



# **THE INTANGIBILITY OF THE TANGIBLE: THE PAMPA GAÚCHO IN THE PRACTICE AND IMAGINATION OF AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FAMILY FARMERS AND RANCHERS**

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# THE INTANGIBILITY OF THE TANGIBLE: THE PAMPA GAÚCHO IN THE PRACTICE AND IMAGINATION OF AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FAMILY FARMERS AND RANCHERS

## A IMATERIALIDADE DO MATERIAL: O PAMPA GAÚCHO NA PRÁTICA E NO IMAGINÁRIO DOS AGRICULTORES E PECUARISTAS FAMILIARES AGROECOLÓGICOS

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### ABSTRACT

The Pampa Gaúcho (in the State of Rio Grande do Sul) is a vast territory full of tangible and intangible characteristics that present potential and opportunities for agro-ecological family farming and ranching. This research aims at identifying the tangible and intangible aspects in agro-ecological family farming and ranching in the Pampa Gaúcho. The research is classified as qualitative and exploratory and was based on a case study. The data collection techniques were semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Fifteen interviews were carried out between October 2021 and February 2022: four with development agents and eleven with agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers. The data was processed using content analysis. The results indicate that the tangible attributes of the territory are more related to the perceptions of agro-ecological family farmers linked to the natural environment and productive issues of social reproduction. The intangible attributes of the territory are more closely linked to the perspectives of agro-ecological family farmers in relation to their way of life and the emotional way they associate production with the natural resources available in the Pampa Gaúcho. The conclusion is that this territory has a huge amount of elements that make it a unique environment for the development of agro-ecological production practices and conservation of its biome.

**Keywords:** Agro-ecology; Family farming and ranching; Territory.

## RESUMO

O Pampa Gaúcho é um vasto território carregado de características materiais e imateriais, que apresentam como potencialidades e oportunidades para a agropecuária familiar agroecológica. A presente pesquisa visa identificar os aspectos materiais e imateriais presentes na agricultura e na pecuária familiar agroecológica no Pampa Gaúcho. A pesquisa se classifica como qualitativa e exploratória e foi realizada a partir de estudo de caso. As técnicas de coleta de dados foram: entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação não participante. Efetuaram-se 15 entrevistas entre outubro de 2021 e fevereiro de 2022: quatro com agentes de desenvolvimento e onze com agricultores e pecuaristas familiares agroecológicos. O tratamento dos dados ocorreu por análise de conteúdo. Os resultados indicam que os atributos materiais do território estão mais relacionados às percepções dos agricultores familiares agroecológicos vinculadas ao ambiente natural e às questões produtivas de reprodução social. Já os atributos imateriais do território vinculam-se, em maior grau, às perspectivas dos pecuaristas familiares agroecológicos em relação ao modo de vida e à forma afetiva que associam a produção aos recursos naturais disponíveis no Pampa Gaúcho. Conclui-se que neste território há uma riqueza de particularidades que o projeta como um ambiente único para o desenvolvimento de práticas produtivas agroecológicas e conservação do bioma.

**Palavras-Chave:** Agroecologia; Agropecuária familiar; Território.

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, the term territory has been linked to physical space; however, new analytical perspectives have been gaining prominence. Interpretations have freed territory from purely geographical aspects and started to consider its social context. The change in the theoretical lens emerged from the conceptual reorganization of geography, which has led to new perspectives on territory (Maia, 2022).

From the 1970s onwards, there has been a movement to restructure the geography based on space-time and revised the way of seeing, thinking about and analysing space. From this perspective, we can cite Milton Santos, who made significant contributions to notions of territory based on human action through the use and occupation of space. According to the author, space is defined by its resources and potential. Thus, the use of territory is what characterizes space as an object of social analysis (Santos, 2005).



According to this reorganization, territory is characterized by a multidimensional perspective, with aspects that relate to its tangible traits, consisting of physical factors such as relief, fauna, flora, climate, natural resources, landscapes and populations, and its intangible traits, such as societies, cultures, traditions, beliefs, way of life and know-how (Santos, 2005; Schneider, 2009; Saquet, 2011; Oliveira, 2020).

The product of the relationship between the tangible and intangible factors of a territory is social construction, which inhabits and consolidates a given space. According to Saquet (2011), social construction comes from a territory, which, in turn, is loaded with a multitude of characteristics inherent to a specific space that are based on different forms of use and feeling of being part thereof. The set of factors and characteristics make up and support the definition of territory and this, in turn, is given by historical, multiform, trans-scalar, multidimensional relations and also by power relations.

Thus, these notions of territory, which encompass use and occupation, tangible and intangible factors, will be related to Pampa Gaúcho. Pampa is a vast living space established by a particular relationship between the natural environment and society. This environment was formed by the use and occupation of the territory and its tangible and intangible aspects are strongly connected (Maia, 2022).

However, modern agriculture has altered this territory. Its arrival in the Pampa Gaúcho has established new social relations in rural areas and inserted new elements to the territory that influence the dynamics and context of existing social life. These new relationships have disregarded the characteristics of the territory and impacted the way of life and work dynamics between men, as inhabitants, and the Pampa, as a natural environment (Netto; Vargas, 2019).

Considering the relationship that farming and ranching in this context have with their environment and the way in which they use the available resources, they follow the precepts of agro-ecology. Agro-ecology serves as a basis for the transition from conventional to sustainable models of agriculture, cattle ranching and development since it reorients production processes to expand social inclusion factors, reduce environmental damage and impact food supply (Caporal; Costabeber, 2002; Caporal, 2008). Agro-ecology is seen as one of the production alternatives with the potential to fulfill the precepts of sustainability, especially for family farming and ranching in regions like the Pampa Gaúcho, with fragile ecosystems and environmental peculiarities (Rocha; Arend, 2017).

The aim of this research is to analyse the tangible and intangible aspects in agro-ecological family agriculture and cattle ranching in the Pampa Gaúcho<sup>1</sup>. Located in the southern half of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the Pampa Gaúcho covers around 63% of its territory (IBF, 2020). It should be mentioned cattle ranching is the main economic activity in the rural setting of the Pampa, given the large size of the land. In addition to being an economic activity, extensive cattle ranching has become *gaúchos'* way of life in the Pampa (Ribeiro, 2018). As a result of agricultural modernization, rice cultivation quickly became hegemonic in the region, at the same time as beef cattle. The same happens with soybean cultivation (Fontoura, 2014).

## THE TERRITORY OF AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FAMILY FARMING AND RANCHING

The notion of territory has been widely discussed in both academia and public policy-making. Space, which used to refer to a physical delimitation, has undergone changes and now includes human relations and the interaction between man and the environment. There are various views within the new theoretical perspective. For Schneider (2009, p. 3), “the concept of territory is ubiquitous and broad”; according to Santos (2005, p. 255), “territory is forms, but the used territory is objects and actions, synonymous with human space, inhabited space.” Thus, it is understood that territory is a space delimited and/or defined by power relations, such as political and economic factors and the actions of social actors. Territory is characterized by its use; “territory is the feeling of belonging to what belongs to us; therefore, territory is workplace, the place of residence, of material and spiritual exchanges and the exercise of life (Oliveira, 2020, p. 43).”

It is clear that the new meanings of territory go beyond regional synthesis. This highlights what Oliveira (2020) said about the intangibility that inhabits a territory, i.e. the habits, customs, traditions, values belonging to a given context, as well as its set of symbolic practices. Santos (2005) postulates that, in addition to the issue of nature and resources, territory is belonging, the exercise of life, the product resulting from social relations in space, its history, culture and local identity.

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1 His research contains partial results of the first author's master's thesis, a study carried out in the research group Circle of Studies in Development and Ruralities (Círculo de Estudos em Desenvolvimento e Ruralidades, or CEDER) (<https://sites.unipampa.edu.br/ceder/>).



Discussions on territory and the varied perspective of rural dimensions contribute to development issues, since they address rural complexities and dynamics without disregarding the social relations that exist in these spaces (Rocha; Paula, 2006; Schneider; Tartaruga, 2004).

For Saquet (2007; 2011), territory is a social construction, given the different ways in which geographical space is used and how people feel they are part thereof. It is also historical and relational, multiform and multidimensional, built mostly by power relations. However, it involves circulation and communication networks, nature outside man, differences, inequalities and both cultural and individual identities.

Territory can also be defined as a piece of land of which one feels as part of. Saquet (2011) considers various interacting factors, from social construction to relationships. These definitions include the discussion of such factors as place, soil and climate conditions, fauna, flora, geography, relief, among many other tangible characteristics that coexist in the same space-time with a multitude of intangible ones, such as local society, customs, habits, traditions, local knowledge and experiences resources (Saquet, 2013).

The interconnection of these peculiarities promotes territorial development. It should be considered that development is linked to the territory as a way of better exploring its local potential and conserving natural resources for society to reach them and use them (Saquet, 2011). According to this territorial construction, it is important to understand the movements in farming and ranching and the dynamics that exist in rural scenarios, such as living spaces, social relations, production, farming and ranching (Maia, 2022).

In this scenario is family farming, which represents one of the most important ways of food production in Brazil, since it produces most of the products consumed daily and is one of the sectors that employ the most people (Aquino; Schneider, 2021). Family farming is understood as “one in which the family both owns the means of production and takes on the work in the productive establishment” (Wanderley, 1996, p. 2). However, it should be pointed out that characterizing this kind of agriculture as family agriculture goes beyond a descriptive and theoretical detail and associates the family’s productive structure with social and economic consequences.



Family farming is diverse and heterogeneous, and the way it is perceived is the result of the historical formation of the Brazilian agricultural structure. According to Aquino and Schneider (2021), family farming is indispensable in establishing food security and has a strategic role to play in meeting the challenges agriculture faces to develop territories, adapt to climate change and provide quality of life.

Family ranching has been socially legitimized based on a series of studies that identified the existence of a specific social category in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Waquil *et al.*, 2016; Borba, 2016; Ribeiro, 2018). Family ranchers are those individuals who have unique characteristics, such as maintaining a family-based mode of production in the countryside, raising beef cattle and/or sheep as their main productive activity, as well as a relationship of dependence on nature (Waquil *et al.*, 2016; Ribeiro, 2018).

Waquil *et al.* (2016) argue that, in order to understand family ranching and its specificities, family ranchers need to be seen as social actors who should also be distinguished ethnically and culturally according to the historical phenomena in their formation. Thus, family ranchers are seen as “subjects with legitimate interests and rights and, as such, protagonists who make up the social and cultural and productive fabric of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in a unique way (Waquil *et al.*, 2016, p. 12).”

According to Ribeiro (2009), family cattle ranchers are a specific type of family farmer, coming from different backgrounds and constructions based on their occupation of the land, their way of life and their particular relationship with nature and the resources that come from it. Azevedo and Fialho (2016) add that the form of production used by family livestock farmers is considered low impact and is therefore capable of promoting ecosystem services of great relevance to the activity, thus becoming a strategic factor in relation to the preservation of intangible factors such as culture, tradition and way of life in unique ecosystems. The way in which family farmers feel as part and make use of nature in every way contributes to the conservation of the Pampa biome.

Production based on care, adaptation and use of the resources inherent in the territory is based on the principles of agro-ecology. Agro-ecology is a new and dynamic science that can provide basic ecological principles for the treatment of agro-ecosystems in terms of both agricultural productivity and conservation of natural resources (Altieri, 2000). Caporal and Costabeber (2002) state that agro-ecology serves as a basis for supporting the transition from conventional to sustainable agricultural development models.



Agro-ecology is based on the search for and identification of the place and its identity as a way of recreating the heterogeneity of the rural environment through different forms of participatory collective social action (Guzmán, 2001). From an agro-ecological and sustainable perspective, Rocha and Arend (2017) argue that, in order to promote social, economic and environmental sustainability in production units, one should consider economic and productive feasibility factors and value local and empirical knowledge.

According to Matei and Filippi (2012), the Pampa territory and all its inherent resources should be valued and planning should be made from a territorial perspective so that the development model can be based on the precepts of agro-ecology and family farming and ranching.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative, exploratory and has a case study. The case addressed is the relationship between agro-ecological family farming and ranching and the Pampa Gaúcho territory, i.e. the tangible and intangible aspects inherent in day-to-day life and labour in producing and reproducing the territory. The data collection techniques were semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Fifteen interviews were carried out: six with farmers, four with agro-ecological family ranchers and one with a participant who is both a family farmer and a family rancher. In addition, four development agents<sup>2</sup> were interviewed between October 2021 and February 2022 using previously prepared scripts based on existing literature on the subject.

The reality of each family farmer and rancher, their role in the territory and their availability and ability to provide information were taken into account to select the participants. The interviewees were selected using the snowball technique, which is suitable for studying groups that are difficult to access, given the lack of knowledge about the research's target population. For this reason, referrals were accepted from participants, who then referred others and so on (Vinuto, 2014).

The interviewees were contacted by telephone or via the WhatsApp messaging and were asked to schedule visits to the Family Production Units (UFP). The location of the UFP is in the

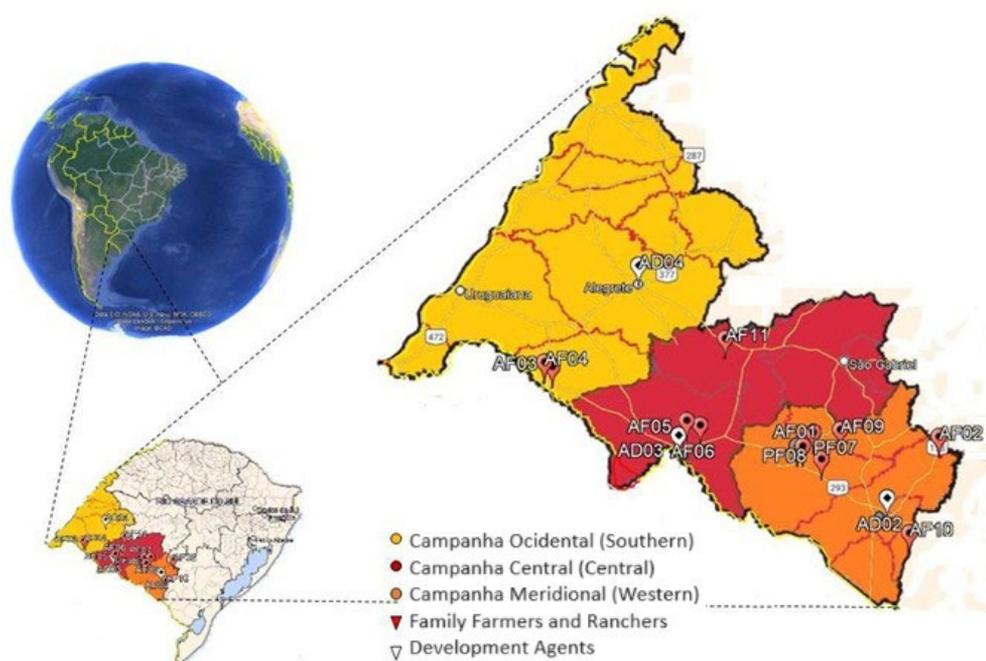
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2 The requirement to select development agents was their activities related to family farming and/or ranching and agro-ecology. Local heterogeneity was thus represented since it included public and private extension workers and university professors who work in institutions located in the Pampa Gaúcho.



three micro-regions of Campanha Gaúcha: Campanha Meridional (Southern), Campanha Central and Campanha Ocidental (Western) (IBGE, 1990). This criterion was used so that a larger representation was achieved considering the size of the territory surveyed, which includes the municipalities of Bagé, Dom Pedrito, Hulha Negra, Lavras do Sul, Quaraí, Rosário do Sul and Santana do Livramento. The scope covered in the study is shown in Figure 1, which illustrates the locations or reference points of each participant in two colours: red for family farmer or rancher and white for development agents.

**Figure 1** | Location of the study participants in the Pampa Gaúcho



Source: Maia (2022, p. 60).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the data collected were analysed using the content analysis approach proposed by Bardin (2010). In order to support the analyses and provide a wider range of information, field and journey diaries were used, combined in such a way as to better showcase the environment in which each family is inserted. With the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the identity of the research participants, the interviewees were presented by codes: “AF” for family farmers, “PF” for family ranchers, or a mixture of both, “APF” and “AD” for development agents. The letters are followed by numbers, which represent the chronological order of the visits made. The following section presents the results of the research.

## THE VIEW OF AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FAMILY FARMING AND RANCHING ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE PAMPA

The main characteristics of the agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers who took part in the research are: high age (54 to 55 on average), most are married men who did not finish primary school. The study corroborates the profile of the rural population in Brazil presented by the IBGE (2019).

The analysis made it possible to outline two categories of **tangible attributes of the territory** considering the *physical place of residence and production* of the study participants: i) *production* and ii) *place of life*. The *production* category was identified in six of the 11 interviewees. The common factor among them was their definition of physical place, i.e. their description of the natural characteristics of their UFP, understanding it as a production space. Production issues were more prominent. The following speech presents the definition of tangible aspects regarding production:

It's a very good farm, in terms of levelling, it doesn't have any, it's not flat, it's not too steep, so for fruit growing the soil, the area has to have a lot of drainage! There can never be puddled soil! It's a black soil, a dark soil which is very strong and rich in calcium and phosphorus (AF 01 - Dom Pedrito).

The category *place of life* was identified in the speeches of five of the 11 interviewees. The common factor among these participants was their definition of physical place. The following speech defines the tangible attributes of the territory, but includes broader factors than those of production, such as context of life:

It's undulating here, very rocky. Surrounded by vegetation, it's a very beautiful place, I really enjoy working here [...]. For me it's a wonderful place, like no other in the world, I really like it, the countryside, the rocks and the vegetation are what characterize the place (PF 02 - Bagé).

It should be pointed out that the descriptions go beyond production factors to include adjectives to the places. They were asked about their *feelings towards the family production unit* and two categories of analysis were identified: i) *there is feeling for the physical place* and ii) *there is no feeling for the physical place*.

Eight of the 11 participants in the study were identified in the category *there is feeling for the physical place*. The group includes four family ranchers, three family farmers and one rural pensioner. In order to contextualize this identification in a better way, three subcategories were observed: i) *feeling for nature*; ii) *feeling for family and trajectory* and iii) *feeling for what has been built*.



Four interviewees were identified in the subcategory *feeling for nature*. However, there are links between this subcategory and family since their feeling for nature is related to family issues and vice versa.

It's a very strong feeling of attachment, so much so that I intend, in the future, after I've been regularized and will have acquired my entire unit, I intend to do something, perhaps a private protection area because I want this to last. Forever! If I can [emotional laughter] [...]. Even as a tribute to my ancestors, who were also very attached. So it's a very deep feeling, not just for the land, but for everyone. We have a very close relationship with the animals (PF 02 - Bagé).

The feeling presented by the interviewees is linked to belonging. According to Oliveira (2020), belonging is a key issue in the construction of territory. Three interviewees were identified in the subcategory *feeling for family and trajectory*. In this group there are two ranchers and a family farmer who also has livestock:

I have two daughters and I know that one may take long to come back, but she's already looking towards Dom Pedrito! She's already planned, 'I'm going to build my house here', which makes us happy that there will be continuity! So I think the seed is planted [...] my feeling is to do it, as long as I exist, as long as I'm here, I want to keep it going. Me, I mean me and my family. As long as we're here, we're going to make it produce, without degrading it (PF 08 - Dom Pedrito).

Finally, one participant was identified in the subcategory *feeling for what has been built*. It was noticeable that in his speech there are strong elements that refer to the work built and to the house to a greater degree than those that refer to nature:

For the first two years we lived in the little wood house next door that belonged to my father, until we built this one. And since I'm the builder of everything here, I do a bit of everything myself, brick by brick. So this house is part of us, it's something we love very much (AF 01 - Dom Pedrito).

The three forms of feeling intertwine and build a greater feeling, one of attachment, of affection for nature, for the physical aspects that exist in each place, for the family history and for what has been built in the place, be it a house or the work of a lifetime. For Santos (2005) and Oliveira (2020), it is the combination of these factors that shapes the territory, understanding it as a context of life based on its tangible and intangible attributes. Three of the 11 participants in the study, all of them farmers, were identified in the category *there is no feeling* for their physical place.

Finally, family farmer AF 05 is part of the *other forms of relationship* subcategory. She is in this category because of her feelings about the territory's tangible features, which she expresses



differently from the others. This is demonstrated when the interviewee talks about her feeling of commitment to the place, to production. She emphasizes that she doesn't feel part of the place: "It would come to mind as a logical response to the feeling of belonging, but I don't feel like I belong, because the feeling of belonging is a bit atavistic, and I'm a bit fluid, I'm not one to put down roots (AF 05 - Santana do Livramento)."

Their feeling or affection is evidently related to ranching and, to a lesser extent, farming. Waquil *et al.* (2016) illustrate that family ranchers are socially differentiated: they include ethnic and cultural aspects that comprise a set of unique historical phenomena that make feelings present in their way of life.

Finally, the *natural and physical attributes in the lives and productive activities* of agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers in the Pampa Gaúcho were addressed. The analysis allowed for the identification of two categories: i) *nature combined with productive aspects* and ii) *life context*.

Eight participants were identified in the category *nature combined with productive aspects*, including four ranchers and four family farmers. For these interviewees, natural and physical attributes, such as soil, water, relief, fauna, flora, climate, the natural environment itself, are important factors mainly because they provide the necessary conditions for them to develop their productive activities, i.e. farming or ranching. Three subcategories were identified in the category *nature combined with productive aspects*: i) *nature factor*; ii) *production factor* and iii) *quality of life factor*.

The *nature factor* was detected in the speech of four interviewees, all family ranchers, who realize the importance of natural and physical attributes linked to production, and nature prevails. According to the family rancher: "That's where I come in, mainly with the matter of nature! I often say that nature is sovereign, each thing has its purpose. So I think that, geographically speaking, there's nothing lacking here (PF 11 - Rosário do Sul)." The introduction of modern agriculture based on monocultures disrupts the ranching dynamics transforms the territory. This may explain why family ranchers give greater importance to the territory's natural factors than family farmers (Maia; Troian, 2022).

The *production factor* was identified in the speech of three participants, all family farmers. For these interviewees, the importance of natural and physical attributes is linked to production. The following speech also highlights its economic importance:

It's very important because the natural resources you can get from your own property. This will mainly save you money. Once you know how to work, for example, in the planting beds you work with straw, it will save you water and labour. For example, the fertilizer comes from the chickens, which we also collect here and use on the plants. The main factor is economic (AF 04 - Quaraí).

One participant was identified in the subcategory *quality of life factor*. For the interviewee, the relevance of natural and physical attributes is linked to production, with and quality of life prevails: "It's quality of life, you can be in a place that's more in the middle of nature. Even when it comes to plants, we're trying to use them, not one hundred percent, because it's very difficult, but we're almost there [...] that's the satisfaction of doing things, of living. You can be at one with nature, you can be at peace (AF 01 - Dom Pedrito)."

Two participants were identified in the *context of life* category. For these interviewees, natural and physical attributes, such as soil, water, relief, fauna, flora, climate, the natural environment itself, are factors of great relevance, mainly because they provide the necessary conditions for their current life context or even for understanding this moment. Two categories were identified: i) *life context based on academic experience* and ii) *life context based on one's own trajectory*. In the subcategory *life context based on academic experience*, there was one interviewee, a family farmer. For her, the importance of natural and physical attributes lies in combining the issue with her current moment in life and work:

For my life, the importance is given by the moment I'm living now. So, for me today, this property, this project means real life. Life as it is, making it work, moving, doing the things that for many years I studied academically and also told my students to put into practice, and to prove those things that don't work (AF 05 - Santana do Livramento).

In the subcategory *context of life based on one's own trajectory* there is the retired family farmer and rancher. For him, the importance of natural and physical attributes lies in providing better living conditions through food production. "Conserve it here! As long as it exists, that's my thought! It's great to live here! Thank God! [...] Then we get around [...] It's raising an animal, a calf, an old cow, a sheep for meat [...] It's resting and surviving! To live well (APF 09 - Lavras do Sul)."

This shows that physical attributes are important and can provoke feelings of belonging among agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers in the Pampa Gaúcho. They derive from human interactions with spaces and human-nature interactions. Agro-ecological family farmers express more feelings and give greater importance to nature in its broadest sense: thanks to this natural



condition, they can develop their productive activities and their life in the territory. Family farmers, on the other hand, are more attached to the productive element of the natural environment.

The intangible attributes of the Pampa Gaúcho territory encompass the following: i) *definition of the (abstract) space of residence and production*; ii) *importance of intangible attributes in life and productive activity* and iii) *influence of cultural aspects such as way of life, know-how and knowledge*. It should be noted that the territory's intangible attributes guide the way of life in and ensure the identity of the Pampa Gaúcho:

The intangible attributes integrate this identity, they derive from this relationship between humans and nature that molds culture [...] the intangible resources are just as important in defining this identity and are, above all, differentiating elements [...] this is fundamental that they [*farming and ranching*] appear, show themselves and be recognized as different in the way they relate to nature, in the way they produce and consequently, their products carry all this differentiation. And intangible elements are crucial, fundamental elements, including in the differentiation of products (AD 01 - EMBRAPA).

With regard to the definition of the space of residence and production, the questions allowed for the understanding of how abstract space is felt. It was, therefore, possible to establish two categories: i) *place of life* and ii) *place of production*. In the subcategory *place of life* there were six interviewees: four ranchers, one pensioner and one farmer.

The characteristics of each place, of each region, our region right here, which is Campanha, is known, I can say around the world nowadays with this internet, for its hospitality, for our way of expressing ourselves, for the local culture, coupling this intangible value with the tradition of the *gaúcho*, the tradition of the ancestors, in today's times, trying to progress, but always maintaining this value! These customs, these roots, which is what differentiates one people from another (PF 11 - Rosário do Sul).

The interviewees describe their spaces in a peculiar way, letting aspects such as culture, tradition and values overflow: family, attachment to the space due to the bond of ancestors with that specific space and the way of life that has developed there over the years, built on the values and culture of the Pampa Gaúcho.

Five study participants were identified in the subcategory *place of production*, in which the existing intangible attributes are directly linked to production, based on the way of life or know-how:

I know that we come from the past of our parents, who had a way of producing, we are taking what we learned from our parents and grandparents, without leaving that aside, but taking what is modern and putting the two together. In order to be able to live well in the business, you have to know how to use the past with the modern now. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to have a good quality product with modern technology alone, because it would be too artificial, you'd end up creating something tasteless (AF 01 - Dom Pedrito).



These aspects make up the intangible universe of a territory. However, what stands out is the way in which the interviewees are attached to production rather than the cultural aspects of the Pampa Gaúcho. In any case, intangible issues such as knowledge, know-how and way of life are seen as one of the pillars that define the territory, as it is consolidated according to how it is used and how people feel they are part thereof (Albagli, 2004; Santos, 2005; Saquet, 2011; Oliveira, 2020). Acquired knowledge is an attribute valued by the interviewees, as one of the farmers explains: “[...] this is the greatest fortune we have, especially knowledge, which we acquire over the years, with practices, with knowledge from the old ones too (AF 04 - Quaraí).”

In the category *importance of intangible attributes in life and productive activity*, the questions allowed for the understanding of the importance of intangible elements for the family farmers and ranchers taking part in the study. Thus, the following categories were established: i) *importance of the place of life* and ii) *importance of the place of production*.

In the subcategory *importance of place of life* there were six interviewees: four family ranchers, a retired man and a farmer. The participants demonstrate how important intangible issues are in their living spaces:

A good family rancher has to be extremely observant, the more observant he is the better, because you..., because the signs are there for you, the animals give you those signs, so I think that's very important. And also, your respect, learning to know the environment, this know-how and respecting the cycles of nature, the animals [...] (PF 02 - Bagé).

The importance of intangible aspects is acquired over time, formed by family connections in the lives of the study participants. They are factors of identity and identification, as the family rancher explains:

We bring a matrix of identity and have to understand what your father did, what your mother did, how she did it [...] we came with the suitcase, some utensils, with knowledge and with a matrix of identity. The arts and crafts people also learned from their ancestors and one thing we need to have is this ability to absorb new things (PF 07 - Dom Pedrito).

In the case of the Pampa Gaúcho, the relevance that the study participants found in the territory's intangible attributes is directly linked to ranching. This relationship has been ingrained since the territory's makeup until the present day, a fact that contributes to the interviewees' greater identification with it: the customs, beliefs, traditions and way of life make ranchers feel part of the territory. Belonging and/or the act of belonging defines the territory (Oliveira, 2020).



Five study participants were identified in the subcategory *importance of the place of production*. They highlight how knowledge and production techniques were taught by their families: “[...] what you bring from the cradle, that your father teaches your and he also brings from his grandfather, from his father. So that’s how our production has advanced, but we’ve always kept our old roots, producing only organic lettuce (AF 03 - Quaraí).”

Finally, the category *influence of cultural aspects such as way of life, know-how and knowledge* on the productive activities of agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers was analysed. The investigation allowed for the understanding of the influence of immaterial attributes on their abstract spaces, which gave rise to two categories: i) *intangible influence on the place of life* and ii) *intangible influence on production*. Six participants were identified in the category *intangible influence on the place of life*. The influence highlighted by the participants lies in the power that the intangible carries.

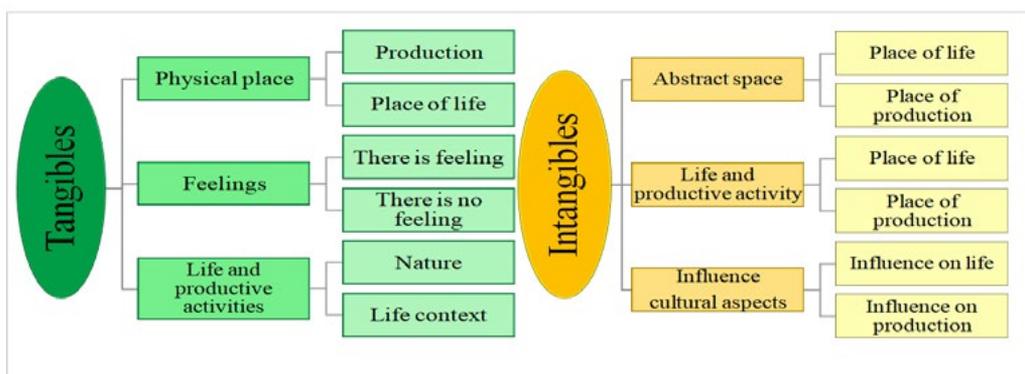
We follow certain rules, like that, from the old days, always linked to nature [...]. But if I have a way of life that comes from my ancestors, following certain rules, and it has always worked, I’m not going to change it now! So I have these values, these criteria. And these intangible values are what make all the difference between the way we produce and the immediacy of today’s farming and ranching, even though we’re always trying to progress (PF 11 - Rosário do Sul).

Five participants were identified in the category *intangible influence on production*. The questions dealt with the influence of intangible attributes on life and productive activities and of knowledge and know-how: “They influence a lot! Because we see, especially now, that things are changing and they are coming back. Because the companies were very much engaged in conventional agriculture, with chemical fertilizers. For you to work with organic agriculture just like that, you have to like it and it has to be your thing (AF 04 - Quaraí).” The intangible attributes relate to aspects linked to production and this influences production activities more than the lives of families. Knowledge and way of life are integrated into production, reinforcing territorial attributes.

In view of the understanding of territory as well as the importance of tangible and intangible attributes for the Pampa Gaúcho, the territory is consolidated through its use and occupation based on the natural resources available, which, combined with intangible resources, make it acquire new meanings, represented by perceptions, sensations, sounds and colours. There were many

associations of these elements illustrated in the relationship between people and animals, or rather, the gaúcho and the horse, the sheep, the *pampeano* cattle, the typical landscapes, the *rodas de chimarrão* (*mate circles*), the barbecue, the traditions and the *campeiras*, inherent in the social and cultural context of local residents. Figure 2 shows the categorizations of the tangible and intangible attributes identified in the study.

**Figure 2** | Chart of tangible and intangible attributes in relation to the Pampa Gaúcho



Source: Search data (2022).

At the same time, the relationships with food production, income generation, autonomy and subsistence of a unique social category, made up of family farmers and ranchers, are inextricably linked and based on agro-ecological precepts, which contribute to enhancing the local environment, culture, society and economy. The empirical experiences of man’s relationship with the territory based on the social use of the land to produce using management techniques that protect biodiversity promote a new relationship between human beings and nature, one based on quality of life and well-being. It can be seen that agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers are satisfied with their way of life, they strengthen their bonds of belonging and feel part of nature: it is a relationship of respect rather than one of domination. Therefore, this trajectory points to the conservation of the Pampa Gaúcho, as well as its diversity, complexity and all its inherent elements.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Pampa Gaúcho territory is consolidated through social construction according to the way people use it, occupy it and feel as part of it. In terms of tangible attributes, the Pampa is heterogeneous and includes characteristics such as soil, water, relief, climate, fauna and flora. Regarding its intangible elements, it is diverse in terms of societies, cultures, traditions, values, beliefs, identity and know-how. The study showed that the territory's tangible attributes are relevant to both family farmers and ranchers and provoke feelings and relationships of belonging through people's relationship with the space, defined by interactions between man and nature. However, agro-ecological family farmers attach greater importance to tangible attributes, since thanks to these factors they can have their productive activities, reproduce their way of life and define social, environmental and economic issues.

Agro-ecological family ranching in the Pampa Gaúcho has a greater relationship with its intangible attributes. This relationship is based on the rancher's way of life, making use of culture, traditions, beliefs and values. However, in family farming, intangible attributes are more related to production, the way tasks are carried out and knowledge of production techniques. This indicates a greater connection between agro-ecological family farmers and the Pampa Gaúcho, since the way they describe the territory moves away from physical factors and towards its symbolic elements rather than production factors.

Based on the testimonies of the study participants, the tangible aspects are present in agro-ecological family farming through their relationship with the natural environment, which is expressed: i) in the nature factor; ii) in the agricultural production dynamics and iii) in the quality of life parameter. The intangible aspects are linked to the dynamics of family ranchers, strongly based on their experiences, and are expressed: i) in the context of life with their academic/educational experience; ii) in the context of life through their own trajectory. Thus, the identification of the space based on the social construction and way of life of the families and the symbolism of the Pampa Gaúcho reinforces and defines the idealization of the Pampa Gaúcho as a multidimensional territory.

Agro-ecology is a movement designed to apply sustainable principles to the conservation of the natural environment through farming and ranching practices in the territory. The experiences analysed lead to the conclusion that the way of life of agro-ecological family farmers and ranchers in the Pampa



Gaúcho is based on resources combined with the use and occupation of the territory, which allows producing families to reproduce themselves socially from an agro-ecological perspective. In short, it has been shown that family ranching has a solid connection with the territory, one that goes beyond merely productive aspects and indeed takes the way of life in the Pampa Gaúcho.

Finally, the hope is that future studies can use the territorial approach to investigate the Pampa Gaúcho not only from the productive, economic, spatial and technological perspective, but also from that of its contexts of life, society, environment, values and traditions. In other words, one hopes that it will be seen and defined as a territory considering its unique and intrinsic tangible and intangible characteristics.

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