

# Analysis of Public Tourism Policies in the Border Zone of Mato Grosso, Brazil

## Análise das políticas públicas de Turismo na Faixa de Fronteira em Mato Grosso, Brasil

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<https://doi.org/10.5380/raega.v63i2.100032>

### Abstract

The study addresses municipal public policies for tourism along the Border Strip in the State of Mato Grosso with Bolivia. Its objective is to discuss the guidelines of these tourism policies in municipalities within this Border Strip, highlighting weaknesses and potential ways to enhance the promotion of tourism activities. Tourism activities and public policies in this region are investigated to identify weaknesses and potentials that may maximize the promotion of tourism. The research is justified by the need to create precise diagnostics about tourism along Brazil's border in Mato Grosso, an area with great potential that remains underexplored. Methodologically, the investigation includes bibliographical research, the development of a map of tourist regions, the application of questionnaires via Google Forms to municipal managers, and graphical analysis of the responses obtained. The results show that the municipalities have few specific legislations related to tourism, low participation in regional and state governance structures, limited partnership networks, and almost no involvement in programs and projects from the Ministry of Tourism. The main economic activities in the region are livestock farming and commerce, leaving tourism in the background. It is concluded that there is an urgent need to strengthen public tourism policies along the border strip to better utilize local potentials and promote the sustainable development of the region.

### Keywords:

Pantanal, Tourism diagnosis, Tourism activity, Governance bodies, Sudeco.

### Resumo

O estudo aborda as políticas públicas municipais de turismo na Faixa de Fronteira no Estado de Mato Grosso com a Bolívia, tendo como objetivo discutir os direcionamentos dessas políticas de turismo

nos municípios nessa Faixa de Fronteira, evidenciando fragilidades e potencialidades de maximização da promoção da atividade. A atividade turística e as políticas públicas nessa região são investigadas para identificar fragilidades e potencialidades que podem maximizar a promoção do turismo. A pesquisa justifica-se pela necessidade de criar diagnósticos precisos sobre o turismo na fronteira do Brasil em Mato Grosso, uma área com grande potencial ainda não totalmente explorado. Metodologicamente, a investigação inclui pesquisa bibliográfica, elaboração de um mapa das regiões turísticas, aplicação de questionários via Google Forms aos gestores municipais e análise gráfica das respostas obtidas. Os resultados mostram que os municípios apresentam poucas legislações específicas para o turismo, baixa participação em instâncias de governança regional e estadual, redes de parcerias limitadas e quase nenhuma participação em programas e projetos do Ministério do Turismo. As principais atividades econômicas na região são a pecuária e o comércio, deixando o turismo em segundo plano. Concluiu-se que há uma necessidade urgente de maximizar as políticas públicas de turismo na faixa de fronteira para aproveitar melhor as potencialidades locais e promover o desenvolvimento sustentável da região.

**Palavras-chave:**

Pantanal, Diagnóstico turístico, Atividade turística, Instâncias de governança, Sudeco.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Mato Grosso is the third largest Brazilian State in territorial extension (903,537 km<sup>2</sup>). It is part of the Central-West region of Brazil and has a privileged geographical location, in the geodetic center of South America. It is home to areas of food production and many natural attributes. It is associated to international borders and in an intermediate position to the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, factors that give Mato Grosso State a competitive locational advantage compared to other Brazilian States, regarding foreign trade transactions (Melo, 2005; Moreno; Higa, 2005).

According to Moreno and Higa (2005, p. 8), the condition of “international border territory that is part of the Brazilian Amazon – gives it the status of strategic space, and plays an important role in national development and South American integration plans”. In this context, considering its economic and geopolitical importance since the 18th century, Mato Grosso has underwent a recurring process of extractive exploitation since the second half of the 20th century. It received incentives for territorial reoccupation in the 1970s, stimulated by different federal and state policies and programs, which helped its rapid transformation into a protagonist of agricultural production in Brazil (Moreno; Higa, 2005).

Silva & Nora (2021) highlight the border condition of Mato Grosso State, with four bordering municipalities, namely: Cáceres, Porto Esperidião, Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade and Comodoro. Among these, Cáceres stands out in the regional scenario of the Center-South as one of the main attractors in the provision of services to the population of other municipalities in the Border Strip, mainly related to commerce,

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health and education. Despite its relevant border condition, these municipalities have a low population and few public policies to encourage health, education, infrastructure and technology. In short, Silva & Nora (2021, p. 87) highlight that the “territory of Mato Grosso State is formed by the movements of advancement from the western border, where in addition to the geopolitical border, it is also a mining frontier, since large quantities of gold are found in this region”.

In an attempt to organize and regulate the development process of the Brazilian Border Strip, after the extinction of SUDECO and the end of incentives for regional policies in the 1990s, the National Regional Development Policy (PNDR) was resumed in 2003 aiming to formulate policies for national integration and regional development. This resulted in the institutionalization of the PNDR in 2007 (Brasil, 2007), followed by the recreation of the Superintendence for the Development of the Central-West (SUDECO) and the Central-West Development Fund (FDCO) in 2019 (Brasil, 2009; 2013). From then on, in terms of territorial planning, the Border Strip of Mato Grosso State began to be divided into sub-regions, including the following: Sub-region IX: Comodoro, Conquista D'Oeste, Campos de Júlio, Sapezal, Nova Lacerda and Tangará da Serra; Sub-region X: Araputanga, Barra do Bugres, Curvelândia, Figueirópolis D'Oeste, Glória D'Oeste, Indiavaí, Jauru, Lambari D'Oeste, Mirassol D'Oeste, Pontes & Lacerda, Porto Esperidião, Porto Estrela, Reserva do Cabaçal, Rio Branco, Salto do Céu, São José dos Quatro Marcos, Vale de São Domingos and Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade; Sub-region XI: Barão de Melgaço, Cáceres, Nossa Senhora do Livramento and Poconé.

These areas are associated with the Integrated Development Plan for the Border Strip (PDIFF) of the Brazilian Central-West region, from Sudeco, aiming a sustainable regional development, with reduction of inequalities, incentives for innovation and technology and improvement of human improvement (Silva; Abrita, 2018). In addition to the proximity condition to neighboring countries, the Mato Grosso Border Strip has another unique feature: the Pantanal biome. Regarding the Pantanal region and its border relationship, it is discussed that:

In Brazil, the Pantanal extends over 150,000 km<sup>2</sup>. There are another 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the neighboring countries Bolivia and Paraguay, hence the name Transboundary Pantanal. It is also worth noting that it is a region characterized by a period of river floods, between the months of November and March, and that it recorded one of the worst river droughts throughout 2020, which resulted in an increase in burning and fire outbreaks, consuming trees, forests, animals, in other words, a typical scene of environmental degradation (Moreira, 2022, p. 168).

Regarding the economic activities developed in the Pantanal, the following stand out: extensive livestock farming, considered the basis of the regional economy; agriculture, considered a complementary activity to livestock farming, mainly based on the cultivation of cassava, rice and corn; mineral extraction; commercial and

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sport fishing; and ecotourism, practiced mainly due to the natural landscapes that attract a significant number of tourists throughout the year in the region (Gonçalves, 2020).

The existence of beautiful landscapes that attract the interest of tourists is not dissociated from a legislation and public policies for its conservation, as well as the need to use technologies to support the control of use from these geographic spaces. It is worth considering that technological evolution has advanced increasingly in recent years. Mainly since the discoveries of the mid-20th century and early 21st century, several areas of knowledge have achieved significant scientific advances (Leite; Brito, 2006; Oliveira; Carvalho, 2024).

Referring to the geotechnologies, Oliveira & Carvalho (2024) highlight that these technologies gained notoriety after the popularization of its methods, which involve mathematical theories and a strong basis in the field of computer science, associated with the collection, storage, treatment and processing of data. For Aquino & Valladares (2013), geotechnologies offer an improved interpretation and representation of geographic phenomena, providing information to support territorial planning.

In this context, geotechnology is a relevant mapping tool for territorial planning. In this study, the application of geotechnology in maps that assist the management and organization of tourism activity in a given locality is highlighted. Among the possibilities, the creation of thematic landscape maps, spatialization of tourist regions, mapping of tourist routes, identification of interest points, among other applications, support the tourist planning process (Rezende; Xavier, 2008; Arruda; Neves; Neves, 2011; Silva; Silva; Neves, 2016; Lima, 2021).

When discussing the importance of geotechnologies, Rosa (2005, p. 81) states that these “are the set of technologies for collecting, processing, analyzing and offering information with geographic reference”, composed of hardware, software and peopleware, which together form powerful tools for decision-making in most different areas. She also describes that the main geotechnologies are: geographic information systems, digital cartography, remote sensing, global positioning systems and topography.

In the context of geotechnologies, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are presented as a relevant tool for spatializing data in the most diverse areas of knowledge. Regarding the data source used in GIS management, it is understood that “the data used in a GIS can come from different sources, generically classified as primary (direct survey in the field or products obtained by remote sensors) and secondary (maps and statistics), which are derived from primary sources” (Rosa, 2005, p. 82).

Regarding the use of geotechnologies for the construction of products aiming the territorial planning, Aquino & Valladares (2013) point out that this process involves specialists from different areas of knowledge.

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This provides an integrated view of the scenario in question and allows, for example, the combination of physical with socioeconomic data from municipalities in a given region. The analysis produced can guide a harmonious planning for the entire study area, and consider the specificities and needs for each municipality.

Tourism is one of the activities that benefit from the spatialization of data through geotechnologies, which are an important resource for urban and rural territorial planning and management of interest for tourism (Maganhotto et al., 2018). According to Duque & Mendes (2006), geotechnologies provide a stronger reliability of data associated to tourism planning, allowing also the cross-referencing of complex information associated with the tourism activity, such as the interrelations of economic, environmental, social and cultural aspects.

In this first quarter of the 21st century, there is a clear need to implement public policies and solutions for the tourism, to expand rules aiming at the sustainability and innovation of the sector, supported by the adoption of geotechnologies to encourage the management of destinations from different perspectives (Correa; Malta, 2019). Among the possibilities for geotechnologies to support tourism, Maganhotto et al. (2018, p. 235) indicate that, “on the one hand, they are an auxiliary tool for tourism planning, and on the other, they can facilitate the tourists’ planning to a given destination”. In addition to the public sector, Steinke & Silva (2005) emphasize that geotechnologies also facilitate planning for the private sector, because they will support the activities of entrepreneurs regarding tourism.

Among the geotechnologies used by the tourism sector, Scalco (2006) highlights the use of tools such as: Digital Cartography (DC), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographic Database (GDB). Considering the importance of the use and insertion of geotechnologies in tourism planning and management, Resende & Xavier (2008) emphasize the challenge of tourism professionals to increase their qualifications to deal with the advances of these technologies. This would enable them to integrate themselves very effectively in the planning and management processes of the tourism activity. Serra (2020) highlights the importance of the articulation from public policies regarding tourism. He recalls that this activity is inserted in a broader context, namely:

[...] "the result of the efforts expended by the Government complements other demands of society, such as e.g. the construction of roads, hotels, public lighting or improvements to collective spaces. All these efforts are not exclusively to benefit tourists, but also to non-tourists, even if the latter use them in a disproportionate relation to people residing in the tourist locality (Serra, 2020, p. 1575)".

The tourism activity is a source of foreign exchange and a driver of structural improvements in a given location. The importance of involving the public, private and local community spheres in the planning and

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organization of this activity is highlighted, to maximize the benefits for both tourists and those who reside in and around tourist destinations.

In this sense, Lopes & Panosso-Netto (2021) present a growing discussion of public tourism policies in Brazil, considered as a possibility to reduce social inequalities, generate jobs and income, stimulate the sustainable development of tourist destinations, and also promoting the income of foreign exchange in the Brazilian economy. However, they warn about a problem linked to public tourism policies in Brazil: the discontinuity of actions, because such continuities and discontinuities would be associated with “[...] regime and government changes, policy formatting, the institutions responsible to create and implement such policies, among other factors” (Oliveira; Carvalho, 2024, p. 203).

The mere existence of a tourism policy is not enough to promote this activity in a planned form. Continuous action plans are needed, targeting the actors and elements associated with the functioning of the tourism system at a given destination. Regarding the strengthening of tourism in Brazil, it is possible to understand that:

Brazil has great tourism potential, but for this potential to be developed effectively and sustainably, generating benefits for the economy and the population, tourism policies must occupy a prominent place in federal planning, just as their implementation must not be neglected, a practice that has been very present, especially in policies that propose decentralization of strategies and actions to subnational units (Lopes; Panosso-Netto, 2021, p. 221).

Strengthening tourism involves to establish and implement public tourism policies, which are characterized by a set of basic factors and guidelines that allow for guiding and planning global objectives for the country's development, i.e. to establish the priorities for executive, supplementary or complementary actions by the State. It is not only the State's responsibility to direct public policies, since the private sector and civil society are also important to establish them (Beni, 2003; Candiotto; Bonetti, 2015). According to Cruz (2005), the state regulation of tourism is linked to the need to encourage the development of this activity, and can thus offer a legal support for the development of actions necessary for planning the tourism destinations.

In the specific investigation, the actions of the Superintendence for the Development of the Central-West (Sudeco) stands out, which is a catalyst and coordinator of national and international actors, acting directly on the development of different sectors of the Central-West region, including in the Tourism sector (Brasil, 2023). Considering the assumptions presented, the present study aims to discuss the directions of public tourism policies in the municipalities at the Border Strip of Mato Grosso State, highlighting weaknesses and potential to maximize the promotion of this activity.

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## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is related to the descriptive research model, and according to Oliveira (2011, p. 21) its main purpose is “the description of characteristics from a given population or phenomenon, or the establishment of relationships between variables”. It also refers to exploratory research that “seeks to gather only information about a given object, thus delimiting a field of work, and mapping the conditions of this object [...]” (Severino, 2013, p. 106).

In the theoretical construction of the work, scientific articles, official documents and books with themes that permeate the present discussion were used. Initially, bibliographical materials and documents on geotechnologies, their application in territorial planning and its relationship with the planning and management of tourism activities were analyzed. Among the tools used for the aforementioned consultation, scientific databases, such as Google Scholar and Scielo, were used with keywords, in order to verify research (articles, dissertations and theses) recently published.

Furthermore, the Geographic Information System QGIS 3.36 (QGIS, 2024) and ArcGIS 10.8 (ESRI, 2020) were used to spatialize the theme investigated in the municipalities from the Border Region in Mato Grosso State, as well as its relationship with the classification of the Brazilian Tourism regionalization map. This procedure enabled the organization of cartographic products linked to the delimitation of the study area, as well as the spatial information about tourism activity in the municipalities listed in the analysis.

The study area, in the context of the federal public tourism policy, is associated to four tourist regions of the Mato Grosso State: Vale do Guaporé; Nascentes; Vale do Cabaçal; and Pantanal Mato-Grossense (Figure 1).

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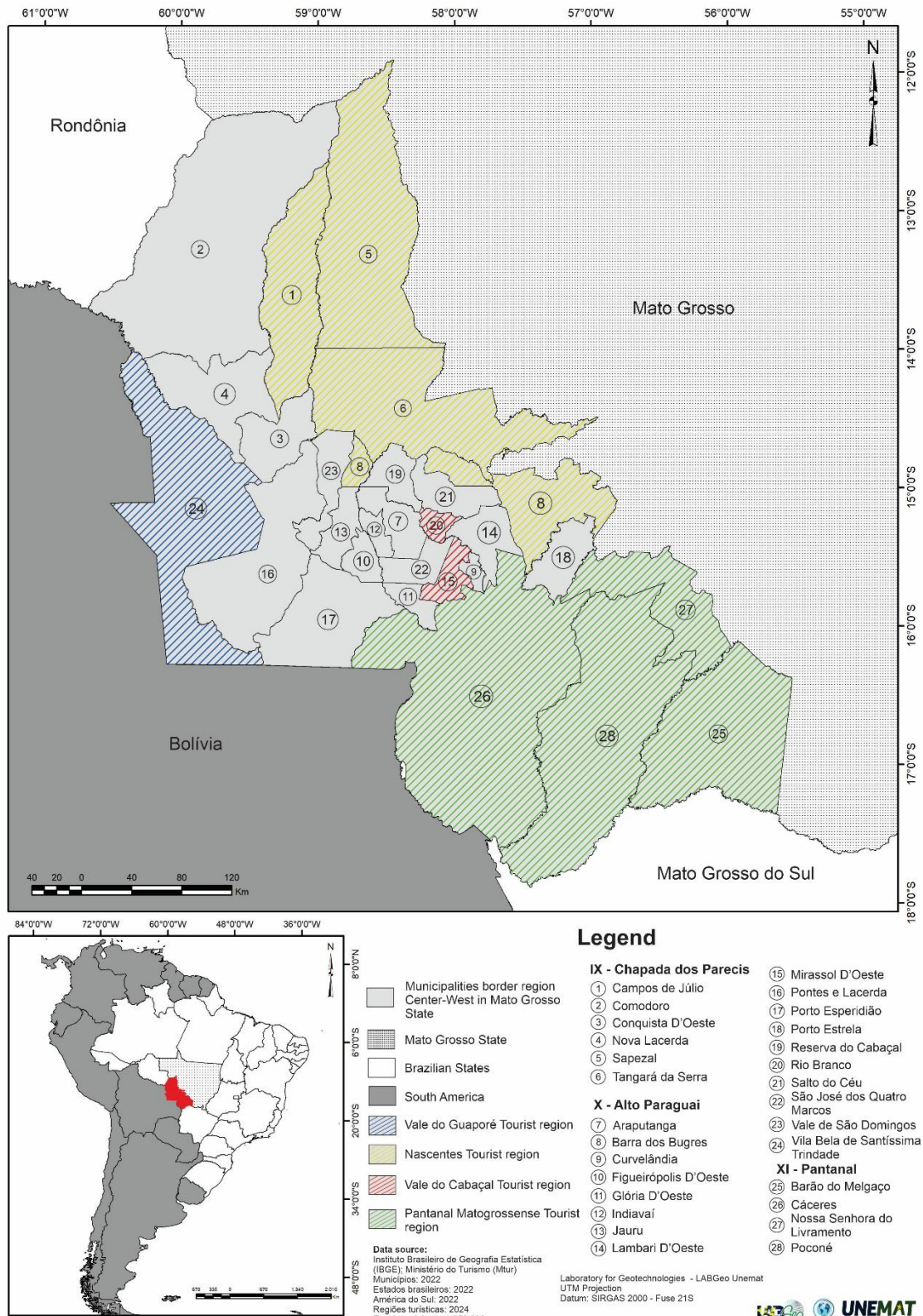


Figure 1 – Municipalities from the Border Strip, Central-West region, Mato Grosso State with the tourist regions. Prepared by: The authors (2024).

To develop the study proposed, a quantitative approach was adopted, which allowed the observation of practical elements to contemplate the panorama of public policies from the municipalities in the Border Strip from Mato Grosso State, in Center West Brazil, and discuss the strategic position of the actors responsible for public tourism policies. The quantitative perspective helped to obtain statistical data and, consequently, allowed an analytical view at the data and the understand the reality of the object under study (Casa Nova et al., 2020).

To this end, a structured questionnaire was prepared and allocated on the Google Forms platform. Its link was sent, by e-mail, to the managers responsible for actions related to tourism in the 28 municipalities of the Border in Mato Grosso State. The questionnaires were applied during the period from May 5<sup>th</sup> 2023 to August 20<sup>th</sup> 2023. In addition to e-mails, contacts were also made by telephone and requests for information via the ombudsman's office from the municipalities.

To prepare the discussions, the collected data were organized into maps and graphs, which allowed the presentation and analysis of information collected from the managers of the municipalities that responded to the questionnaire sent.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Among the 28 municipalities in the Border Strip of the Central-West region, Mato Grosso State, 12 municipal managers (42%) responded to the questionnaire provided. From the perspective of planning and organizing tourism activities in the that region, this lack of engagement by the municipal government is a weakness in the proposal to maximize tourism activities in these municipalities. This was a survey to build elements in support to regional and local public policies, funded by Sudeco and with the active participation of researchers from the State university.

Regarding the existence of a municipal legislation directed to tourism, 50% of the managers who responded to the questionnaire (6 municipalities) indicated that they adopted a mechanism to promote tourism activity, whether through the existence of a Tourism Fund, an active Municipal Tourism Council or an implemented Tourism Plan (Figure 2). Considering the importance of these municipal laws, Fontes (2016) highlights that public policies have the role to regulate and improve the tourism activity. In this sense, it is worth to highlight the need for municipalities in the Mato Grosso Border Region to make stronger efforts to establish a legislation that promotes tourism. However, when looking at the tourist regions Vale do Guaporé and Pantanal Matogrossense, areas with a high tourism potential, only Nossa Senhora do Livramento stated, among those interviewed, that this municipality does not have a legislation directed to tourism activity.

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Regarding the participation of municipalities in the Mato Grosso State border region in regional and State tourism governance, 58.3% (7 municipalities) of the interviewees indicated that they participate at some instance, such as the Vale do Guaporé Tourist Region, CONTUR Pró Pantanal, IGR - Pantanal Mato-grossense, IGR Regional Governance Instance and Vale do Cabaçal Tourist Region (Figure 3). From the organizational point of view of tourism activity, an active participation in governance instances encourages collaboration between the municipalities involved, as well as facilitates to create policies and decision-making in favor of planning and development of tourism activity in the destinations. All municipalities in the Vale do Guaporé and Pantanal Mato-Grossense regions participate in some instance of regional or State tourism governance.

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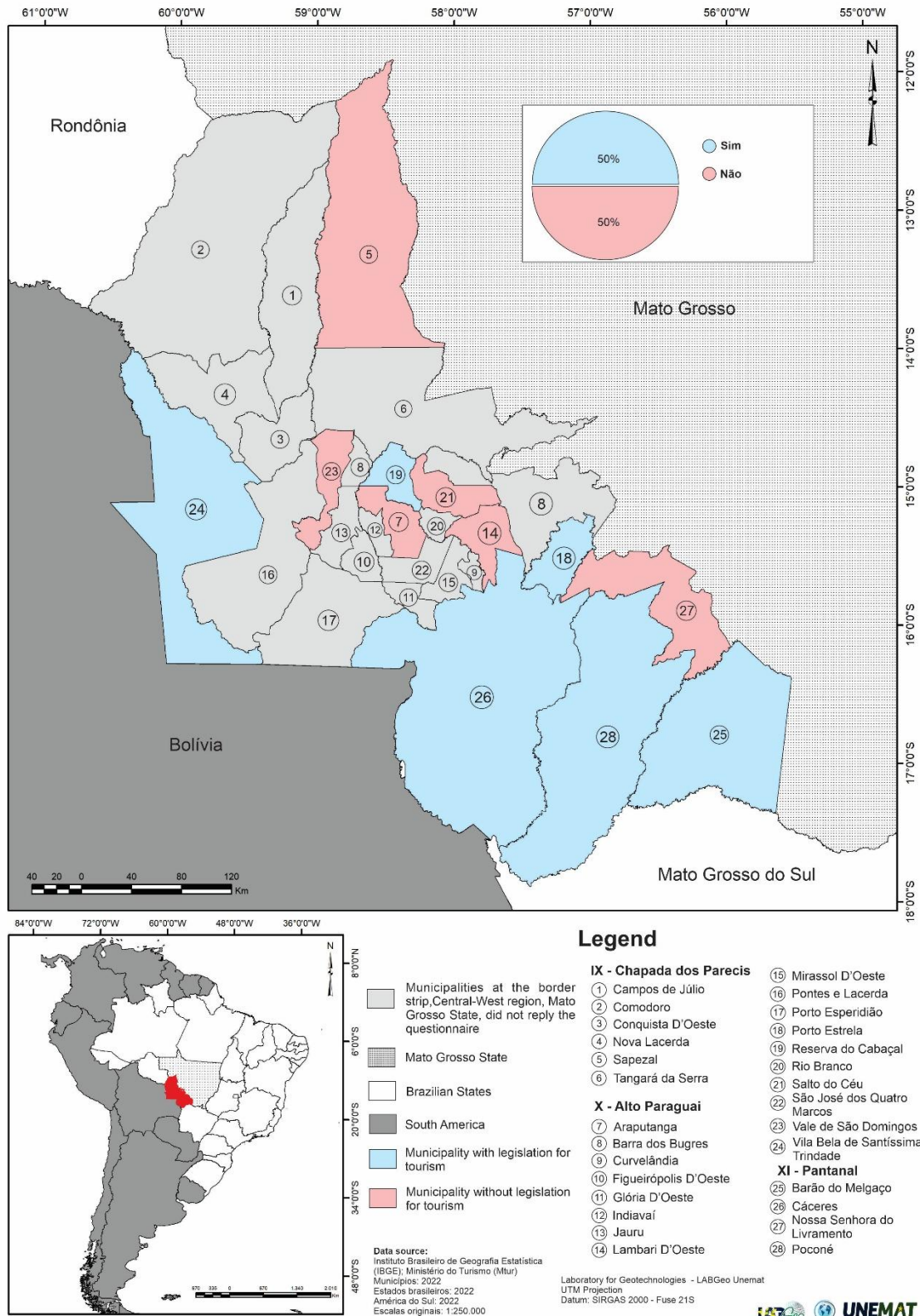


Figure 2 – Municipalities that have a legislation related to Tourism. Prepared by: The authors (2025).

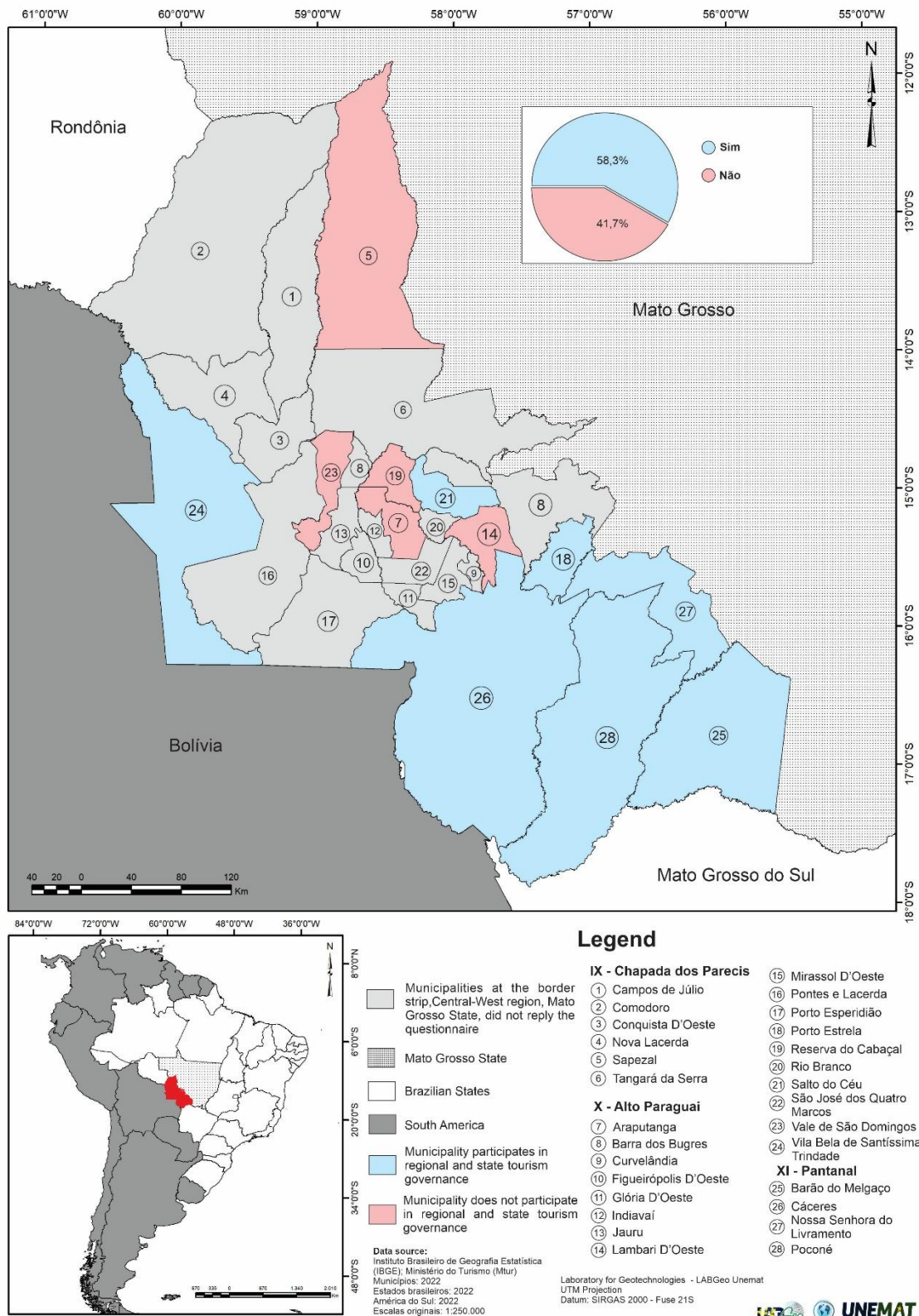


Figure 3 – Municipalities that participate in regional and state tourism governance. Prepared by: The authors (2025).

In the investigation of partnerships, cooperation networks and exchanges carried out by municipalities for the development of tourism, 41.7% (5 municipalities) of the interviewees indicated that there were no active partnerships, while 58.3% (7 municipalities) highlighted the existence of some type of established partnership, such as the Pró Pantanal network, Unemat, Secitec, Sebrae, Senar and Empaer. As pointed out by Rocha (2006), partnerships between public and private authorities, the local community and the third sector are of fundamental importance to maximize tourism activity in destinations.

Another important factor to be considered for the planning and organization of tourism in municipalities is its participation in federal government programs and projects made available by the Ministry of Tourism. When analyzing this condition in the Border Strip studied, it was noted that only 25% (3 municipalities) of the interviewees stated that they participated in some action developed by the Ministry of Tourism (Figure 4). This finding indicates that there is still a need for a stronger involvement of municipalities in national tourism policies. Of the municipalities located in tourist regions whose managers were interviewed, only Nossa Senhora do Livramento (Pantanal Mato-Grossense) participates in federal tourism programs.

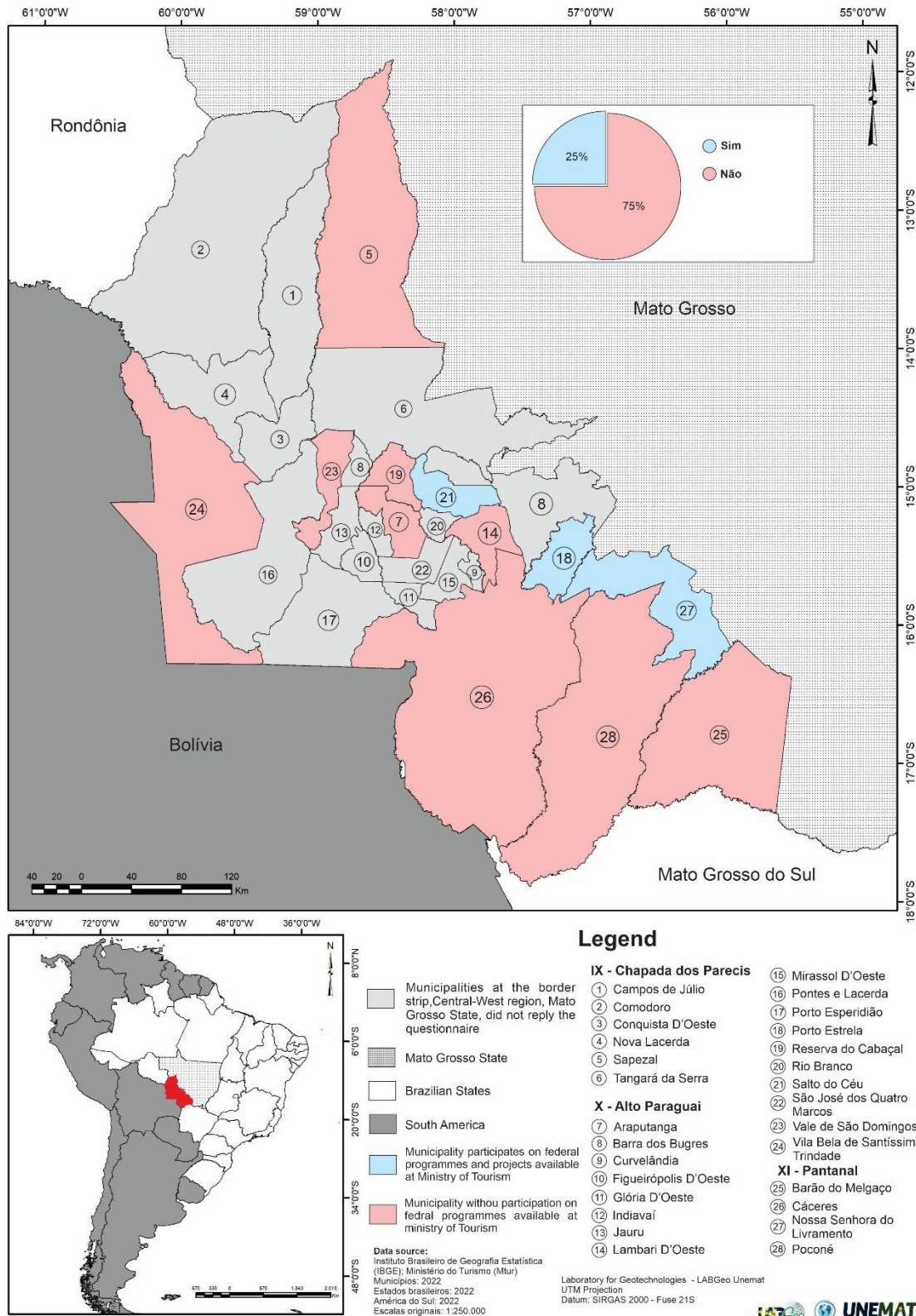


Figure 4 – Municipalities participating in federal programs and projects made available by the Ministry of Tourism. Prepared by: The authors (2025).

Regarding the importance to articulate public tourism policies with the federal government, Beni (2003) states that it is the Ministry for Tourism's role to develop, coordinate and promote the guidelines for national tourism planning. The State and municipal authorities are responsible to implement regional and local projects. The low participation of municipalities in the border area in SW Mato Grosso State, in federal projects and programs, suggests that municipal administrations are ineffective in this sector, since this fact demonstrates the inefficiency to raise funds for municipalities to promote and manage local tourism.

In order to recognize the economic potential of the municipalities included in the survey, municipal managers were asked about the main economic activities within their municipalities. As the main activity developed, 91.7% of respondents (11 municipalities) indicated livestock farming and 58.3% (7 municipalities) highlighted commerce. Tourism was indicated by only 16.7% of respondents (2 municipalities). These figures highlight two issues: first, that the border region has an economy consolidated in livestock farming and commerce activities; and second, that in the municipalities investigated, tourism is still presented as an underexplored activity (Figure 5).

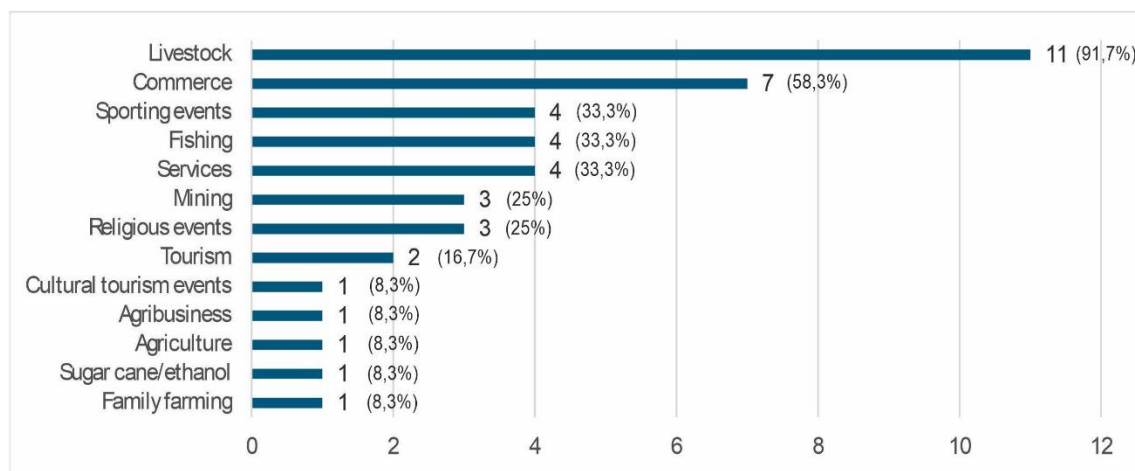


Figure 5 – Main economic activities in the municipalities of the Mato Grosso border strip. Prepared by: The authors (2025).

Regarding the economic panorama of the municipalities, tourism is characterized as an activity that enables the local economic diversification, as indicated by Vieira, Hoffmann and Alberton (2018). Still considering the scope of the economic importance of tourism, the OECD (2020) highlights that it is a relevant activity for economic growth that generates income, foreign exchange and jobs, stimulating regional development and supporting local communities. With the prevalence of livestock farming and commerce in the Mato Grosso border region, tourism activity can be enhanced as a complementary activity to the productive dynamics in

place, enabling the development of different segments in the natural and cultural dimensions of the municipalities investigated.

Another important factor evaluated is the existence of tourism inventories in the municipalities of the Border Strip. According to Fratucci and Moraes (2020), the inventory is one of the basic elements of tourism planning, since it analyses, interpretes and discusses the instruments for planning tourist destinations. Conceptually, it is indicated that:

An inventory is a tool that must be constantly updated so that the manager can have up-to-date information when making decisions. Although it may be expensive to obtain this knowledge in its first edition, once the base is set up and with collection methods that guarantee frequently updated data, the cost and time spent will be much lower and it will become a routine in the context of tourism planning and management (Fratucci; Moraes, 2020, p. 9).

The data in Figure 6 shows that half of the responding municipalities indicated the existence of an inventory in their municipalities. Given the importance of this instrument, there is a need to expand the inventory to other municipalities, as inventories support the municipalities' tourism information database, a sine qua non condition for successful tourism planning, as indicated by Moraes, Fogaça and Soares (2020).

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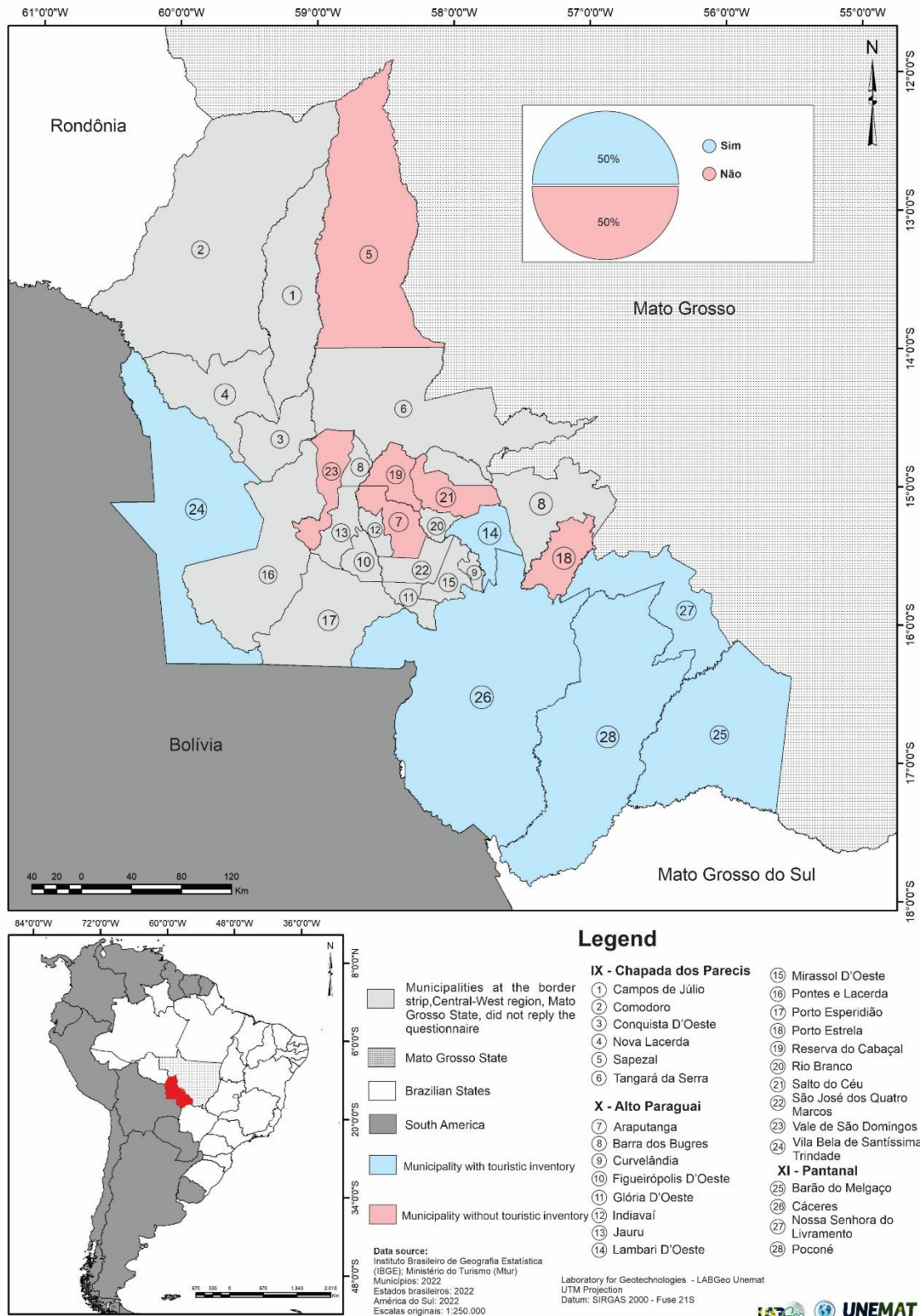


Figure 6 – Municipalities with a Tourism Inventory. Prepared by the authors (2025).

In line with the analysis of municipalities with tourism inventories, it was also investigated which municipalities have a Master Plan that includes actions, guidelines and policies aimed at Tourism. Regarding the importance of this association, Lima (2012, p. 365) highlights the importance of the master plan as a municipal management tool, stating that the instrument “should not, however, be seen only as the fulfillment of a guideline, but also as a process that involves different social segments around commitments, which implies the need for population participation”. Façanha and Viana (2012, p. 13) also report that, in city planning, Master Plans “must be based on the concept of sustainable development and its proper implementation must occur through a democratic process of collective discussion”.

Although half of the municipal managers informed that their municipalities have a tourism inventory, within the scope of the Master Plan only three of the respondents indicated that their Plans were directed towards actions linked to the planning, management and promotion of tourism activity (Figure 7).

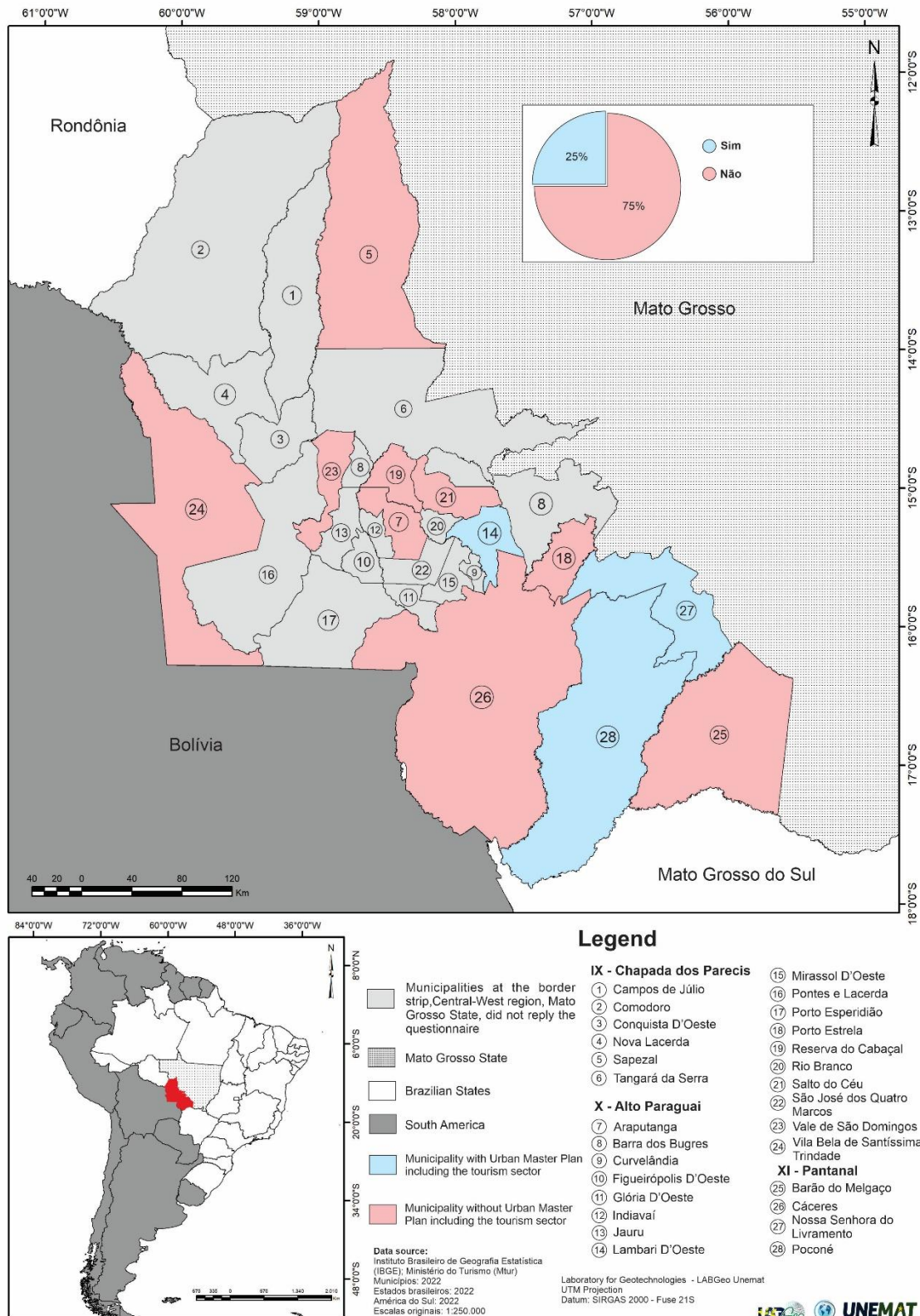


Figure 7 – Municipalities with an Urban Master Plan including the Tourism Sector. Prepared by: The authors (2025).

These figures reflect the need for municipal administrations to pay attention to the importance of linking tourism development to public policies and instruments for territorial organization and management, which should prioritize the different aspects that directly and indirectly impact their populations, including issues related to tourism. As a management instrument, Lacerda et al. (2005) emphasize that the Master Plan is based on the premise to guide the actions of public and private agents in the municipal development process, with the capacity to provide a plural debate among the social actors involved.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

The municipalities of the Mato Grosso Border Region still have weaknesses in their handling of tourism activities. The respondents to the survey demonstrated that there are various gaps that need to be filled to handle policies aimed at tourism activities, with repercussions on the flow of tourists in this region, on investments linked to tourism supply, on the lack of basic public infrastructure services, as well as on the missing of efficient tourism marketing to attract tourists interested in the different natural and cultural potential of the municipalities studied.

The “superstructure” of the tourism system, which plays a fundamental role in the organization, standardization and regulation of tourism, should be prioritized within the scope of actions to strengthen tourism activities in the Mato Grosso Border Region. In the scenario observed, the municipalities located in the tourist regions Guaporé Valley and the Pantanal Matogrossense demonstrate a stronger articulation within the scope of public policies aimed at tourism activities. The municipalities in the other regions lack stronger efforts in territorial articulation related to tourism.

In order to maximize tourism activity, managers must be more involved in discussions and investigations on the issues in their municipalities, including participation in diagnoses such as those presented in this investigation, as well as in strategic and integrated planning of tourism with municipal and regional development plans.

#### **Acknowledgements**

To the Superintendence for Development of the Central-West Region – (Sudeco) for funding the research project “Diagnosis and preparation for the Development and Integration Plan at the Border Strip, Central-West Region of Brazil – PDIF” developed in partnership with the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul – UFMS/Campus Pantanal and the Mato Grosso State University – UNEMAT/Campus Jane Vanini, Cáceres. To

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CAPES for granting a postdoctoral scholarship to the second author, as well as to the UNEMAT Geotechnology Laboratory (LabGeo UNEMAT) for the infrastructure made available for the development of this study.

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