

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM: EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS

DESENVOLVIMENTO RURAL E TURISMO: OPORTUNIDADES DE EMPREGO E RENDA PARA JOVENS EM ÁREAS RURAIS

DESARROLLO RURAL Y TURISMO: OPORTUNIDADES DE EMPLEO E INGRESOS PARA JÓVENES EN ZONAS RURALES

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ABSTRACT

Recent transformations in the relations between rural and urban areas have redefined the economic and spatial organization of the countryside. Among the factors driving these changes, the growing expansion of agribusiness plays a central role, causing profound shifts in the labor market, economic dynamics, and population distribution. One of the most notable outcomes of this process is the significant outmigration of young people from rural areas, both as a place of residence and as a space for professional insertion. In this context, this article—based on a literature review, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews—analyzes rural tourism as a potential means of breaking with the concentration-driven logic of agribusiness, highlighting non-agricultural activities (beyond animal and plant production) as an alternative to encourage young people to remain in rural areas as a place to live and work. The empirical evidence obtained from the data indicates that rural tourism can diversify income sources, generate new opportunities—especially for women and young people—and strengthen local social networks by expanding the functions of rural properties to include non-agricultural activities, among them tourism. Despite its potential, the advancement of rural tourism depends on the implementation of adequate public policies and the adoption of training and management strategies. The study focuses on the municipality of Ituiutaba (MG), a context in which such initiatives show the capacity to promote a more inclusive, sustainable, and sustained model of rural development.

Keywords: Rural Development. Tourism. Youth. Permanence. Ituiutaba (MG).

RESUMO

As transformações recentes nas relações entre campo e cidade têm redefinido a organização econômica e espacial do meio rural. Entre os fatores que impulsionam essas mudanças, a crescente expansão do agronegócio desempenha papel central, provocando modificações profundas no mercado de trabalho, na dinâmica econômica e na distribuição populacional. Um dos reflexos mais marcantes desse processo é a saída expressiva de jovens das áreas rurais, tanto como lugar de vida quanto como espaço de inserção profissional. Nesse contexto, este artigo, fundamentado em revisão bibliográfica,

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questionários e entrevistas semiestruturadas, analisa o turismo rural como uma possibilidade de ruptura com a lógica concentradora do agronegócio, apontando as atividades não agrícolas (para além da produção animal e vegetal) como alternativa para estimular a permanência dos jovens no meio rural, como local de morada e trabalho. As evidências empíricas obtidas através dos dados indicam que o turismo rural pode diversificar as fontes de renda, gerar novas oportunidades, especialmente para mulheres e jovens e reforçar as redes sociais locais, ao ampliar as funções das propriedades para atividades não agrícolas, entre elas o turismo. Apesar do seu potencial, o avanço do turismo rural depende da implementação de políticas públicas adequadas e da adoção de estratégias de formação e gestão. O estudo toma como recorte o município de Ituiutaba (MG), contexto em que tais iniciativas demonstram capacidade para promover um modelo de desenvolvimento rural mais inclusivo, sustentável e sustentado.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Rural. Turismo. Juventude. Permanência. Ituiutaba (MG).

RESUMEN

Las transformaciones recientes en las relaciones entre el campo y la ciudad han redefinido la organización económica y espacial del medio rural. Entre los factores que impulsan estos cambios, la creciente expansión del agronegocio desempeña un papel central, provocando profundas modificaciones en el mercado laboral, en la dinámica económica y en la distribución poblacional. Uno de los efectos más destacados de este proceso es la marcada salida de jóvenes de las áreas rurales, tanto como lugar de vida como de inserción profesional. En este contexto, este artículo—basado en revisión bibliográfica, cuestionarios y entrevistas semiestruturadas—analiza el turismo rural como una posibilidad de ruptura con la lógica concentradora del agronegocio, señalando las actividades no agrícolas (más allá de la producción animal y vegetal) como una alternativa para estimular la permanencia de los jóvenes en el medio rural, como espacio de vivienda y trabajo. Las evidencias empíricas obtenidas a partir de los datos indican que el turismo rural puede diversificar las fuentes de ingresos, generar nuevas oportunidades—especialmente para mujeres y jóvenes—y reforzar las redes sociales locales al ampliar las funciones de las propiedades para actividades no agrícolas, entre ellas el turismo. A pesar de su potencial, el avance del turismo rural depende de la implementación de políticas públicas adecuadas y de la adopción de estrategias de formación y gestión. El estudio toma como recorte el municipio de Ituiutaba (MG), contexto en el cual tales iniciativas demuestran capacidad para promover un modelo de desarrollo rural más inclusivo, sostenible y sostenido.

Keywords: Desarrollo Rural. Turismo. Juventud. Permanencia. Ituiutaba (MG).

1 INTRODUCTION

An interesting debate on the definition [definitions] of the rural is practically endless, but the literature points to a certain consensus on the following elements: I - rural is not necessarily synonymous with agricultural [animal and vegetable production] and rural is not always synonymous with agricultural; II - the rural is not exclusively sectoral (pluriactivity) and multifunctional (productive, environmental, ecological, social functions, etc.); III - rural areas tend to have relatively low population density considering urban areas (in the surroundings or not); IV - there is no absolute isolation between rural and urban areas. Different networks, mercantile, social and institutional, are interconnected between the rural and the urban. Another complex point in rural studies is the very proposition [or propositions - in the plural] about rural development and the discussion itself (often naturalized) about development.

The endogenous or exogenous approaches or a combination of the two within the context of rural development proposals gives a good idea of the plurality of empirical situations to deal with this development perspective: local characteristics, external forces, institutions (and their arrangements), the limits of the modernization paradigm, the various approaches to the rural (including beyond the agricultural), etc. The multifunctionality of rural spaces (productive functions, role in ecological balance and support for recreation activities and preservation of the landscape) force us to consider that nature conservation, Ecological and Rural Tourism, Agrotourism, organic agriculture, among others, show a perspective of multifaceted rural development, including relations between the rural as a consumption space for populations living in urban areas, or the criterion to define which urban it is. Rural areas may lose their primary function of animal and plant production, and others become valued (landscape, tourist and ecological functions). However, there is no rural development "without agriculture; there is no agriculture and no farmer without other activities; and there are no other activities without the development of small and medium-sized towns and cities". (KINSELLA et al., 2000, p. 484). However, when considering public policies for rural spaces, in the Latin American experience, including Brazil, there is a change in the conduct of these policies: from the promotion of economic growth based on the stimulus to the modernization of agriculture, after the Second World War (without great concern for the environmental dimension of the rural), to a new perspective of valuing rural territories and a multifunctional character of these spaces.

Research on rural and urban social universes has presented social, economic and cultural dynamics that point to the weaknesses (present, for example, in the principles of rural

sociology) about a certain dual nature of the rural and urban worlds, sustained by a set of oppositions. Among these oppositions there would be mainly a set of agricultural activities (practiced in rural areas) and commercial, industrial and service activities (concentrated in the urban world).

However, the relations between the countryside and the city have undergone intense transformations, driving new economic and spatial dynamics. Among these changes, the expansion of agribusiness stands out, which causes significant changes in rural areas, especially in the labor market, in the economy, and in population dynamics. One of the most evident effects is the exodus of young people from rural areas, whether as a place of residence or professional activity. This article, based on a literature review, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, discusses rural tourism as an alternative to the exclusionary logic of hegemonic projects, including agribusiness, aiming at the permanence of young people in the countryside, considering the rural as a place of work and home. The data reveal that rural tourism can generate economic opportunities, especially for young people and women, in addition to strengthening the local social fabric, with the management of properties beyond agriculture (animal and vegetable production) directed to non-agricultural activities, as an emblematic example of rural tourism. However, its development depends on effective public policies, training and management strategies. The study has as a spatial cut Ituiutaba (MG), where these practices have the potential to promote a more sustainable and inclusive rural development, in a scenario of spatialization of agribusiness, especially the spatial circuit of sugarcane and extensive and intensive dairy farming.

Promoted in the Brazilian experience since the mid-twentieth century, the modernization of agriculture was structured based on a set of state policies and programs, altering rural spaces in a concentrated, selective and unequal way. It aimed to increase agricultural production and productivity through technological innovations (which were spreading internationally in the context of the so-called Green Revolution (Matos; Pessôa, 2011)). Brazilian economic thought widely disseminated in this period is based on the logic of the classic roles of agriculture in economic development (Delgado, 2001). To fulfill these basic functions of agriculture, a broad technological modernization was promoted, which intensely modified production in the Brazilian countryside, as well as the relations between capital and labor and the countryside and the city (Matos; Pessôa, 2011) and a very limited perspective of rural development and with a management of properties deeply associated with the increase in agricultural production and productivity.

At the turn of the century, the diverse and distinct socio-spatial configurations of agribusiness (Elias, 2003) and its new spatialities (Baeninger, 2023), pose new questions for studies on rural development. Changes that occurred in the processes of industrialization, urbanization and, more recently, productive restructuring, resulted in new dynamics (economic, social, political and cultural) causing profound transformations in the relations between the countryside and the city (Hespanhol, 2013). The municipality of Ituiutaba (MG) is characterized by growing productive specialization, modernization of very selective agriculture, favoring medium and large rural producers and centered mainly by the concentration in the spatial circuit of sugarcane production and land. As an unequal and excluding modernization, there was a broad process of rural exodus (migration from the countryside to the cities) and an unequal and excluding modernization in the experience of Ituiutaba.

The increase in production and productivity was not a condition to promote the well-being of the population. It solved agricultural problems, but favored land and income concentration. Canales and Canales Ceron (2013), when analyzing the interrelations between urbanization, globalization of agriculture and the international division of labor, consider the emergence of a new development model in Latin America, in which rural spatialities are strengthened that break with the traditional rural-urban flows.

The agropolization paradigm combines a pattern of urban residence with a dynamic of agrarian-export accumulation, inducing the formation of a wide variety of agrarian cities where global links are densified through the production and processing of commodities (Canales and Canales Ceron, 2013) with branches of the agro-industrial sector's production chain that intertwine in the commercial branches, banking/credit and services, agroprocessing, logistics/transportation to meet the demands of modern agriculture that install new agricultural crops or restructure agricultural production with the presence of physical technology with emphasis on agricultural machinery, chemistry with partial replacement of labor by the application of herbicides and biotechnology and the genetic improvement of plants. Among others, by productively and spatially metamorphosing agricultural production, in the Brazilian experience, many cities have become a reference for the reproduction of capital associated with agribusiness, organized to meet the consumption needs of agribusiness and its demands (technical systems, services, agricultural credits, etc.).

The "agribusiness cities" are transformed into dynamic centers of capital reproduction in different economic spheres. Particularly in the municipality of Ituiutaba, one of the largest

producers of commodities, Baeninger and Ojima (2008), the dynamics of agribusiness reproduction emerges as a phenomenon connected with global productive restructuring, articulating it, locally, with the production of regional urban-rural arrangements (dis)articulating at different scales (Demétrio, 2017). In Ituiutaba, public policies aimed at rural development with a largely productivist character, that is, the countryside only as a place to produce, and were not concerned with social factors, such as the quality of life and the diversity existing in the rural, including productive. From 1990 onwards, however, these aforementioned policies began to be elaborated based on the territorial perspective, reinforcing the local scale (Hespanhol, 2007). About the rural is practically endless, but the literature points to a certain consensus on the following elements: I - rural is not necessarily synonymous with agricultural [animal and vegetable production] and rural is not always synonymous with agricultural; II - the rural is not exclusively sectoral (emphasis on non-agricultural activities) and multifunctional (productive, environmental, ecological, social functions, etc.); III - rural areas tend to have relatively low population density considering urban areas (in the surroundings or not); IV - there is no absolute isolation between rural and urban areas. Different networks, mercantile, social and institutional, are interconnected between the rural and the urban. Another complex point in rural studies is the very proposition [or propositions - in the plural] about rural development and the discussion itself (often naturalized) about development. It is understood that rural development must consider the various dimensions, including social, cultural, political and environmental. It is in this sense that this text will deal with the rural beyond the agricultural with a focus on rural tourism and agritourism in the context of Ituiutaba (MG).

2 DEVELOPMENT

The rural exodus and the scarcity of job opportunities represent challenges that compromise the sustainability of rural communities in different experiences, whether Brazilian or international. The migration of young people and women to urban centers not only reduces the availability of labor in the countryside, but also threatens the preservation of the cultural and social traditions of these localities (Carneiro, 1998; Abramovay, 2003). In this scenario, the strengthening of sustainable economic initiatives, such as rural entrepreneurship, tourism, and agritourism, emerge as promising strategies to transform this reality, offering new possibilities for socioeconomic development (Schneider; Gazolla, 2008).



According to Bricalli (2005), tourism in rural areas comprises all enterprises that provide recreation, leisure and any other activity related to tourism, as long as they are located in rural areas. The literature on rural tourism in Brazil highlights its relevance in the revitalization of local economies, environmental conservation, and the preservation of the cultural identity of rural communities (Trentin, 2019; Bianchi et al., 2020).

Tourism is an activity in constant transformation, driven by new demands from the public and growing competition in the market. This scenario favors the emergence of different tourist modalities, including rural tourism, which is consolidated as an alternative capable of increasing the income of rural landowners, in addition to valuing traditional ways of life, the characteristics of rurality and contact with nature. According to the Ministry of Tourism, rural tourism is all activities practiced in non-urban areas, which consists of leisure activities in rural areas in various modalities defined based on the offer: Rural Tourism, Ecological Tourism or Ecotourism, Adventure Tourism, Business Tourism and Events, Health Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Sports Tourism, activities that complement each other or not. In addition, rural tourism plays a significant role in settling the population in rural areas and reducing social inequalities, especially in locations where agriculture and formal employment are the main sources of livelihood (Ferreira, 2021).

Rural development through tourism is widely recognized as a strategy to diversify the economy in the countryside. This process includes introducing new products and services in emerging markets, promoting a multifaceted and multi-determined approach. According to Kageyama (2004), practices such as landscape management, environmental conservation, agritourism, organic agriculture, the production of regional specialties and direct sales are examples of initiatives that are significant for the complexity of rural development. In addition, rural development establishes a new paradigm by creating new products and services for new markets, with different objectives, such as the production of public goods; generation of complementary income for the owner; preservation and conservation of natural, cultural and historical heritage; appreciation of culture and regionalism; integration of visitors with local history; the search for synergies with local ecosystems; the economy of scale with the pluriactivity of rural households (Azevedo, & Rodrigues, 2015; Blanco, 2004; Caliaro et al., 2016; Cipolat et al., 2019; Dias, 2003; Machado, 2005; Ploeg, 2008).

Among the activities that contribute to sustainable socioeconomic development, tourism stands out as a relevant strategy. According to the Ministry of Tourism (Brasil, 2015), several actions are important to promote the sustainable development of tourism. Among

these initiatives, the following stand out: a) the integration of local production into the tourism production chain, with actions aimed at promotion and marketing, supporting projects that ensure the sustainability of tourism activities at the local level; b) the encouragement of community-based tourism, through support for projects and actions that favor sustainable development, with a focus on the organization and qualification of production, the improvement of services and the encouragement of associativism, cooperativism and entrepreneurship; and c) the induction of tourism in priority areas for investment, with positive socioeconomic impacts, especially in territories with low Human Development Indexes (HDI), contributing to local development and job creation. In a complementary way, according to Bosetti and Oliveira (2016, p. 43), tourism is currently perceived as an innovation aimed at the socioeconomic development of locations that seek to raise the quality of life of their inhabitants. According to the available attractions, many municipalities invest in the tourism sector in order to reduce unemployment, increase income and mitigate the social exclusion of the most vulnerable groups, such as women and young people who often face the absence of social opportunities. Recent research highlights the inclusive potential of rural tourism, especially for women and young people, given that the activities developed, such as artisanal production, accommodation services, gastronomy, and acting as cultural guides, favor the insertion of these groups in the labor market, promoting autonomy and sustainability (Oliveira and Santos, 2022).

In this study, a qualitative approach was chosen, with the purpose of analyzing the empirical and subjective elements related to the mapping of potential rural enterprises through rural tourism, being a fundamental step to understand the economic, social and cultural dynamics involved. This technique consists of choosing problem situations and aims to promote a consolidated discussion on theoretical foundations, in addition to presenting strategies adopted in reality, which can serve as a model for other communities that have experienced the same circumstances (RICHARDSON, 2012).

The approach of this project aims to capture the richness of rural women's and youth's experiences and perceptions of rural entrepreneurship and tourism, ensuring a holistic understanding that goes beyond numbers, and thus providing valuable input for the development of effective empowerment strategies and fostering inclusive rural enterprises.

The present study worked with primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected based on field research, carried out through 50 semi-structured interviews with women of all ages and young people up to 30 years old, using a questionnaire to map

aspirations, perceived challenges and existing skills, considering aspects such as economic options, development and inclusion. Secondary data were extracted from public sources such as databases, including the IBGE, as well as articles, books, magazines, theses and dissertations, enabling an in-depth review of the literature on rural entrepreneurship, rural tourism, rural development, gender equality and youth empowerment.

The analysis of the qualitative data, from the open questions of the interviews, was carried out based on content analysis, according to the method proposed by Bardin (2011), complementing the answers to the guiding questions of the study. Quantitative data, such as family income and migration indexes, were analyzed using descriptive statistics using Excel software.

The data obtained show that most of the interviewees are in the age group between 30 and 50 years old, although a significant portion of young women, aged between 18 and 30 years, are also present. These results showed that, among the women participating in the research, most belong to more advanced age groups, demonstrating that the field has been undergoing an aging process. Comparatively, the demographic data obtained by the 2000 and 2010 Censuses show a decrease of 2 million people living in rural areas, of which 50% are young people aged between 15 and 29 years. This indicates that, of the Brazilians who migrate to the cities, the vast majority are young people who find themselves without prospects of income and quality of life in the countryside. Thus, it is possible to state that the rural exodus is predominantly composed of young individuals (IBGE, 2018).

About 46% of the interviewees live in Ituiutaba, while 33% live in Capinópolis and the others are distributed among the neighboring municipalities of the region, such as Santa Vitória, Canápolis and Cachoeira Dourada. Regarding the relationship of the interviewees with the rural environment, it is observed that most identify themselves as children of farmers. Next, rural workers stand out, followed by landowners. The other interviewees belong to the group of tenants. This panorama is in line with data from the 2017 Agricultural Census, which shows that 20.1% of the registered production units (1,040,022 out of a total of 5,175,489) are not managed by owners, but by tenants, partners, occupants and producers without area.

Regarding the main activities developed on the properties, agricultural activity stands out as the most predominant, followed by dairy farming and beef cattle. This scenario is due to the fact that sugarcane has become the main agricultural crop in Ituiutaba, especially after the installation of mills in the region, because before the growth of sugarcane, livestock was the predominant activity. As for the monthly income obtained on the properties, 74% of the

interviewees reported that it comes exclusively from activities developed in the rural area, while 26% of the interviewees indicated that it also includes services provided in the urban area. The predominance of income from rural activities highlights the relevance of the agricultural sector in the local economy.

The results obtained indicate that rural tourism can be considered a viable practice for the region of Ituiutaba, especially if driven by the creation of tourist itineraries that highlight the local culture and the environment. Only 10% of respondents reported knowing what rural tourism is and tried to implement it on the property. This is often due to the fact that the concept is unfamiliar, as many people still do not have a clear understanding of what rural tourism involves. In addition, inadequate promotion of rural tourism opportunities can contribute to a lack of knowledge. Many rural initiatives lack effective marketing and visibility, causing potential visitors and even residents themselves to not recognize the available offers. In this sense, more accessible and educational information could help increase awareness and interest in this practice.

Regarding the cultural aspects on the properties, approximately 16% of the interviewees reported that they have already had or still have cultural practices such as religious festivals, music festivals, farms for events, bullfighting, sport fishing and even soccer. A relevant fact for the survey is that 90% of respondents have never carried out or thought about any type of market research to assess the probability of rural tourism on their property, only 10% did. This scenario highlights an important gap, as market research is an essential tool for understanding consumer behavior, identifying industry trends, and exploring growth opportunities. The absence of this practice can limit the development of rural tourism, preventing owners from adjusting their offers to real demands and maximizing the economic potential of the activity.

With regard to the production of homemade food or the manufacture of handicrafts by the interviewees, the data revealed that 66% did not develop these activities. This result is worrying in the context of rural tourism, since these practices, especially if developed by women, play a crucial role in preserving cultural identity, valuing traditional knowledge, and generating symbolic value, going beyond contributions of an economic nature (LIMA et al., 2023). In addition, and in agreement with Brenzan et al (2021), tourism can awaken the female entrepreneurial side, which once again emphasizes the versatility of women who can perform management activities that go beyond managing domestic tasks. The options most frequently selected by respondents for implementing a rural tourism project on their properties

were, firstly, horseback riding, followed by motorcycle trails and catch and pay. The other alternatives mentioned include picnics, sport fishing, accommodation in farm hotels, rural routes, among others. The diversification of activities offered in rural tourism is essential to attract different tourist profiles and promote the sustainable development of local communities.

Among the adversities raised for the implementation of rural enterprises are the financial challenges and the limitations of the options available on the property, followed by a lack of specialized knowledge and fear of failure of the enterprise. Many also highlighted the absence of external public policies to strengthen tourism infrastructure and facilitate access to credit. These aspects highlight the need for articulation between the public and private sectors, with the objective of fostering the expansion and qualification of rural tourism in a sustainable and inclusive manner. It is important to note that there are national public policies that encourage sustainable rural tourism in family farming, such as: the National Program for the Strengthening of Family Farming – PRONAF, which grants financing with interest rates lower than the market rates, and the National Program for Rural Tourism in Family Farming – PNTRAF, which encourages the development of tourism activities through collaboration between government organizations, technicians and family farmers, promoting national integration and the strengthening of local networks. However, despite the existence of initiatives, misinformation and lack of adequate dissemination by the competent bodies often result in limited implementation, without the expected effectiveness.

About 30% of the young people showed interest in tourism activities and reported that, if there were technical courses and training with local institutions, they would be interested in developing skills in management and customer service. These data corroborate previous studies, such as that of Almeida and Santos (2020), which point to rural tourism as a tool for emancipating and retaining the young population in the countryside, through the development of entrepreneurial skills, appreciation of local culture, and strengthening of rural identity. In addition, the participation of young people in rural tourism contributes to the revitalization of rural areas, promoting innovation and continuity of local traditions. In accordance with Gaweleta and Billota (2022), it is highlighted that by getting involved in tourism activities, young people introduce new perspectives and technologies (disclosures on social networks, forms with suggestions for improvements, scheduling visits and purchases of products online, digital maps, among others), attracting visitors of different age groups and diversifying family income sources. Rural tourism becomes an opportunity to develop a business for these

young people, since when well structured, tourism ceases to act as a complementary activity and assumes the role of the main economic activity, since in the properties studied the main economic activities are concentrated in traditional activities such as livestock and agriculture. In this same perspective, studies indicate that rural tourism contributes to the sustainable development of rural communities, by integrating young people in initiatives that preserve the natural and cultural heritage and that enable them to lead socioeconomic transformations in their own regions (Gavira; Menasche, 2006). As pointed out by Araújo et al. (2013), in Brazil, professional qualification in the rural tourism sector still faces significant challenges, even in the face of its high potential to contribute to the rural economy and promote sustainable development. Despite the country's vast cultural and natural wealth, training programs are not always adequate to the specificities of the sector. Issues such as the management of rural enterprises, customer service and sustainable practices often need attention, which compromises the full use of the opportunities offered by rural tourism.

In terms of evaluating the rural tourism activities currently present in the interviewee's municipality, they demonstrate a heterogeneous distribution of the answers, with a greater concentration on values 0, 4, and 6, representing respectively 16%, 16%, and 14% of the respondents' opinions. The predominance of medium and low grades suggests that rural tourism activities in the region are perceived as insufficiently designed or exploited, reflecting a significant gap in the exploitation of existing rural potential. This result can be interpreted as an indication of the need for greater investment in infrastructure, marketing and technical training to make rural tourism a more expressive and attractive activity for tourists and local residents.

92% of participants believe that social media plays a significant role in promoting rural tourism. Only 2% stated that they did not consider the use of social networks relevant for this purpose, while 6% were indifferent, which suggests the need to raise awareness about the efficient use of these tools. These results highlight the importance of digital platforms as strategic tools for the dissemination and appreciation of rural tourism, especially among women and young people, audiences that are often more engaged in the use of these technologies. Social networks can act as mediators in creating connections between rural entrepreneurs and tourism potentials, promoting the reach of wider and more diversified markets.



3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The general objective of the research was to demonstrate the importance of rural tourism as an instrument for local development and social inclusion for women and young people in Ituiutaba-MG. In addition, the mapping of potential rural enterprises emerges as an innovative and essential strategy, aimed at the economic and social empowerment of women and young people who live in rural areas. When properly planned and structured, it attracts investment and development to local communities by ceasing to act as a complementary activity, transforming the reality of the place and causing positive impacts, such as valuing local culture and strengthening rural identity.

The research showed that rural tourism presents itself as a viable alternative to promote the economic engagement of women and young people, contributing to income generation, reducing dependence on large urban centers and strengthening the local social fabric. Although initiatives related to rural tourism have great potential, their full development depends on the improvement of public policies and training strategies. Such measures are essential to ensure the sustainable growth of the activity and the generation of long-term benefits for the communities involved.

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