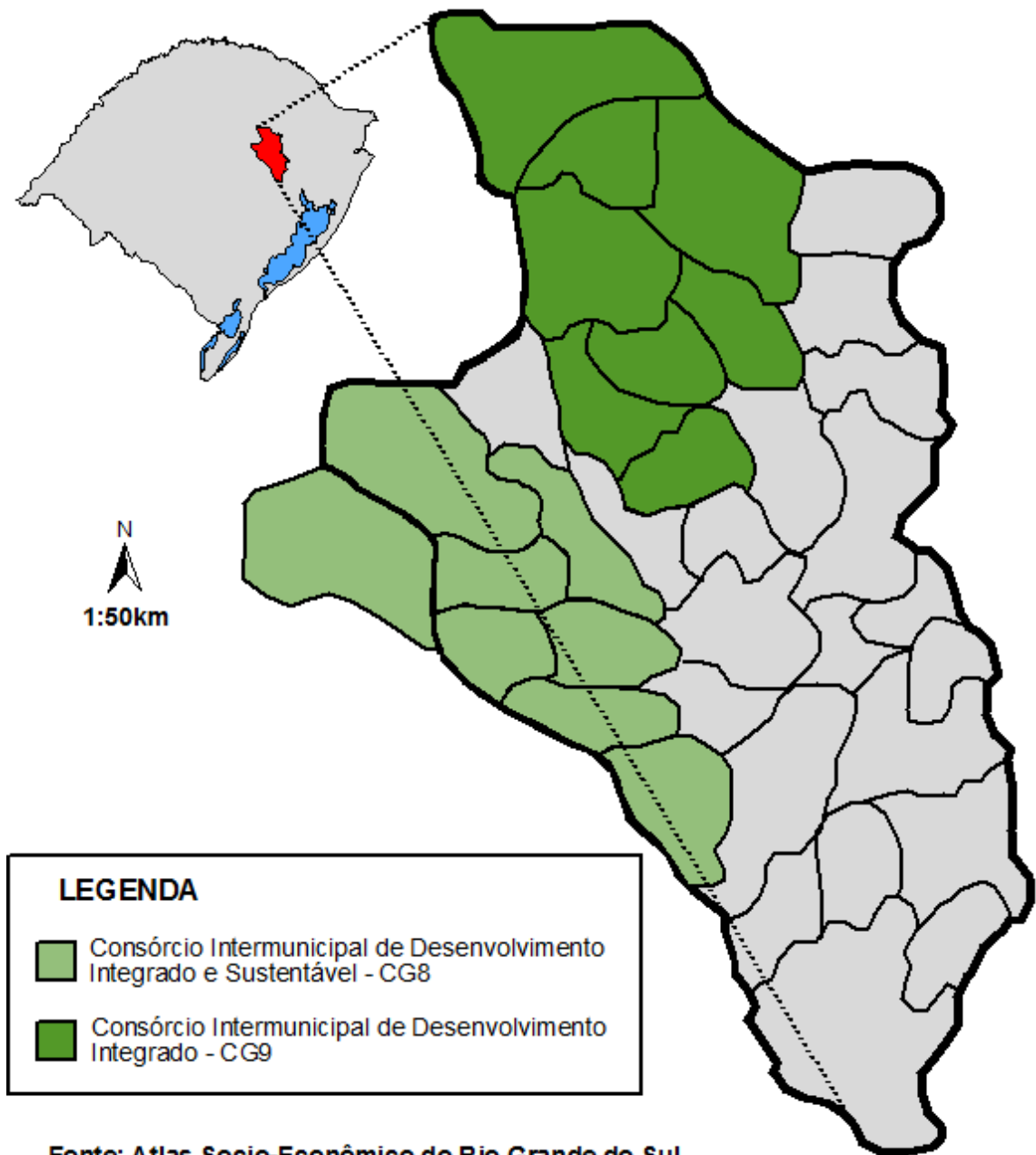
From 1988 countless public consortiums are created, so many that until 2001 in the health department alone there were 1969 consortium members. In 1998 the Constitutional Amend number 19 altered the text of article 241 of the Constitution and introduced the concepts of public consortium and public services associative management. In 2005, the Public Consortium Law is constituted, and in 2007 the decreed 6.017 from Jan 17, 2007 regulates the law of Public Consortiums.

The Constitutional Amend number 19/1998 becomes an important innovation in the Brazilian legislation, once it states that public consortiums may be established between states, municipalities or even yet, may be mixed with the combined participation of federative organizations from different levels.

Supported by this legislation and moved by the hopes presented above, the small municipalities of Vale do Taquari/RS established both Intermunicipal Consortiums identified in the picture below.

Picture 2

REGIÃO DO VALE DO TAQUARI
Consórcios Intermunicipais



Fonte: Atlas Socio-Econômico do Rio Grande do Sul
Autor: ZANELLA, 2009.

This way the small municipalities of Vale do Taquari create a new political-territorial order through establishing micro regional associations as an alternative to suppress many needs which may be reached through partnerships between members, aiming to exchange projects and experiences,

seeking a combined strengthening to demand the answers for claims from micro regions in National and State's level upon governments and institutions, facing the exaggerated power of the globalized markets and offering instruments and minimum conditions to act in the many local activities, seeking the so desired sustainable regional development.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To foresee and anticipate the future seems to have been a permanent concern of human beings, either individual or collectively. The worries of political role players and institutions in projecting and planning a more promising, fraternal and equal future seems to be the speech of every management, either in local, regional, national or global levels. The difference between the intention and the practice of political-administrative and institutional issues is only possible to be verified when government plans are executed, considering an improvement in quality of life for the population, or not.

What happens in Vale do Taquari in relation to the political-administrative structure of the municipalities in the search to create micro regional associations is an alternative attempt to suppress many needs which may be reached through the establishment of partnerships amongst the members, aiming an exchange of experiences, ideas and syndicate articulations offering instruments and minimum conditions to act in the many local activities, seeking the so desired sustainable regional development.

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