

## “CULTURE-TOURISTIFICATION” OF COLONIAL TOWNS IN THE INTERIOR OF BRAZIL

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**Summary:** The link between cultural heritage, touristification, and urban development has been extensively researched in larger cities with a strong appeal to international tourists. However, there is limited information on the relationship between these factors in smaller cultural heritage towns that rely only on regional or national tourism. This is also the case for small and medium-sized colonial towns in the Brazilian interior, which are the focus of this paper. We introduce the concept of “culture-touristification” as a form of touristification that is co-constituted by several interacting, culture-led sub-processes, such as patrimonialization, culturalization, festivalization, adventuring of landscapes, telenovelaization, and counter-culturalization. Based on this concept, we argue that culture-touristification drives the touristic transformation of small and medium-sized colonial towns in the interior of Brazil. However, the effects and the interplay of these sub-processes are different in these towns. Some of them may be more pronounced than others, and some may only be partially articulated, depending, for example, on their societal significance, the strategic orientation of responsible stakeholders, the resistance of local populations, or the geographical location of the towns. To illustrate this argument, we draw on case studies conducted in Cidade de Goiás and Pirenópolis, two small colonial towns in the state of Goiás, Brazil. Methods include in-depth and semi-structured interviews with residents and critical actors, mappings of building use in the town centers, participant observation, analysis of telenovelas and Instagram hashtags representing these cities, and document and data research.

**Keywords:** Colonial cities, world heritage, urban transformation, Latin America, touristification, culture

### 1 Introduction

In the early 20th century, old towns around the world began to decline as industrialization expanded. In Brazil, this was particularly true for colonial administrative, agricultural, and mining cities in the interior. The loss of political, economic, and functional importance in these cities led to their social and economic decline and structural decay. As early as the 1930s, however, certain historical colonial cities were recognized as part of Brazil’s national cultural heritage. This reflected the growing global trend towards national identity formation. In Brazil, the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*, IPHAN) identified many Portuguese city foundations as an integral part of Brazilian national identity, and thus as cultural heritage (see Fig. 1). This emphasis on local and national identity continued to grow, especially from the early 1970s onwards (PESSOA & PICCINATO 2007). At the same time, with the adoption of the World Heritage Convention in 1972, UNESCO began to define and designate World Heritage Sites.

Patrimonialization, the process of transforming historical city centers into cultural heritage sites, can boost tourism and contribute to the economic development of a city or region. For this reason, the relationship between cultural heritage, tourism, and urban regeneration has been the subject of much research and academic debate (e.g., WISE & JIMURA 2020). A key concept in this context is ‘touristification’, which refers to the complex process by which various stakeholders transform “a territory through tourist activities” (OJEDA & KIEFFER 2020: 143). Tourist demand drives this process and leads to the development of a service culture in the destination region, including hotels, restaurants, and cultural events (DREYER 2000: 42). In addition, efforts to preserve cultural heritage in cities often aim at a visible (re)construction of the past and the integration of museum-like features into city centers. This often results in a transformation in which objects such as buildings, lamps, fences, and benches, appear to be disconnected from everyday life (NELLE 2007). Measures for ‘city facelifting’ (MÜLLER 1999: 365) also involve de-functionalization or functional change. The com-





Fig. 1: Urban Historical Centers in Brazil (National Heritage and World Cultural Heritage)

memorative function, for example, can replace the everyday practices of the local population in historic areas. In short, tourist demands, aesthetic conservation (ASHWORTH 1998), and functional change are crucial drivers of touristification. What follows is the touristic appropriation of public spaces as sightseers visit touristic sites like interactive museums. Negative impacts of touristification include over-commodification, displacement of long-term residents by tourism activities, as well as rising property values, rents, and living costs (GOTHAM 2005).

There are many Brazilian old towns inscribed on the World Heritage List, especially the larger ones on the coast. The touristification of these locations has been extensively studied and analyzed (see RUBINO 2005). Notable examples include the historical centers of Salvador da Bahia (e.g., ROTFUSS 2007, MARINO DE AZEVEDO 1994), Recife (e.g., LEITE 2015), and Rio de Janeiro (e.g., RUBINO 2005). In general, international scholarly attention to touristification tends to focus on larger cultural heritage cities that attract international tourists, rather than on smaller cities in the interior that lack international touristic appeal (see section 2).

Given this lack of research, this paper explores the processes that drive the touristic transformation of small and medium-sized colonial cities in the Brazilian interior. In the following, we present the relevant state of the art and the theoretical framework we employ here, including our argument (section 2), the methods (section 3), and the case studies that support our argument (section 4). Section 5 summarizes the argument and outlines its implications for current debates on touristification and for future research.

## **2 Theory: Intertwined processes leading to culture-touristification**

The international literature on touristification has grown considerably in recent decades, focusing in particular on urban regeneration through tourism, cultural heritage, and problematic effects, such as gentrification and overtourism (e.g., JOVER & LERENA RONGVEAUX 2024, BLANCO-ROMERO & BLÁZQUEZ-SALOM 2023, WISE & JIMURA 2020, OJEDA & KIEFFER 2020). There is a consensus among touristification scholars that cultural heritage plays a crucial role in touristification processes (WISE & JIMURA 2020), as well as heritagization (TRIVI et al. 2024) or patrimonialization (VALVERDE et al. 2022). However, the majority of studies in this field fo-

cus on urban areas in relatively large, often coastal cities that attract international tourists, whether in Europe (e.g., LECCIS 2023, PARRALEJO & DÍAZ-PARRA 2021, SEQUERA & NOFRE 2020, ERBAS 2018), Asia (e.g., KIM & HOLIFIELD 2022), Latin America (e.g., CÁCERES-SEGUEL 2024), or Brazil (e.g., LEITE 2015, ROTFUSS 2007, RUBINO 2005, MARINO DE AZEVEDO 1994). Small and medium-sized cities with cultural heritage, which predominantly depend on regional and national tourism, are often neglected in these debates, although touristification is also one of their most important approaches to urban regeneration. Several studies on such cities have been published in Portuguese (e.g., PAES 2015, COSTA 2015). However, they do not focus primarily on touristification but rather on related aspects.

A second striking aspect of the scholarly debates on touristification is its link with 'gentrification'. Numerous studies have shown that processes of touristification and gentrification are closely related and overlap (e.g., JOVER & LERENA RONGVAUX 2024, TRIVI et al. 2024, CALDERÓN-FAJARDO & NUEVO-LÓPEZ 2024, COCOLA-GANT 2023, 2018, KIM & HOLIFIELD 2022, PARRALEJO & DÍAZ-PARRA 2021, SEQUERA & NOFRE 2020, 2018, STORS & KAGERMEIER 2013, GOTHAM 2005). On the one hand, authors have introduced the concept of tourism gentrification. Based on an analysis of the Vieux Carre (the French Quarter) in New Orleans, GOTHAM (2005), for example, defines it as "the transformation of a middle-class neighborhood into a relatively affluent and exclusive enclave marked by a proliferation of corporate entertainment and tourism venues" (GOTHAM 2005: 1099), which means that median incomes and property values increase, rents rise and lower-income people are pushed out of these neighborhoods (GOTHAM 2005: 1099, see also BLANCO-ROMERO & BLÁZQUEZ-SALOM 2023).

On the other hand, various scholars have argued that touristification and gentrification should be differentiated and that the two processes and their corresponding terms should not be used synonymously, as they highlight different perspectives (OJEDA & KIEFFER 2020). "Whereas gentrification means a lower income population replaced by one of a higher status, touristification consists of an increase in tourist activity that generally implies the loss of residents" (JOVER & DÍAZ-PARRA 2019: 1) and can lead to the depopulation of all classes. In the case of touristification, housing is dominated by temporary accommodation with a deteriorating quality of life within a community. This stands in contrast to owner-occupied housing and the class conflicts that arise

as a result of the process of gentrification (SEQUERA & NOFRE 2018). In the process of touristification, retail changes can be characterized by disneyfication offering ‘real authentic’ experiences with the promise of eating, drinking, consuming, and experiencing a location like a local, while gentrification leads to the dominance of chic and sophisticated options. Nevertheless, the displacement of residents is an aspect common to both touristification and gentrification, although in the latter case, it mainly affects lower-income groups (SEQUERA & NOFRE 2018: 8f.). In this context, some researchers claim that, as strategies of touristification, cultural heritage and patrimonialization are ultimately tools that reinforce this displacement (CÁCERES-SEGUEL 2024).

Our paper contributes to the debates outlined above in two ways. First, we focus on touristification processes in small and medium-sized colonial cities in the Brazilian interior, which rely mainly on regional and national tourism and have so far been neglected by scholars. We show that patrimonialization (or heritagization) is only one of several culture-related processes that are crucial for attracting tourists. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the patrimonialization of historic areas, including their declaration as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, does not automatically lead to a long-term influx of tourists and its negative effects, in contrast with the findings of studies that focus on larger cultural heritage cities (e.g. CÁCERES-SEGUEL 2024). Secondly, we contribute to the conceptual debates on touristification. Based on two case studies, which are presented in section 4, we develop the argument that the following intertwined culture-related processes have been crucial for the touristification of the small, cultural heritage towns in the Brazilian interior: patrimonialization, culturalization, festivalization, adventurizing of landscapes, telenovelaization, and counter-culturalization. These processes and their interplay co-constitute what we call ‘culture-touristification’. We call them sub-processes of culture-touristification and assume that the list of sub-processes is open-ended. In addition, some of them may be more pronounced in specific cities, while others may find partial articulation only. In what follows, we briefly define each of them.

The concept of *patrimonialization* refers to the complex transformation processes of places as well as spatial and immaterial objects into cultural or natural heritage. An important factor that enabled the patrimonialization of historic urban areas in Brazil has been nationalization, i.e., the Brazilianization (that is, the construction of *brasilidade*, see FREYRE

2006 [1933]) of the former Portuguese city foundations. Through patrimonialization, the things of the past have been reused, reinterpreted, and reconfigured. Simultaneously, they were adapted to the present to serve as a reference for the future (ESCHER & KARNER 2018: 37f.). In the case of World Heritage inscriptions, this process has involved the objectification, protection, development, and, in most cases, the commodification of the site in question (COSTA 2015, COPERTINO 2013: 103).

Associated with this, the approach of *culturalization* has been pursued by politicians, planners, and residents since the 1970s as an economic imperative that requires the permanent aesthetic self-renewal of urban spaces. This has often involved the implementation of spectacular construction projects, renovation measures of decaying urban districts (e.g., old towns, industrial areas), and cultural events (STEYAERT & MICHELS 2018: 88). Culture-led urban regeneration is “as individual as the places in which it happens” (LANDRY et al. 1996: 40). Even literature, including its material references (e.g., books, author’s residences) and immaterial aspects (e.g., imaginary places elaborated in the writings), is considered a cultural resource. It can be used for the social, cultural, and touristic development of urban areas (e.g., PAES 2015, BONNIOT-MIRLOUP 2016).

*Festivalization* is the concept used to describe the staging of major events, which has been an ongoing urban policy measure since the 1980s. Funds, people, and media are mobilized for the realization of mega-events (FRANK & ROTH 2000: 206), often in order to achieve secondary goals related to infrastructure development and new living spaces (HÄUSSERMANN & SIEBEL 1993: 8, 17f.). In the Anglophone international literature, such realization of smaller festivals and cultural events is either subsumed under the term ‘festivalization’ (ZHERDEV 2014: 6f.) or ‘eventification’ (JAKOB 2012). In Brazil, scholars mostly use the term ‘festivalization’ (*festivalização*) (e.g. VINCO 2019).

In contrast, the concept of *adventurizing of landscapes* describes their staging through medial bridges (e.g. texts, images) and architectural arrangements that shape human experiences (HASSE 2013: 26). The infrastructural development and aestheticization of formerly relatively inaccessible natural areas and phenomena are often linked to questions about the optimal relationship between public and private actors in rural tourism (KAGERMEIER et al. 2022). Landscape tourism has received more attention in research in the last decade: “A fairly new paradigm in geography, *more-than-representational geographies*, brings



out and delves into the relationship of the tourist with the visited landscape, through lived, interactive experience (...), with an emphasis on sensescape and emotions/affect, tied to place and landscape" (TERKENLI 2014: 283).

It is also important to acknowledge the effects of film-induced tourism triggered by telenovelas. We coin the term *telenovelaization* to refer to a specific process of 'mediatization' (HJARVARD 2013), one whereby telenovelas filmed in historical centers and their surroundings provide tourists with images and information about previously unknown or inaccessible destinations. Locations shown in cinema, TV movies, and other TV programs can trigger a boom in almost any region, city, or urban place, often driven by marketing strategies to promote tourism to these places (BEETON 2006). This may be particularly true for Brazilian telenovelas due to their huge influence and impact on Brazilian society (SVARTMAN 2021, MICHAEL 2014).

As touristification proceeds through the processes mentioned above, negative effects occur, such as the loss of residents due to increased tourist activity in historic areas (touristification) and/or the replacement of a lower-income population by a higher-income one (gentrification). Following the debate on touristification and gentrification above, we argue for a clear distinction between these processes and their corresponding terms. However, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate these in an empirical context as the underlying concepts overlap with each other, and interviewees (see section 4) often refer to gentrification rather than touristification when describing their city's problems.

*Counter-culturalization* refers to processes that resist specific and/or dominant forms of culturalization and social orders. In the context of our case studies, three movements have been relevant. The first refers to movements and cultures that challenge the traditional values, norms, behaviors, and lifestyles of mainstream society (BATZELL 1994: 116), such as those that relate to so-called *ecovilas* and *comunidades intencionais*. Members of these communities seek to free themselves from the constraints of traditional and modern urban life to create a new, socially and environmentally sustainable lifestyle in remote areas in order to achieve self-fulfillment. Studies show, however, that they are still economically dependent on urban centers to find work and sell their handicrafts at local markets. The second type of counter-culture refers to those cultures that have resisted colonial and postcolonial structures, claiming space and recognition while questioning how colo-

nial legacies have been patrimonialized. The third counter-cultural movement refers to the more recent resistance movements against the displacement of lower-income groups from the old towns due to touristification and/or gentrification.

### 3 Methods: Analyzing culture-touristification from a multi-perspective empirical approach

We used a multi-perspective empirical approach and mixed methods (ELWOOD 2010) to analyze how culture-touristification operates. First of all, we conducted fieldwork in two historical old towns in the interior of Brazil, namely Pirenópolis and Cidade de Goiás. Both towns are located in the state of Goiás and have been declared national cultural heritage sites. Nevertheless, they differ in various aspects, such as the distance from the capital Brasília (see Fig. 1), the material and natural potential they possess, and the predominance of specific transformative processes involved in each place. The fieldwork was carried out in August 2019 and included, first, GIS-based mappings of the building fabric, building use, and tourism infrastructure in the historic quarters, combined with photographic documentation of the buildings. Second, we conducted 66 qualitative semi-structured interviews with residents, key actors in the tourism sector, artisans, artists, and representatives of cultural and alternative movements. Most of the interviews were conducted during the mapping process. Residents were asked to describe (a) the cities and their transformations after the old towns became cultural heritage sites, (b) their relationship with the cities and their view of what it means to live in a cultural heritage city, and (c) the buildings they live in, if applicable. Key actors were asked additional questions about the cities' development, economic situation, and prospects for the future, including tourism, as well as the interviewees' functions in the city and/or region. All questions allowed for an open response in the interviewees' own words; hence, some interviews were short (about 5 min.), and others much longer (up to 1,5 hours). In this paper, all names of quoted interviewees have been anonymized through coding (the letter 'G' in the codes indicates Cidade de Goiás, 'P' stands for Pirenópolis; see Table A1 in the appendix for an overview of the quoted interviews). In addition to mappings and interviews, the third component of the fieldwork was participant observation during festivals (the Cora Coralina festival on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2019 in Cidade de Goiás and the 10<sup>th</sup>

Literary Festival in Pirenópolis between the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2019) and everyday situations to better understand the practices, needs, and goals of stakeholders and tourists (WATSON & TILL 2010). The empirical data were collected during a field trip with geography students from the University of Brasília (Brazil) and the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany). The intercultural collaboration proved to be highly beneficial for the selection, collection, and interpretation of data.

The empirical work was complemented by data and document research on tourism, cultural events, socio-cultural movements, and marketing strategies of the cities' administrations, and other aspects related to the theoretical concepts presented. Unfortunately, official and reliable statistical data on tourism in the cities investigated is very limited. For this study, most of the statistical data were obtained from the Census 2022 (IBGE 2022) and the Accommodation Services Survey (*Pesquisa de Serviços de Hospedagem*) 2016 (IBGE 2016), which was conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, IBGE 2016), as well as from the Tourism Observatory of the State of Goiás. Finally, we analyzed cinematic representations of the cities with a focus on the Brazilian telenovelas 'Estrela Guia', 'Araguaia', and 'Em Família', which were rated as tourism boosters by locals and visitors. With a subsequent analysis of Instagram hashtags, we identified popular photo hotspots in and around the old towns of both cities. This multi-perspective empirical approach allowed us to shed light on the various cultural sub-processes that constitute culture-touristification and their different articulations in both cities.

#### 4 Culture-touristification in Brazil: The cases of Cidade de Goiás and Pirenópolis

The rise of culture-touristification in historic centers of colonial cities in Brazil was made possible by the designation of these areas as national and international heritage sites. This allowed residents and tourists to see these areas as inherently 'Brazilian'. A comparison of Cidade de Goiás and Pirenópolis shows not only that they differ in the extent of touristification, but also that the sub-processes of culture-touristification manifest differently in each city. This variation is influenced by stakeholders, key actors, their interests, evaluations, practices, and the accessibility of the old towns and their surrounding natural areas to tourists.

Cidade de Goiás has 24,071 inhabitants according to the 2022 census (IBGE 2022). Its GDP is around R\$763.7 million, of which 50.9% comes from services, followed by agriculture (26.2%), public administration (16.4%), and industry (6.5%) (Caravela Dados e Estatísticas 2024a). The Tourism Observatory of the State of Goiás considers agriculture to be the most important economic activity in the city (Observatório de Turismo do Estado de Goiás 2021: 9). It is worth noting that the city has a significantly higher aging index (89.88) than the national average (55.24) (IBGE 2022). This supports the view of several interviewees who stated that there are few job opportunities for young people and families, leading many to leave the city to seek work elsewhere (G20, G18, G36, G38). Pirenópolis, with 26,690 inhabitants, is slightly larger than Cidade de Goiás but has a significantly lower ageing index (64.23, according to census data). Pirenópolis has a GDP of around R\$640.3 million, of which 43.8% comes from services, 28.5% from agriculture, 19.6% from public administration, and 8.1% from industry (Caravela Dados e Estatísticas 2024b). According to the Tourism Observatory of the State of Goiás, the most important economic activity in the city is the extraction of quartzite, known as 'Pirenópolis stone,' while tourism and agriculture also play a major role (Observatório de Turismo do Estado de Goiás 2021: 9).

In both cities, tourism is primarily regional and, to a much lesser extent, national (Observatório do Turismo do Estado de Goiás 2021). The interviewees highlighted the tourism potential of Cidade de Goiás as expandable (e.g., G10, G13, G20), while Pirenópolis was often associated with over-tourism (e.g., G32, P4, P11). This difference is also evident in Table 1, which shows that the number of officially registered establishments and employment related to the tourism sector is significantly higher in Pirenópolis than in Cidade de Goiás. In terms of public policies to promote tourism, respondents indicated that they were not very significant in either city. While Pirenópolis does not need more tourists, the municipal government of Cidade de Goiás was criticized for not doing enough to promote tourism and attract investment in the tourism sector (e.g., G20).

One reason for this difference is the geographical location of the cities. Cidade de Goiás is located 315 km from Brasília, and the quality of the roads to reach the city is partly compromised. Pirenópolis, on the other hand, is only 156 km from the Brazilian capital (see Fig. 1). Brasília, together with the Federal District, has approximately 4.3

Tab. 1: Data on tourism in Cidade de Goiás and in Pirenópolis

Segment	Year	Cidade de Goiás	Pirenópolis
Officially registered <b>establishments</b> related to the tourism sector (including accommodation, gastronomy, transport, tourism and travel agencies, cultural and leisure facilities). Source: Observatório do Turismo do Estado de Goiás (2022)	2021	50	175
	2020	35	186
	2019	42	181
	2018	43	181
Officially registered <b>employment</b> related to the tourism sector (including accommodation, gastronomy, transport, tourism and travel agencies, cultural and leisure facilities). Source: Observatório do Turismo do Estado de Goiás (2022)	2021	124	1197
	2020	128	972
	2019	224	1156
	2018	239	1060
	2017	238	994
Officially registered establishments for <b>accommodation</b> (hotels, hostels, B&Bs, others, camping excluded). Source: IBGE 2016	2016	18	123

million inhabitants and the highest per capita income in Brazil (IBGE 2022). This makes it the most important source market for tourists in Pirenópolis.

In the following sections, we present the results of the case studies in Cidade de Goiás and Pirenópolis. In each section, we focus on the three most prominent sub-processes of culture-touristification and briefly summarize the others. The mapping results show the extent of touristification and its spatial patterns in each city.

#### 4.1 Cidade de Goiás

The history of Cidade de Goiás dates back to 1727, when Portuguese expeditionary troops set up the first camp in search of gold and diamonds. The settlement, called Vila Boa de Goyaz, became the state capital when the administrative state of Goiás was established in 1748, marking the beginning of the city's golden age, which lasted until 1770. With the decline of the gold cycle, a long period of stagnation began. This is why the town's present layout is similar to the one from 1782 (PESSÔA & PICCINATO 2007: 97f.). It was not until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the state government invested in the installation of a sewage system and underground electricity.

In 1937, the state capital was moved to Goiânia, which is 180 km from Cidade de Goiás. As its importance declined, the administrative buildings were left abandoned. In 1950/51, in an effort to promote the national cultural heritage, the responsible national authority, now IPHAN, identified representative buildings. Later, in 1978, the IPHAN

declared the entire old town a National Heritage Site (PESSÔA & PICCINATO 2007: 97, TAMASO 2007). In 2001, it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

##### 4.1.1 Patrimonialization

In December 2001, UNESCO declared the old town of Cidade de Goiás (40,3 ha) a World Heritage Site on the following grounds: “Goiás testifies to the occupation and colonization of the lands of central Brazil in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The urban layout is an example of the organic development of a mining town, adapted to the conditions of the site” (UNESCO 2001). In addition, the use of local materials and construction techniques are considered exemplary of colonial settlements from that period.

Extensive efforts have been made to restore the colonial-baroque architecture of the central buildings. This has advanced the musealization of the old town. In Cidade de Goiás, patrimonial objects and spaces were selected, protected, and preserved in order to guarantee “the reproduction of the traditional social order” (TAMASO 2007: 319) and to promote tourism consumption. This ennoblement was perceived as an expression of power by the inhabitants of the peripheral areas who found themselves increasingly distanced and excluded from the cultural, political, and economic structures of the city (ibid. 474f.; see also G4, G8, G17, G27). At the same time, marketing the town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site led to an increase in tourist arrivals in the early years: “Look, during the years [after] the city had been declared [UNESCO World] Heritage, it was very

good [...], tourism was flourishing, there were many job opportunities for the local population” (G38, transl. by the authors). However, within a few years, long before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourist arrivals declined rapidly. “Nowadays, it’s very quiet. The tourism we once had doesn’t exist anymore” (G38, transl. by the authors). The main reason given by local stakeholders and residents is that cultural tourists are only interested in visiting the city once (e.g., G17). Besides the cultural heritage (e.g., places, buildings, objects, celebrations), there are too few attractive gastronomic and nightlife options in the old town or other possible tourist activities to attract repeat visitors (e.g., G19, G36).

#### 4.1.2 Culturalization

In Cidade de Goiás, tangible and intangible aspects are explicitly used to develop tourism. As early as 1960 and 1977, for example, two organizations were created to promote art, traditions, and handicrafts in order to preserve the cultural identity of the city as the birthplace of the Goiás district. The Association of the Artisans from Cidade de Goiás (*Associação dos Artesãos da Cidade de Goiás*, ASEAGO) aims to strengthen and preserve the region’s popular culture. Specifically, the Vilaboense Organization for Arts and Traditions (*Organização Vilaboense de Artes e Tradições*, OVAT) preserves the cultural references of Lent until the Holy Week. Since 2018, a so-called cultural passport (*passaporte cultural*) has provided information in Portuguese and English about historical structures (e.g., bridges) and museums in the old town, and individual stamps can be collected to confirm one’s visits to these sites. The *Museu das Bandeiras* presents a collection of important objects representing the Afro-Brazilian, indigenous, and Portuguese presence in Goiás.

The commodification of artists and writers is one of the leading strategies in the old town for attracting tourists. The branding of the city as the birthplace of Cora Coralina (1889-1985), a famous Brazilian writer and poet, is a good example. A house in the old town where she is said to be born in 1889 now hosts the *Museu Casa de Cora Coralina*. It is considered the place of inspiration for many of her works, as Cora Coralina spent her childhood and later years there. Busts and other sculptural replicas of the writer have also been placed around the old town. The commodification of the writer also extends beyond this area. Since 2013, the *Caminho de Cora Coralina*, a more than 300 km long trail for hikers and cyclists that termi-

nates in Cidade de Goiás, has connected municipalities, villages, farms, and attractions in the state of Goiás (see also interviews G5, G6, G9, or G16).

Similarly, the Brazilian artist Goiandira Ayres do Couto (1915-2011) is promoted in Cidade de Goiás (although much less referred to by the interviewees). Her paintings represent the historical landscape of the city. This valorization of colonial symbols is said to have inspired the creation of an ideal city with universal exceptional value which would later become a heritage city. The artist established a relationship with cultural institutions such as the Vilaboense Organization for Arts and Traditions, which worked with local and regional political authorities to reinvent the city and its cultural identity. Today, the foundation of the Cultural Center Goiandira Ayres do Couto (*Espaco Cultural Goiandira Ayres do Couto*) reminds us of the trajectories of this remarkable artist and guardian of the history of the city of Goiás (BARBOSA 2017). Through this process of culturalization, symbols and intangible heritage are linked to the old town.

#### 4.1.3 Festivalization

The commodification of personalities is supported by festivals held in the old town on special occasions. One example is the inauguration of an *Ano Cora Coralina* in August 2019, on the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the writer’s birth (e.g., G9, G16, G18, G26). Other events, such as the annual International Film Festival, which has been held in Cidade de Goiás since 1999, also highlight her birthplace by projecting portraits of Cora Coralina on the walls of the house. In this way, artists, writers, filmmakers, and their work are enshrined as an integral part of the city’s cultural heritage.

Around 15 seasonal events take place in Cidade de Goiás each year. Many interviewees said that these events were essential for attracting tourists (e.g., G14, G28, G36). The town is best known for its Holy Week processions. The torchlight procession usually attracts a large number of visitors who share their experiences on social media, thus contributing to the visibility of the city. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this event was held virtually in 2021, showing that the stakeholders find innovative ways to promote the town even in times of crisis.

Every February, Cidade de Goiás celebrates a street carnival, which has the most extensive program in the state. There are parades, performances by samba groups, and shows for children. The four



examples mentioned here illustrate how the representatives stage the old town as a venue for religious, traditional, and popular events and happenings. This process of festivalization is accompanied by a process of distortion and spectacularization. The eviction of long-time vendors during the festivals sparked protests from the population when the authorities asked so-called 'hippies' and street vendors to leave the Praça do Coreto, a patrimonialized public space. Other vendors catering to the needs of tourists, such as the ice cream parlor *Sorveteria*, were not affected (OLIVEIRA 2014: 45f).

#### 4.1.4 Spatial patterns of touristification in Cidade de Goiás and comparative remarks

The map below shows that the old town of Cidade de Goiás has largely retained its residential function. Since 1968, the Campus Cora Coralina of the State University of Goiás has characterized the old town, along with other educational institutions and museums. The number of souvenir and clothing shops in the old town is relatively small (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). A few restaurants are concentrated near the church of St. Anna and the market. Furthermore, during the data collection period (18.-20.08.2019), 28 accommodations were offered through the Airbnb platform. In the map (Fig. 2), they are marked as guesthouses or residences. However, the mapping, the qualitative interviews, and the available statistical data (Tab. 1) suggest that the degree of touristification is rather low compared to Pirenópolis. Moreover, while the existing academic literature has identified gentrification in the inner city (e.g., TAMASO 2007), it was hardly mentioned by the interviewees and not perceived as a significant problem, as it was in Pirenópolis.

The other three sub-processes (telenovelaization, adventurization of landscapes, and counter-culturalization) that co-constitute what we call culture-touristification are also less pronounced than they are in Pirenópolis. Nevertheless, they have been articulated, at least in part. In terms of telenovelaization, the old town of Cidade de Goiás has served as the setting for 'Em Família' (broadcast by Rede Globo in 2014), which may have had an impact on tourism, although interviewees did not explicitly highlight this. The Netflix series, 'Boca a Boca' (2020) was also filmed in Cidade de Goiás. The adventurizing of landscapes is not as pronounced as it is in Pirenópolis, as the natural environment around Cidade de Goiás is (still) largely inaccessible, except

for the *Parque da Carioca* and the *Parque Estadual da Serra Dourada*. At the same time, its potential has been highlighted (G28). Counter-culturalization also plays a role in Cidade de Goiás, as the culturalization and musealization of colonial heritage have been accompanied by a demand for recognition and space for those cultures that have resisted colonialism and postcolonial structures to this day. This includes, for example, the recognition of a Quilombo or the practice of Capoeira. As the coordinator of the Women's Support Center (*Centro Especializado de Apoio a Mulher do Município de Goiás*), an Afro-Brazilian artist, explained in an interview: "So, poetry, the possibility of [performing and making] art, made me known in the city. And on stage, I started to subvert the order. Instead of arriving and just being the artist, I started to be known and recognized for taking on the agendas of women and *negritude*, which has worked" (G9, transl. by the authors).

#### 4.2 Pirenópolis

The founding history of Pirenópolis (or Vila do Meia Ponte, as it was called in the early years) is comparable to that of Cidade de Goiás. As a result, the layout of the town and its buildings are of a similar age. During the gold mining era, the two cities vied for the title of the richest city in the province. After the decline of gold mining around 1780, Pirenópolis served as a regional trading center for cotton, mules, and sugar cane. This role diminished with the construction of new roads starting in 1850. The city of Anápolis, located 65 km to the south, then became the new commercial center.

It was not until 1890 that the city was renamed 'Pirenópolis,' when it was designated as a place of cultural activity. The first theatre was built in 1899, and the first Art Deco cinema in 1936. From 1930, the exploitation of quartzite-micaceous for the construction of Goiânia and later for Brasília boosted the economy. In 1989, the city was declared a National Heritage Site by the IPHAN, resulting in an intact architectural and urban heritage. It has been rediscovered not only for urban but especially for rural and nature tourism (e.g., P2, P7, P8). In recent years, the heritage has been threatened by real estate speculation, changes in occupancy rates, and increasing commercial use to generate higher profits. The main problems caused by over-tourism in Pirenópolis are related to environmental issues, sewage, lack of water and electricity, violence, escalating rents, and the displacement of residents.

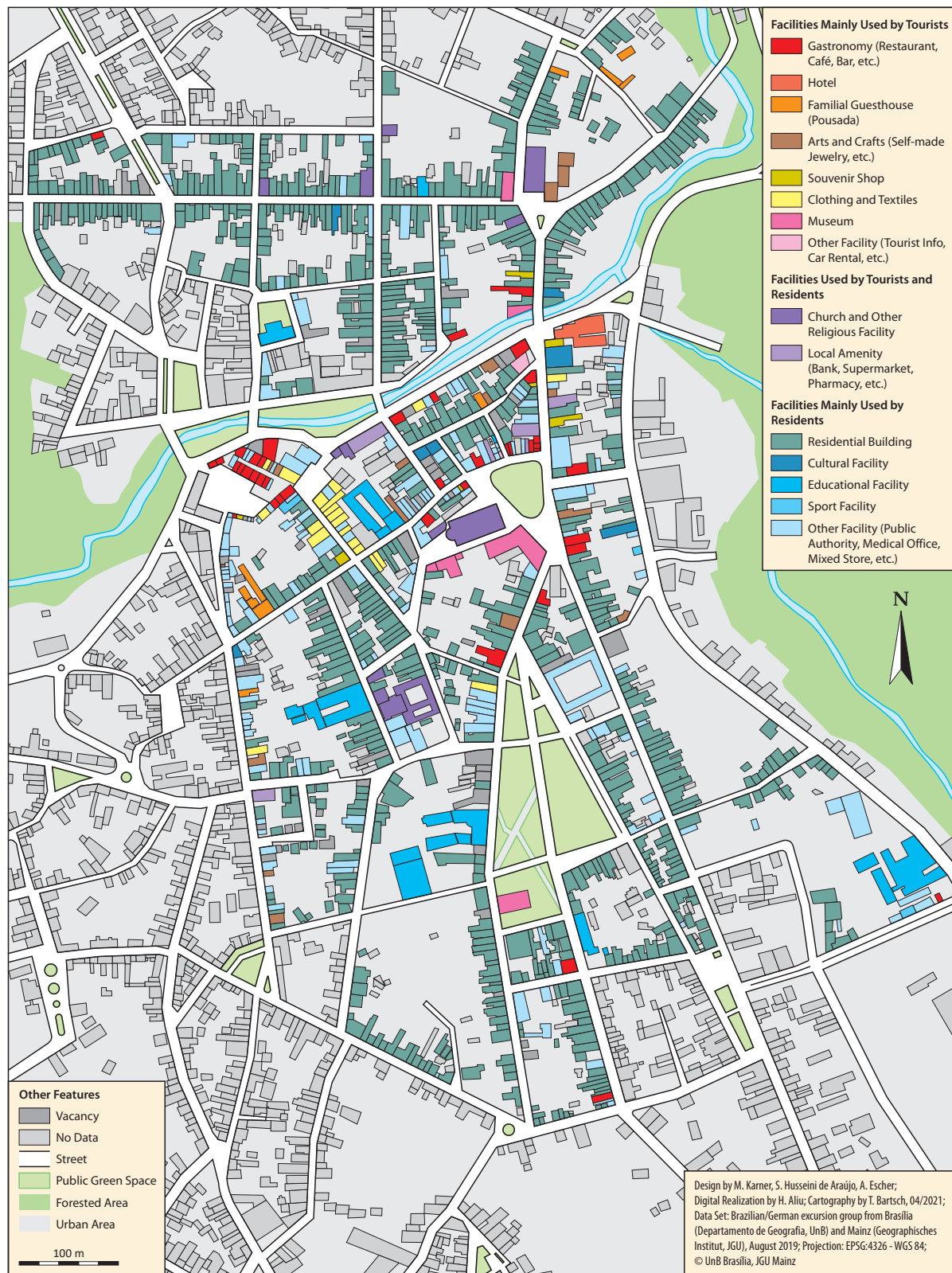


Fig. 2: Touristification in Cidade de Goiás (UNESCO World Heritage Site)



Fig. 3: The old town of Cidade de Goiás (photographs from the authors' archives): The old town of Cidade de Goiás, away from the alleyways with tourist infrastructure (top left), is characterized by extensive renovation of buildings (top right). There are only a few accommodation options and craft shops (bottom left). The old town is not very lively at night, except for temporary cultural events (bottom right).

Like in the case of Cidade de Goiás, patrimonialization, culturalization, and festivalization have also played a key role in the transformation of Pirenópolis from a decadent town to a tourist center in the state of Goiás. However, these sub-processes were not emphasized as much as the others by the interviewees, despite the fact that the list of annual festivals in Pirenópolis, for example, is even longer than that of Cidade de Goiás. For the inhabitants of the city counter-culturalization, adventurizing of landscape, and telenovelaization are at the forefront.

#### 4.2.1 Counter-culturalization

Especially in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, people who associated with alternative movements and eco-friendly lifestyles came to the Pirenópolis area in search of remote places. Elsewhere, such anti-mainstream movements were violently suppressed by

the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil until 1985. Several alternative communities emerged in the vicinity of Pirenópolis, including ecovillages (*ecovilas*), such as FraterUnidade, Terra Nostra, or Comunidade Omni, as well as eco-farms (*ecosítios*) and educational eco-centres, such as the Fazenda Vagafogo or the Ecocentro. On the one hand, the old town offered a market for handicrafts. On the other hand, visitors were invited to indulge in a variety of often exotic activities offered by the alternative communities for a fee. The alternative communities have changed dramatically over time and contributed in different ways to the touristification of the historic center (P8, P23, P24, P25), as the following examples show.

The Fazenda Vagafogo is considered the first alternative community in Pirenópolis. It was founded in 1978 by a married couple six kilometers from the city center. In 1992, about 30 percent of its land was converted into a 'Private Reserve of Natural Heritage' initiated by the owner. It was the first wild-



life sanctuary in the state of Goiás and is open to tourists today. The main attractions are hiking, tree climbing, and tasting a variety of homemade dishes and drinks served as part of a sumptuous brunch at the Fazenda Vagafofo (P24).

The FraterUnidade community is about seven kilometers from the old city. In the past, its mission focused on a sustainable lifestyle, spiritual practices, and self-discovery. This is still evident today from the existing temple that was once used for meditation. Members have also successfully rehabilitated the surrounding landscape and the *Cerrado* vegetation destroyed by gold mining and agriculture. A guest house for a maximum of eight people allowed visitors to experience the community's alternative lifestyle. It was characterized by subsistence farming, communal work, regulated daily routines, flat hierarchies, daily leisure activities (e.g., yoga, meditation), and shared wealth and finances (P25). Many community members have left over time due to a number of reasons, including younger generation's leaving to pursue higher education, changing social dynamics as a result of new people joining the community, and the death of a leader (P25). A few families still live in the area, but the eco-social and spiritual community life that once characterized FraterUnidade no longer exists.

Furthermore, the Terra Nostra community is located 35 kilometers from Pirenópolis. Members of this community introduced silversmithing to the region and taught the technique to locals. They used recycled silver from electronic equipment as raw material. Over time, some community members opened studios in the old town to sell the jewelry they made to tourists. Today, around 150 silver artisans are based in the old town of Pirenópolis (P11, P24, P25). The Terra Nostra community has also changed over time and is now a relatively loose group of several families, known as the FraterUnidade.

In interviews, former members of these communities confirmed that many of those who had founded and/or lived in the ecovillages as part of a counter-culture later became pioneers of tourism promoters when they moved into the city and opened shops or restaurants (P25). Today, many residents consider the high level of touristification and the displacement of local residents from the inner city (several interviewees referred to it as gentrification) as a major problem (e.g., P2, P11, P13, P14, P17, P19, P21, P25). Accordingly, social movements have emerged that try to resist gentrification and/or the spatial and cultural marginalization of the old local population. One example of such a (new) counter-cultural move-

ment is the cultural center 'Quintal da Aldeia'. As its founder said in an interview: "Our inspiration for the Quintal is to act as a 'de-gentrifying' movement bringing [the local] people back to protagonism of the city" (P25, transl. by the authors). Other forms of counter-culture (e.g., *negritude*, anti-racism) also exist in Pirenópolis (as they do in Cidade de Goiás, e.g., P6, P26).

#### 4.2.2 Adventurizing of landscapes

The natural heritage, with its relief, vegetation, and water resources, is the result of intense tectonic activity that has created numerous waterfalls; Pirenópolis's most popular tourist attraction alongside the old town. The 2008 marketing plan for Pirenópolis highlights nature as the unique selling point that distinguishes it from other cultural destinations in the country. The city is surrounded by many natural tourist attractions, waterfalls, parks, viewpoints, and eight protected areas (see Fig. 4, also P13, P22). Most of the sites are easily accessible by paved roads and are promoted with posters and flyers in the old town. NGOs and the municipality are said to regulate and control these sites in order to preserve, conserve, and maintain them. Municipal projects and laws prevent the encroachment of agriculture, cattle ranching, and mining, while other agencies help monitor the reserves. These protections provide a counterweight to the threat that the remnants of the Brazilian *Cerrado* face due to the lack of protection from the Brazilian government (SANTOS & CHAVES 2014: 115f.).

By creating protected areas, the authorities have encouraged the development of educational and eco-tourism, as proposed in the city's 2012 tourism master plan. The initiative to preserve the sites comes from the owners who also protect their eco-tourism attractions by limiting the number of visitors, distributing rubbish bags, and cleaning regularly. Environmental education is also provided through guided tours and with the help of informative displays. Tourists are given information about protected species and instructions on how to behave so as not to endanger wildlife. At the Vagafofo Wildlife Sanctuary, for example, visitors can book zip-lining adventures or hike through the reserve on designated trails with information boards. They can even find tree trunks designated as *Pau de Self Rústico* (rustic selfie stick) to take group pictures with the self-timer function in front of natural spectacles and, ideally, share them on social media to increase visibility and awareness.



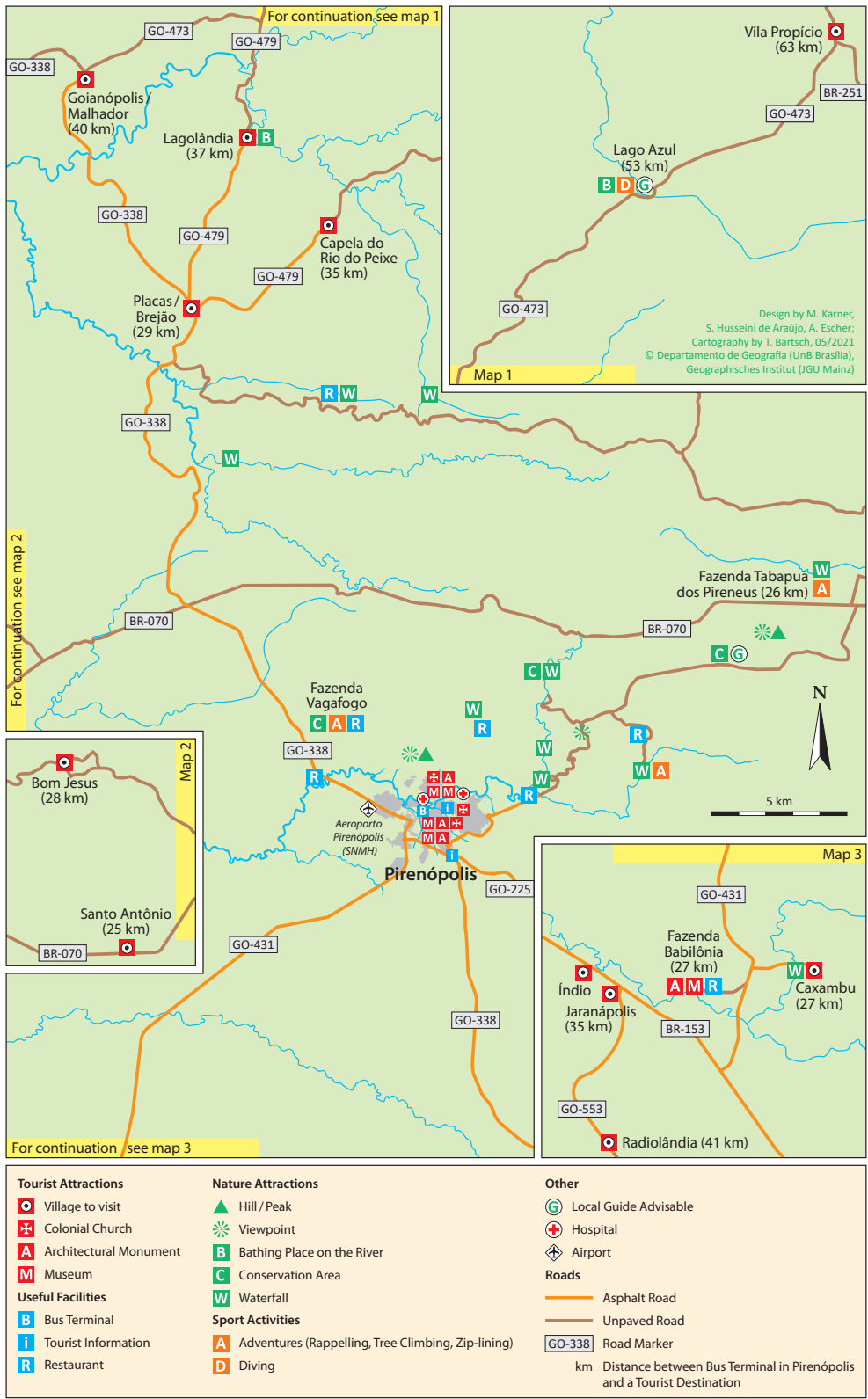


Fig. 4: Destinations of Landscape Tourism in the Pirenópolis Area

A well-known example of the adventurizing of landscapes is the Fazenda Babilônia, an educational farm and place where visitors are served food and drinks that is said to be produced using methods from colonial times. The colonial heritage is presented during guided tours of the mansion, which is a national heritage site. At the same time, information about the exploitation of enslaved people on cotton plantations is provided rather uncritically by descendants of the former owners.

Overall, Pirenópolis has developed into a recreational area mainly for the wealthy inhabitants of the metropolis of Brasília (56% of the tourist influx) and the surrounding cities (23% Goiás, 7% Anápolis, 5% other cities located in the interior of the state Goiás, 9% other cities) (BOANERGES & MACLOVIA 2011: 372). However, the ongoing touristification of the landscape threatens the natural environment. Although the city government has enacted laws to prevent large corporations from building hotels and leisure parks, illegal slash-and-burn clearing is carried out to build restaurants, rental houses or small resorts, leading to massive environmental problems and pollution (P23). According to interview partners, the government does not take enough action against this illegal environmental destruction (P14, P23).

#### 4.2.3 Telenovelaization

Residents and representatives attribute the increase in the number of tourists in Pirenópolis to several well-known telenovelas in Brazil: 'Estrela Guia' (2001), 'Araguaia' (2010-11) and 'Em Família' (2014), all broadcast by Rede Globo. The colonial center, the famous cultural attraction of the *Cavalhadas*, and the beautiful waterfalls serve as a backdrop for many scenes, and the alternative community FraterUnidade is also considered the inspiration for the telenovela called 'Estrela-Guia.' Central themes of the episodes include the division of labor, spiritual practices, arts and crafts, and community life. After the telenovela was aired, the alternative community became the destination for many tourists. Since then, Pirenópolis has experienced a boom in tourism: "Over time, tourism has grown. Two telenovelas were filmed here by Rede Globo, and then it was on television and suddenly became quite famous. That was about 15 years ago" (P11, transl. by the authors, see also BATISTA 2003).

The images shown in the telenovelas coincide with the photo spots identified through the analysis of Instagram hashtags. The church of Matriz

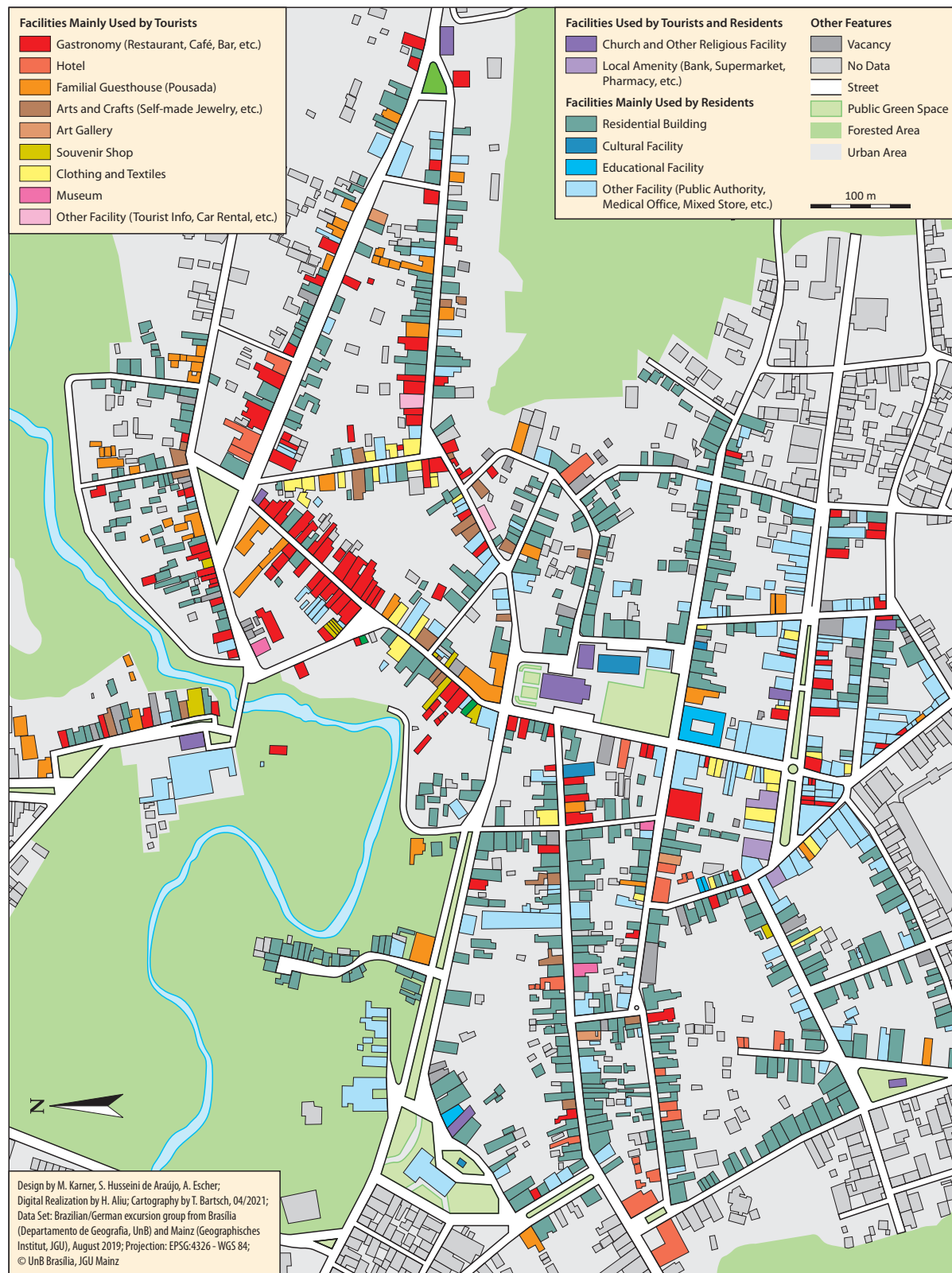
do Rosário is posted most often by visitors to Pirenópolis, who also post photographs of waterfalls. Visitors to Cidade de Goiás, on the other hand, post photos of the local churches and the bridges of the old town. Pictures of the surrounding landscape are missing, however, as the equally attractive surroundings of Cidade de Goiás are hardly developed or promoted for tourism.

#### 4.2.4 Spatial patterns of touristification in Pirenópolis and comparative remarks

In addition to the location of the city, the three highlighted sub-processes in Pirenópolis are also responsible for the higher level of touristification compared to Cidade de Goiás. The section of the street Rua do Rosario (see the street from north-east to south-west in Fig. 5) was declared a leisure street (Rua do Lazer) in May 1997 and is now a hub for high-priced restaurants and pubs with outdoor seating areas lining up along the traffic-calmed road (see Fig. 6). This northern part of the old town is also characterized by boutiques and ateliers: There are currently around 20 workshops that sell handmade silver jewelry in the old town (see also P5). Guest houses and hotels also dominate residential areas. In the area shown on the map (Fig. 5), there were 78 accommodations offered through the Airbnb platform at the time of mapping (21.-25.8.2019), either marked as guesthouses or residences. These findings are consistent with statistical data showing that there are significantly more officially registered employment and establishments related to the tourism sector in Pirenópolis than in Cidade de Goiás (see Tab. 1).

### 5 The concept of culture-touristification

This paper has introduced the concept of culture-touristification, which is the result of the interplay between cultural heritage and tourist-driven, culture-led processes aimed at urban regeneration. Based on two empirical case studies in Cidade de Goiás and Pirenópolis, two small cultural heritage towns in the Brazilian interior, we have shown how various processes, such as patrimonialization, culturalization, festivalization, adventurizing of landscapes, telenovelaization, and counter-culturalization, have contributed to their urban transformation, co-constituting what we call culture-touristification. In essence, the paper argues that culture-touristification is the driving force behind the touristic trans-



**Fig. 5: Touristification in Pirenópolis (IPHAN National Heritage Site)**





Fig. 6: The old town of Pirenópolis (photographs from the authors' archives): Pirenópolis is a lively place both day and night (top left). One of the main attractions is the Rua do Lazer (leisure street), with its many high-priced restaurants and indoor and outdoor seating areas (top right). Pousadas offer accommodation within walking distance (bottom left) of the many boutiques (bottom right).

formation of small and medium-sized colonial towns in the Brazilian interior.

Culture-touristification begins with the identification of a cultural heritage site. The decline of old towns due to economic and political factors in the mid-19th century (Pirenópolis) or the beginning of the 20th century (Cidade de Goiás) is a significant factor in the subsequent appreciation of material and immaterial cultural heritage. Once tourist visits begin, the various processes of culture-touristification begin to establish themselves. In particular, the process of patrimonialization leads to the restoration and musealization of places of cultural-historical interest. The original functions of religious, educational, and governmental buildings are often maintained or showcased to establish a sense of national identity and to promote tourism. Tourists are particularly attracted to the culturalization of notable figures, such as writers, which is influenced by media representations like telenovelas and Instagram,

as well as specific festivals. In general, colonial old towns are seen as 'authentic' and fascinating locations. They stand in contrast with functional, car-oriented, postmodern cities, such as Brasília or Goiânia. At the same time, the range of restaurants, bars, and boutiques can be compared to the upscale leisure zones of metropolises (at least in the case of Pirenópolis), creating a nightlife that provides a stage for self-expression. The production of authenticity and fascination also applies to landscapes. On the one hand, they are perceived as 'authentic' and 'original', but on the other, they are designed to meet the needs of visitors. Finally, counter-cultures of various kinds can also play an important role in urban transformations, as the examples of Cidade de Goiás and Pirenópolis show.

However, the extent of culture-touristification and the intensity of the individual processes are influenced by various framework conditions, such as alternative sources of income for the cities and the



involvement of different actors in cultural tourism, including their interests, perceptions, and practices. Proximity to a source market is a crucial factor, as are transportation and infrastructure. Pirenópolis has no difficulty attracting tourists due to its proximity to Brasília and Goiânia, as well as its accessibility through relatively good roads. On the other hand, Cidade de Goiás is further away from major urban centers, and the quality of the roads leading there is poor in parts.

Culture-touristification is a theoretical approach that takes into account as many formative processes and their interconnections as possible in order to describe, analyze, and plan tourist sites. It is important to note that this list of sub-processes is open-ended, and their specific articulations, manifestations, and effects will vary in different contexts. These processes may also be applicable to other historic towns and potentially to other deprived areas and marginalized cities.

In light of these findings, this paper contributes to existing academic discussions on cultural heritage, touristification, and urban regeneration (as outlined in section 2) in several ways. Firstly, it addresses neglected urban areas, in particular the historic centers of small and medium-sized towns, which depend primarily on regional and, to a lesser extent, national tourism. The paper has shown that cultural heritage and patrimonialization/heritagization alone are not sufficient to promote tourism in these cities. While numerous studies have shown that UNESCO designation in larger cities often leads to significant touristification with negative effects, such as overtourism and displacement of residents (e.g. CÁCERES-SEGUEL 2024, TRIVI et al. 2024, VALVERDE et al. 2022), our case study in Cidade de Goiás revealed that receiving a UNESCO designation does not automatically ensure long-term touristic attractiveness. Instead, we found that additional culture-led initiatives were implemented to increase touristic interest in the area.

Moreover, the idea of culture-touristification contributes to the ongoing conceptual debates on touristification. Some scholars have argued that, in recent years, the term 'touristification' has been used to describe many different things, such as the touristification of poets, musicians, or artists (BHANDARI 2008), and is often used interchangeably with 'gentrification' (OJEDA & KIEFFER 2020). OJEDA and KIEFFER (2020) argue that this can make the concept of touristification too vague or meaningless. In contrast, our proposed concept of culture-touristification is supported by extensive empirical data and provides a new and expanded meaning. It implies

that the various cultural drivers of touristic demand (such as literature, landscape aesthetics, and spiritual associations) are relevant to the transformation of tourist destinations. Future research could explore the applicability of this concept in other geographical contexts, in and beyond small and medium-sized colonial cities in the Brazilian interior.

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### Appendix

Tab. A1: Overview of the interviews quoted in this paper

Quoted interviews in Cidade de Goiás, hold between 18.-20.08.2019		Quoted interviews in Pirenópolis, hold between 21.-25.08.2019	
Code	Function and additional information	Code	Function and additional information
G4	Retired resident	P1	Jewelry store owner, co-founder of an alternative community
G5	Resident	P2	Restaurant owner
G6	Resident	P4	Resident
G7	Retired resident	P5	Artist, charity organization coordinator, resident
G8	Retired resident		
G9	Coordinator of the CEAM, artist, activist	P7	Bar Owner
G10	Food store owner	P8	Tourist information center employee
G13	Tourist guide	P11	Pizzeria owner, German immigrant, resident
G14	Restaurant owner	P13	Guesthouse owner
G16	Clothing store employee	P14	Restaurant owner
G17	Clothing store owner	P17	Resident
G18	Retired resident	P19	Resident
G19	Resident	P21	Hotel receptionist
G20	Resident	P22	Bar worker
G26	Resident	P23	A couple, co-founders of an alternative community
G27	Resident		
G28	Resident	P24	Owner of an eco-farm and educational center
G32	Resident	P25	Cultural center coordinator
G36	Guesthouse owner	P26	Artist
G38	Retired resident		