


## Marketing of places and sustainable development in regions of low population density: A look at the south of Brazil, from the perspective of local public managers

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to analyze the result of a quantitative and descriptive research that was applied to 20 municipalities in the Northwest Frontier Region of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. The research analyzed the evaluation of mayors regarding the current situation of marketing of places, focused on the infrastructure of cities, through categories of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction. This study also highlights the strengths and weaknesses of cities. The statistical method of distribution of relative frequencies and the technique of content analysis were used for the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The results show that there is satisfaction from municipal governments, especially regarding public health and public education. Dissatisfactions are related to air transport, technology and science parks and cycle paths. Agribusiness, industrial and tourist activities are the main potential of the region. The reduction in population and logistical infrastructure are among the main weaknesses, according to the assessment of regional governments.

**Keywords:** Cities, Infrastructure, Place marketing.

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## INTRODUCTION

Marketing, as a science, has undergone modifications, both in concept and characteristic, as well as in definition. The main objective is to follow, through techniques, the main changes in the market, with new consumers and with the demands of society. Therefore, marketing is not only oriented towards consumption and business activity, but also towards the social domain, non-profit organisations, politics, sport and public services.

One of the areas of marketing is place marketing, which is a tool that serves to influence certain interest groups in relation to products and services for a particular location. However, place marketing literature presents different approaches, based on the characteristics of its multidisciplinary nature. Most studies seek to conceptualize it with reference to the sustainable development of places, aiming to satisfy target segments, identified as current and potential, in order to create or generate positive value for those involved, as well as to strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of a place with a focus on external and internal markets (ASHWORTH; KAVARATZIS, 2008).

Studies in place marketing seek to approach the concept with reference to the development and strengthening of competitiveness. Highlighting a particular region, city, state or country, based on the exchange process established by the marketing concept between the locality and its various stakeholders.

In this scenario, according to Kotler *et al.* (2006), marketing can help prepare places to deal with an uncertain future, since, like businesses, places are also impacted by important forces that affect the economic balance of communities, and are caused by rapid technological changes, demographic effects, global competition, and political variables of the external environment that are beyond their control. This preparation becomes increasingly important in the face of a volatile environment, given the constant influences of the environment and the effects of globalization on the environment (KANTER, 1995).

Therefore, in the same way that marketing prepares an organization to act in the face of the threat of technological, demographic, social, natural and economic forces, it can prepare a city to better position itself, making it more attractive and offering conditions of well-being for its residents, entrepreneurs, visitors and tourists. And one of the strategies of place marketing is infrastructure marketing. In almost all place marketing, infrastructure plays an important role. Investments in infrastructure, in particular, help reduce unemployment and have the support of financial groups.

The greater presence of people in a given place and/or area needs a certain infrastructure to meet its demands. However, places that have high population density can suffer from problems that interfere with people's lives. Being very high, combined with low levels of income and education, it



interferes with general living conditions, such as the configuration of houses with crowded and unsafe housing, increasing the risk of contamination of these people. (ALVES AND LIMA, 2021).

However, places that have low population density and low population generally have difficulties in offering differentiated and quality services. The absence of adequate infrastructure in these places makes it difficult to attract investments and generate new jobs. Considering that population density data are used by federal, state and municipal governments to propose population public policies to design better public services for the local population, it is important that public managers of small cities are aware of these issues, acting in a positive and purposeful way.

In this sense, the objective of this article is to discuss the marketing of places, focusing on infrastructure marketing strategies. Based on this analysis, the study aims to discuss the results of a research that involved 20 municipalities with low population density in southern Brazil. The work seeks to show the evaluation of the mayors regarding the current situation of infrastructure marketing, through twenty statements of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction and to understand the main potentialities and weaknesses of the cities under study. Considering that the marketing of places can feed public managers as an alternative to react and face problems generated by the low population density of cities, among others.

Therefore, for didactic purposes, this study is divided into four sections, aiming to facilitate the understanding of the theme. In addition to the introduction, the following section contains the theoretical framework; Then, the methodology and its classification, which supported the present research. In the fourth section, the development is presented with the results and discussion and, finally, the conclusion of the work.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **PLACE MARKETING**

When places have a poor image, due to factors such as location, inadequate infrastructure, poor service provision, lack of own resources, or a small population, they need to be especially skilled in changing their image. Even if they have attractive characteristics, if they are not transformed into competitive advantages, these places will remain anonymous (KOTLER *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, the city as a place needs to create and develop a favorable situation, based on certain elements and strategies superior to other locations, so that it can have preference when compared to other locations.

It is understood that through the application of place marketing it is possible to present propositions capable of providing a considerable change to the space, revitalizing places and feeding governments to be attentive and able to react positively to changes in scenery. Location marketing is an applicability of marketing with important advancement for the development and growth of cities,



regions, countries and anywhere. It can be understood as a management process applied in localities to satisfy and meet the needs and desires of individuals and organizations (MINCIOTTI; SILVA, 2011 *apud* ALMEIDA 2004).

Ocke and Ikeda (2013) point out that place marketing, when used strategically, becomes a reference for the development and sustainable growth of places, that is, of the municipality. An important point is the existence of attractions that are geographically delimited units and a positive image of the place. To this end, there must be a link between the attractions and the provision of services, anchored by an adequate infrastructure that offers conditions to meet the needs and demands of residents, visitors and tourists. Fundamental elements of a locality to stimulate local development.

The marketing of Places is presented by Cezar (2019), when the author addresses the theme of public marketing. The study explores the four paths that public marketing can follow, considering the objectives of the public sector that wants to implement it: 1) marketing of places with a focus on building local identities and tourism exploitation; 2) marketing of public organizations and services, aimed at promoting services of public organizations, program offerings, public policies, and institutional dissemination; 3) social marketing, aimed at changing social behaviors and; 4) political marketing with a focus on electoral strategies, strengthening of party and government image.

The conscious attempt by governments to shape a specifically designed local identity and promote it to identified markets, whether internally or externally, is almost as old as government itself (Ashworth & Voogd, 1994).

For the city to build its local identity, the existence of a basic infrastructure compatible with the environment makes urban design possible. Satisfaction with the place remains a key factor that can influence the way people relate to each other and ensure that they enjoy social well-being.

## INFRASTRUCTURE MARKETING

According to Health and Wall (1992), infrastructure is considered a public investment and is materialized especially in the form of transportation, public utilities and other basic services. In general, the existing infrastructure is used by residents and visitors of a locality. In this sense, seasonality can be a difficulty for development, since its planning is defined to meet a percentage of the region's carrying capacity.

According to Kotler *et al.* (2006), investments in infrastructure include streets and highways, power generation, technology and innovation parks, railways, airports, and telecommunications and information technology networks. Countries, states, regions and cities that have better infrastructures gain in importance because they reduce transportation costs, supply chain management and end up



attracting companies, industries, residents, visitors and tourists, as they improve their image in society and offer new investment and business opportunities.

According to Dias and Cassar (2005, p. 240), the competitiveness of a locality and the quality of life of its inhabitants depend on the existence of an adequate infrastructure to serve visitors. Thus, the authors cite some important aspects that should be considered when talking about the infrastructure of a location (related to attracting visitors), which are described below: a) Water and electricity supply networks; b) basic sanitation system and disposal of solid and liquid waste, as well as paving of streets and access roads to attractions; c) Effective public transport system and ease of access to the sites of the attractions; d) Connections with other cities and easy access to airports and bus terminals; e) Existence of public leisure spaces, as well as afforestation of public roads; f) Existence of health centers with the capacity to respond to emergencies and specialized professionals; g) Service structure qualified to serve visitors (hotels, restaurants, etc.); h) Adequate telecommunication and internet structure; i) Security, both with policing and with service stations and; j) Commerce that meets the needs and expectations of visitors, whether basic or superfluous.

In addition to the need for an adequate infrastructure to attract visitors, it is necessary to think about the infrastructure aimed at attracting investments of an economic nature, for the generation of jobs and development of a locality.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Two different methods were used in this study. At first, a quantitative research was carried out to understand the perception and evaluation of mayors regarding the elements of place marketing, focusing on infrastructure marketing strategies. Afterwards, a descriptive research was carried out in order to understand the main potentialities and weaknesses of the municipalities.

The quantitative research process began by contacting city halls, via phone, email, and WhatsApp, in the months of April, May, and June 2022, to verify availability and interest in contributing information about the topic under study. In these contacts, the main objective and purpose of the research were anticipated.

Subsequently, for the collection of primary data, a questionnaire containing a set of closed questions was elaborated, which was sent via mail and by e-mail to the mayors of the twenty municipalities in the region. The questionnaire presented 20 assertions, and was structured on a 5-point *Likert* scale (1 - totally dissatisfied, 2 - dissatisfied, 3 - neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 4 - satisfied and 5 - totally satisfied).

The scale requires respondents to indicate a degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, considering statements presented in the data collection instrument that had as its main focus to investigate and evaluate the infrastructure of cities. In the same data collection instrument, open



questions were presented so that the municipalities could describe the main strengths and weaknesses of the municipality.

In the period from May to June, the questionnaire corresponded to 100% of the cities surveyed. Some data collection instruments were answered by the mayors themselves, others by cabinet advisors, public managers and secretaries.

In addition to the primary data collected through the questionnaire, the study used secondary data to characterize the region, which are usually those that were collected, tabulated and analyzed, that is, information that is available for consultation.

The results of the quantitative research were presented basically in the form of percentages, using statistical methods of distribution of relative frequencies. Based on this, explanatory comments were made, seeking to establish a relationship with the theoretical studies carried out on the subject and the researcher's perception.

To present the results, three categories were used: one column for very dissatisfied and dissatisfied, another for neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, and the third column for satisfied and very satisfied. To interpret and understand the data collected from the open questions, the study used the content analysis technique.

According to Bardin (1977), content analysis aims to obtain, through systematic and objective procedures for describing the content of messages, indicators that allow the inference of these messages. According to the author, this technique aims to identify what is being said about a given topic. It helps to understand how people think and act in the concrete world.

## DEVELOPMENT

This part of the paper presents the main results of the research. Initially, through secondary data, a set of basic information about the region is brought. Next, the article shows the results of the research and analyzes the infrastructure marketing of the municipalities. And finally, the unit highlights the main strengths and weaknesses of cities.

## CHARACTERIZATION OF THE REGION

The territory of the northwest border of the state of Rio Grande do Sul is formed by 20 (twenty) municipalities, as follows: Alecrim, Alegria, Boa Vista do Buricá, Campina das Missões, Cândido Godói, Doutor Maurício Cardoso, Horizontina, Independência, Nova Candelária, Novo Machado, Porto Lucena, Porto Mauá, Porto Vera Cruz, Santa Rosa, Santo Cristo, São José do Inhacorá, Senador Salgado Filho, Três de Maio, Tucunduva and Tuparendi.

In total, these municipalities cover an area of 4,639 km<sup>2</sup>, with an estimated population of 198,320 inhabitants, of which 67.32% live in the urban area and 32.68% live in the rural area. Only 4



cities have a population above 10 thousand inhabitants: Santa Rosa (73,882), Três de Maio (23,846), Horizontina (19,446) and Santo Cristo (14,177) (IBGE, 2022). In comparative terms, at least three categories of municipalities can be created, considering their population: the three largest, those with a population between 6 and 15 thousand inhabitants, and the smallest, with less than 6 thousand inhabitants, the majority of them, and those with less than 3 thousand inhabitants. The municipalities were grouped into regions and the northwest border is one of the 28 regions of the state.

As for the region, it is observed that over the last few years there has been a process of population reduction. The territory has been losing population, as shown in figure 1. When comparing the year 2001 (212,181 inhabitants) with the year 2022 (198,329 inhabitants), it can be seen that over the years the region lost around 13,852 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022; FEE, 2022).

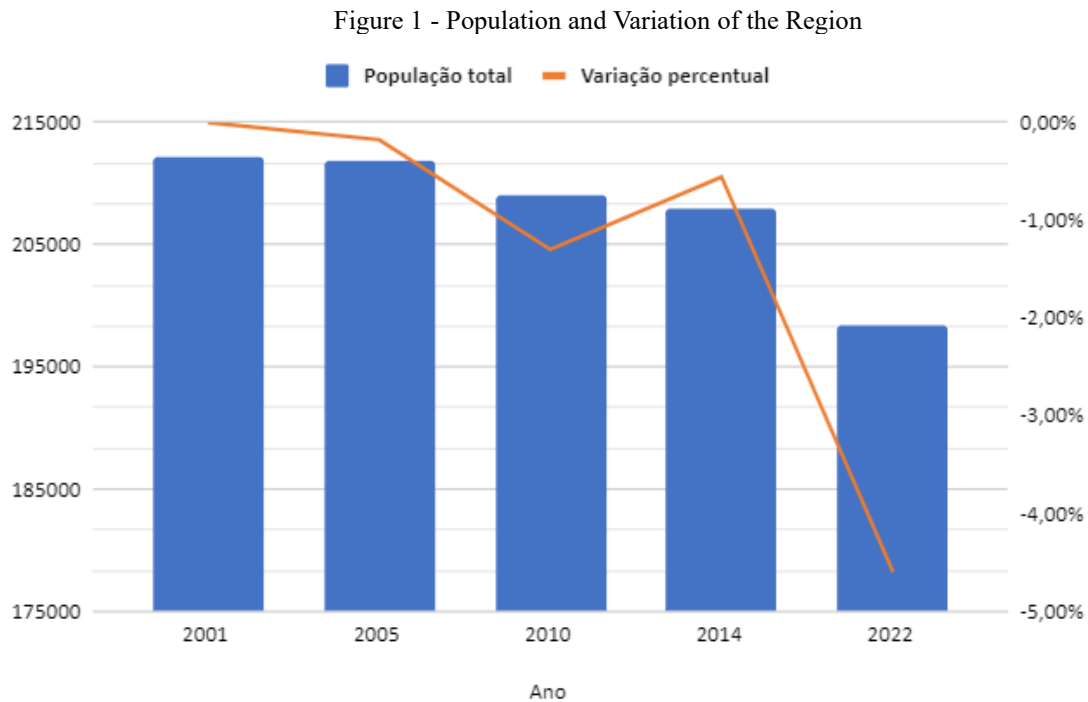
The reduction of the population associated with low population density creates a problem for public managers, among which we can highlight: a) Limited access to obtain financial resources from the state and federal governments, as these prioritize large urban centers; b) The inequality and disproportionality in the distribution of revenues from the Union and the States reduce the capacity for investments, which is aggravated by the fiscal war provoked by the larger municipalities, and weaken the small municipalities, generating difficulties to meet the social demands of their citizens; c) Insufficient revenues lead municipalities to indebtedness and, consequently, to increase their dependence on transfers from other entities of the federation and the difficulty of meeting the needs of citizens; (d) the absence of a consumer market; (e) minimal possibility of new investment in infrastructure; f) Difficulty in attracting new residents, visitors, tourists and enterprises to the city; g) Lack of qualified and specialized labor; h) Flight and difficulty in retaining talents from the site; i) Lack of differentiated and specialized services; j) municipal economic fragility, among others. (SANTOS FILHO AND MIRANDA, 2015).

In this sense, Alves and Paula e Silva (2014) also point out challenges that can be faced by small municipalities, in the sense that sometimes small cities can face an unequal environment, since there may be social and environmental problems, such as lack of housing, insufficiency of basic services (environmental sanitation, asphalt, lighting, etc.), seasonality of employment and others.

França (2021), points out the need for effective planning, capable of organizing localities, especially small municipalities and, consequently, ensuring the quality of life of citizens. This implies the planning of urban-industrial and economic growth, the implementation of infrastructures, and also the provision by the government of basic rights for the population, such as health, education, employment, leisure and transportation.

Still, in relation to the region, as for the economic sectors, the largest participation is in agriculture and industry, and the smallest is in services. The municipalities in the region represent approximately 3.2% of the Gross Value Added (GVA) of agriculture in the state, 2.1% of the GVA of

industry and 1.6% of the GVA of services, considering the gross value of each sector. (BERTÊ *et al.*, 2016).



Fonte: IBGE (2022)

## PLACE MARKETING: INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIES

Infrastructure can be understood as any representation of any form of construction above or below ground. Its function is to serve and complement the offer of services and spaces and places of attraction that the city offers to residents, visitors, investors and tourists. Therefore, the infrastructure is responsible for the receiving locality to offer conditions to satisfy the needs and demands of the people who need it, in addition to contributing to the social and economic development of the locality, generating a climate of general satisfaction. (MÜLLER & SILVA, 2011).

## PUBLIC MANAGERS' SATISFACTION WITH INFRASTRUCTURE

Considering the data presented in Figure 2, the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the statements presented can be observed. Satisfaction is observed when the offer of a product and/or service meets the needs and expectations of consumers and users.

Generally, residents, users, visitors and tourists, as well as companies, commerce and industry, have positive expectations of the place and expect several options to meet their needs and demands. Be it the basic conditions, such as water, electricity, education, health, sanitation, as well as others related to logistics, tourism, sanitation, telecommunications, transport, industrial, urban and economic infrastructure.



Figure 2 - Infrastructure Marketing: Questions and percentages

INFRASTRUCTURE MEASUREMENT ISSUES	Satisfaction Scale		
	MI/I	NI/NS	S/MS
1. Street Lighting	10%	20%	70%
2. Paved Streets	15%	10%	75%
3. Cobblestone Streets	5%	5%	90%
4. Sidewalks	10%	50%	40%
5. Side Roads (inland)	-	15%	85%
6. Traffic Signs	10%	15%	75%
7. Traffic Fluidity	-	20%	80%
8. Public Squares	10%	5%	85%
9. Public Safety	10%	20%	70%
10. Public Health	-	-	100%
11. Public Education	-	5%	95%
12. Water Supply	10%	15%	75%
13. Open Gyms in Squares	10%	15%	75%
14. Electricity Supply	5%	20%	75%
15. Internet/Telecommunications Signal	-	35%	65%
16. Airport	60%	35%	5%
17. Technology and Science Parks	60%	30%	10%
18. Bike lanes	65%	25%	10%
19. Your view on residents' perception of the city's infrastructure	-	5%	95%
20. Waste/garbage recycling	15%	20%	65%

Source: Survey data (2022).

A complete and quality infrastructure makes it possible to attract people, investments, job creation, economic growth and, above all, increase competitiveness. It also contributes to the development of a place, region, city and/or country in relation to the markets, offering strategic differentials.

For Minciotti and Silva (2011), a locality must have and be able to provide basic infrastructures, such as means of transportation, schools with quality education, affordable energy, security, urban standards, recreational spaces, restaurants and good hotels.



As for the indicators of totally satisfied and satisfied, the study shows, according to the evaluation of the city halls, that the areas that generated the most significant percentage are related to the situation of paved streets (90%), paved streets (75%), side roads (85%), traffic fluidity (80%), public squares (85%), traffic signs (75%), public health (100%) and public education (95%).

The client evaluates a service based on a process in which there is a relationship between the expected quality, which are their expectations before receiving the service, and the quality experienced, that is, what the client actually receives in the execution. There is a perception of good quality when the experience meets expectations. (GRÖNROOS, 2009).

It should be noted that the area of public health presented a positive evaluation. The result may be associated with the Unified Health System (SUS), which is considered one of the largest and best in the world. And Brazil offers a broad solution for the population that depends exclusively on this system to treat their health. The results also highlight the area of public education. Quality public education generates benefits throughout the social structure, as it provides greater opportunities for people, generates social and economic development, and helps reduce violence.

The municipal government has a key role in creating a favorable environment for business development and success. By its nature, local economic development is the result of a partnership between the business sector, community interests, and municipal government. (MURPHY; GOGA; SWINBURN, 2006, p. 9).

It can be seen that the municipalities seek, through projects, structures and qualified professionals, seeking positive results in these areas, which are essential to the residents and residents. The other items that were well evaluated contribute to the generation of a positive image of the place. Although they are small cities, having fluidity in traffic, side roads in good condition, paved streets and more welcoming squares, make residents, visitors and tourists more satisfied and content, whether they are from urban or rural areas.

Other areas that obtained a positive evaluation and contribute to people's well-being are associated with public lighting (70%) and public safety (70%). It can be seen that the result is not a concern, but due to its importance, it is essential that cities direct strategies with the objective of improving results.

Still, in relation to the positive aspects, it is possible to highlight the water supply (75%), gyms open in squares (75%) and electricity supply (75%). When it comes to infrastructure, these are essential issues of a place that need to be monitored by managers to further qualify the services and structure.

The municipalities in the region, according to the survey, showed positive results in several aspects of infrastructure, as shown in figure 2. This is vital to boost the region's socio-economic planning and development. It is up to municipal managers to intensify actions with the positive



aspects of cities, to improve the image, make places more attractive and gain in terms of preference and choice when compared to other places in the state and other regions.

### **PUBLIC MANAGERS' DISSATISFACTION WITH INFRASTRUCTURE**

Dissatisfaction is related to a negative emotion generated by the distrust of expectations in the face of something, especially in the face of the offer of a service or product that does not meet the interest when the experience of using it occurs. When the result of the comparison with standards is negative, it can drive residents, visitors, tourists and future investors away from a place, which can bring future problems to public managers. The image of the place can be compromised and the generation of negative recommendations can contribute to the dynamics of its decadence. And with the collapse of the infrastructure, the place becomes unattractive.

In this sense, the research shows that the main percentages of dissatisfaction with the infrastructure of the municipalities analyzed, which are presented in figure 2, are mainly related to the airport (60%), technological and scientific parks (60%) and bicycle paths (65%). With the globalized and digital economy, the time factor has become a competitive advantage. Time is a powerful tool for the quick delivery of products to customers, making online production and logistics more flexible. In this sense, despite all the efforts of the municipal, state and federal public authorities to enable the regular air transport service, connecting the city of Santa Rosa to the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, this situation remains a challenge to be overcome. For example, the region of the Missions, which borders the region under study, in addition to enabling flights to Porto Alegre, has a set deadline to start the air operation, also connecting Santo Ângelo to São Paulo. In addition to being far from major centers and having a deficiency in the logistics infrastructure on highway and rail transport routes, this weakness makes the region lose competitiveness and efficiency in this sector.

Generally, bike lanes contribute to mitigate accidents involving bicycles, motorcycles and cars and are another road option that allows greater fluidity in city traffic. In this segment, the research showed that cities need to invest in structures that make this service more feasible for their residents.

At the current stage of technological development of society, it is necessary to increase wealth in communities through partnerships between public and private institutions that generate knowledge. Thus, it is possible to transfer technology and create business incubation strategies. In this requirement, the results of the research show that the region still lacks more actions aimed at the municipalities, a situation that today is restricted to a few cities through partnerships with higher education institutions.



There are factors that are important for the growth of the cities and the region, which showed a level of dissatisfaction, in addition to the inhibiting elements that affect the offer of new services and more investment and business opportunities. Infrastructure applications help reduce unemployment and rebuild the site, setting the stage for new investment and business opportunities. Therefore, the municipal administration needs to find alternatives that are capable of minimizing the effects of the dissatisfaction results identified in the survey.

In this sense, when talking specifically about the application of Place Marketing, there are several challenges for the execution of marketing in locations, the main one being the coordination of a large number of actors from the public and private sectors, which can impact the performance and image of a place. The lack of coordination and fragmentation of marketing strategies can lead to inconsistency of established policies, resulting in an obstacle to long-term effectiveness. (OCKE; IKEDA, 2013). Envisioning the reality of small municipalities, this task can become even more difficult, being an obstacle to the implementation of strategies and the implementation of changes.

## **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF MUNICIPALITIES AND THE REGION**

The data collection instrument asked the municipalities to highlight the main potentialities, as well as to indicate possible weaknesses. Among the main capabilities, it was possible to highlight:

- The primary sector. The municipalities have a vocation and tradition for agribusiness activities, which are supported by a strong sector of various branches of cooperativism. Cooperatives operating in the region earned R\$ 2.6 billion in 2021, with agricultural cooperatives accounting for 82.5% of total revenues.

- Existence of ports in the municipalities of Porto Mauá and Porto Vera Cruz, which have an important participation in the movement of people, products, cargo, tourists and visitors. In this area, there is the possibility of building the international bridge and the coastal project, which aims to create a coastal highway on the banks of the Uruguay River. Numerous investment opportunities may arise, such as the installation of hotels, restaurants, companies specializing in fishing, among other ventures. The stretch of the coastal project covers the municipalities of Doutor Mauricio Cardoso, Novo Machado, Porto Mauá, Alecrim, Porto Vera Cruz and Porto Lucena, which are part of the northwest border region.

- Industry sector. The region is home to two major industries that manufacture harvesters and other industries focused especially on the agricultural sector, which represent around 40% of the agricultural machinery and equipment segment. Also noteworthy are the food processing, dairy and meat agro-industries.

- The tourism sector. With emphasis on the Uruguay River route, whose icon is the river itself. In the region are the 20 municipalities registered on the Brazilian Tourism Map. Highlight for



the possibility of leisure activities, bathhouses, nautical tours, sport fishing, huts and events. The proximity to the neighboring country, Argentina, is another point to be highlighted as potential for tourism, leisure and business for the region.

- Other aspects highlighted in the research are related to people's behavior in relation to volunteer work, incentives for entrepreneurship and industrial pole, mechanized agriculture and the creation of the Association of Municipalities of the Northwest Border (AMUFRON), which aims to boost the development of municipalities.

Among the main weaknesses, the result of the survey pointed out a set of negative situations that include demographics, infrastructure, geographic position, among others:

- Population reduction. In recent years, between 2001 and 2020, according to IBGE (2022), the region's population increased from 212,181 to 198,324 inhabitants, as already presented in this work in the characterization of the region. Associated with this process is the aging of the region's population, which follows the numbers of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The data indicate that the population over 60 years old has tripled in the last 50 years, from 5.8% in the 70s to 18.8% in 2020. Currently, in the state, there are 103.3 elderly people for every 100 young people, which is the highest value in the country (ATLAS, 2020). Associated with demography, there is also the departure of young people from rural areas to urban centers.

-Infrastructure. In many municipalities there is a lack of restaurants that offer varieties of typical dishes, *homemade food buffets* and assortments of salads and hotels. The region also has municipalities without asphalt access, hindering a more structured logistics that can connect with the country's major centers.

- Other approaches highlighted by the municipalities are related to the precarious situation of the side roads in rural areas, the risk of drought, the lack of more qualified labor, the border culture not prone to development and *the housing deficit*.

Observing the potentialities and weaknesses, some worrying aspects that interfere with the development of the region are evident: its location, compared to the rest of the state and the country, is considered geographically peripheral, with several border cities and with characteristics of late development; the reduction of the population associated with low population density that impacts and compromises activities that depend on qualified professionals; among others and lack of logistics infrastructure and in the offer of services in the gastronomic and hotel sectors, which impact the development of the region.

However, it can be said that the region has been facing its present and future challenges in a qualified way. Actions planned through the adoption of marketing tools for places, specifically the marketing of attractions, image and people, can contribute to the creation of a new positive scenario for municipalities and the region.



## CONCLUSION

For the development of the article, the marketing of places with a focus on the infrastructure of the municipalities was addressed. Most cities have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. Possibly, this condition weakens and restricts the capacity for new investments in priority areas for social and economic development, especially in the smallest cities.

It can be seen that cities, as well as the region, can react in different ways to the positive or negative aspects of infrastructure. Some, due to their geographical position and low population density, associated with the small number of inhabitants, find it more difficult in terms of financial resources, compromising actions to qualify the spaces in order to make them more attractive. Others seek to define strategies to attract new investments, aiming to meet the needs of those who live there, as well as visitors and tourists.

It should also be noted that, because most of its municipalities are less inhabited, the region runs the risk of concentrating investments when new companies arrive, mainly in the retail chain and also in the industrial sector, only in cities that have a larger population and infrastructure. For the place that receives it, it is positive, however, when this process concentrates its actions in the cities with the largest population, the small municipalities tend to remain anonymous, with tendencies of emptying people, tourists, visitors and new capital.

In this situation, the search for public-private partnerships, the famous PPPs, can be an alternative for the joint realization of a certain service or work of interest to the population. Many infrastructure works that need a more robust investment can be made feasible and carried out through this strategy. The private sector has a culture for large infrastructure projects, which further justifies the idea of partnership.

In a way, even if the results of the survey are not worrisome, since most of the infrastructure items obtained a positive evaluation, a new positioning of the region is necessary.

The study shows that some sectors need more attention and investments in infrastructure, to qualify and improve services and spaces designed to meet the demands and needs of residents, visitors, tourists and for new businesses. Especially investments in tourism, because some places can enjoy the benefit of the Uruguay River, which has the possibility of leisure, spas, nautical tours, fishing, events, enjoy the natural beauties and camping area, which constitutes a potential for the cities near the river and for the region.

To this end, the applicability of place marketing can influence certain groups and public managers in relation to the offer of products and services for a given location. Considering that the city as a place needs to create and develop a favorable situation of attraction, based on elements and strategies in infrastructure, mainly so that it can have the preference of people, tourists, companies, new investments, institutions and organizations, when compared to other places. These actions can



contribute to tackling the problem of low population density and loss of inhabitants, although this is a huge problem for public managers.

Finally, this study suggests the continuity of the research with the same theme to be applied to city dwellers. The work was limited to the evaluation of infrastructure by public managers, which limited more complex and systemic analyses. Increasing the investigation and involving residents, visitors and tourists, the study incorporates new conceptions of other agents that demand the city's infrastructure services. By bringing new perspectives on the places, more strategies supported by the marketing of places can contribute to the process of continuous improvement of the cities of the northwest border region.



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