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ARTICLE

Rethinking agritourism through Strategic Action Fields: evidence from Mantiqueira Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil

Repensando o agroturismo por meio dos Campos de Ação Estratégica: evidências da Mantiqueira Paulista, São Paulo, Brasil

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Abstract: With the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with pre-existing social movements, a gradual transformation in the way products and services are consumed was observed. Rural cities, close to metropolises, experienced the temporary or permanent migration of individuals, who started to participate in local agricultural activities. In Brazil the city of São Bento do Sapucaí (SP) registered an increase in per capita income, population, and the emergence of small and medium-sized companies. Based on questions related to new forms of consumption, incorporation of tourism activities, innovations and diversifications in rural areas, this study investigates how the process of structuring and maintaining farm tourism occurs from the perspective of farmers. The article applies the Strategic Action Fields Theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), which provides the conception of the logic of an ecosystem composed of a set of social orders. This theoretical lens is complemented by the Course of Action concept (Bertaux, 2014) to capture the action taken by the farmers intending to change social conditions. The empirical approach adopts the Life Narratives Method (Bertaux, 2020) to provide an understanding of the individual's social microenvironment. The research proposes a framework for the structuring and maintaining process in farms that incorporate tourism, indicating that the actors' social logic conditions their strategic actions and shape diversifications in the properties.

Keywords: farm tourism, Mantiqueira, strategic action fields, course of action, life narratives.

Resumo: Com a pandemia por Covid-19, somada a movimentos sociais pré-existentes, observou-se a gradual transformação na forma de consumir produtos e serviços. Municípios rurais, próximos a metrópoles, observaram a migração momentânea ou permanente de indivíduos que passaram a participar de atividades agropecuárias locais. O município de São Bento do Sapucaí (SP), registrou o aumento da renda per capita, populacional e o surgimento de pequenas e médias empresas. A partir de questionamentos relacionados a novas formas de consumo, incorporação de atividades turísticas, inovações e diversificações em zonas rurais, investiga-se como ocorre o processo de estruturação e manutenção do turismo em propriedades agrícolas a partir da perspectiva dos agroprodutores. O artigo fundamenta-se na teoria de Campos de Ação Estratégica (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), que fornece a concepção da lógica de um ecossistema composto por um conjunto de ordens sociais. Agrega-se à teoria o conceito de Curso de Ação (Bertaux, 2014) para o entendimento da ação conduzida pelo indivíduo intencionando uma mudança de condição social. A vertente empírica adota o método Narrativas de Vida (Bertaux, 2020) para o entendimento do microambiente social do indivíduo. O artigo propõe um framework do processo de estruturação e manutenção de propriedades agrícolas que incorporam o turismo, indicando que a lógica social dos atores condiciona suas ações estratégicas, definindo as diversificações nas propriedades.

Palavras-chave: agroturismo, Mantiqueira, campos de ação estratégica, curso de ação, narrativas de vida.

1 Introduction

Market turbulences of various degrees can destabilize economies, leading to significant transformations (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, 2012). The Covid-19 pandemic in the early 2020s exemplifies this, as it has brought about global shifts by its consequences. Added with pre-existing

social movements advocating for quality of life and sustainability, a gradual transformation in the way products and services are consumed has been noticed.

During this period, isolation requirements fueled intense demand for open spaces, nature interaction, and food security. Rural areas near metropolitan regions saw temporary or permanent migration of individuals who, as tourists or new residents, began engaging in local agricultural routines (Britto, 2021; Hardesty & Leff, 2020; Popescu, 2021). This context highlights the growing value of agritourism, a branch of rural tourism defined as "[...] activities within the property that provide supplementary occupations to agricultural activities, which remain part of the property's daily routine [...]" (Campanhola & Silva, 2000, p. 148).

São Bento do Sapucaí, geographic focus of this study, a town distant 185 km from São Paulo, Brasil and primarily focused on agriculture, experienced an 89.5% rise in per capita income from 2019 to 2022, along with a population increase (from 10,893 in 2020 to 11,674 in 2022) and the growth of small to medium-sized enterprises (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022).

Research shows that from the perspective of local entrepreneurs and authorities, tourists and newcomers brought new demands related to food consumption, biosafety, and technology (Carvalho & Quintella, 2020; Pato, 2020). Additionally, issues like accommodation shortages, limited infrastructure, and a lack of comprehensive destination development plans to showcase regional attractions have been noted (Mengue, 2020).

With rural tourism's growth predating the Covid-19 pandemic, sustainability issues have been well-debated in literature. Topics include infrastructure strain due to visitor and vehicle influx, legal challenges, environmental degradation, increased carbon emissions, workforce education and labor skills, concerns over the erosion of rural identity and the activity itself underscore the need for sustainable sectoral structuring (Brasil, 2010; Gössling et al., 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Martins & Madureira, 2019; Oliveira, 2020; Romagosa, 2020).

Given this context, questions emerged for the authors of this research related to new forms of tourism consumption, the integration and maintenance of tourism activities on farms, actors' relationships, innovations in rural areas, and how small producers adapt to new demands and promote diversification in their properties. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the following question: According to farmers, how does the process of structuring and maintaining tourism on farms occur?

The literature underscores, on the one hand, the importance of local demand (Mastronardi et al., 2020; Hardesty & Leff, 2020; Palau-Saumell et al. 2021; Gössling, et al., 2021; Oleksenko et al., 2021), public policy formation (Roman & Grudzién, 2021; Chin & Dato Musa, 2021) and collaborative networks among actors in developing rural business and innovation (Stanovčić et al., 2018; Wojcieszak, 2019; Stefan et al., 2021). Additionally, research when analyzing agriproducers, favored the analysis of behavioral profiles of entrepreneurs or through connection with macroeconomic analysis (Dickes et al., 2020; Khazami et al., 2020; Canovi, 2019; Doh et al., 2017).

Conversely, the literature identifies studies with the use of Granovetter's Network Theory (Granovetter, 1985) (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020; Guilarducci & Fratucci, 2020; Gabriel-Campos et al., 2021; Bastarz & Souza, 2023), Bourdieu's (1992) concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Nieddu & Andueza, 2010; Taveira, 2016; Tomay & Berger, 2024), Innovation Ecosystems Theory (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Madanaguli et al., 2022; Vu Dinh et al., 2023) and Muchnik et al. (2008) e Boucher (2011) Local Agri-Food Systems Theory (SIAL) (Ambrosini et al., 2008; Balestro & França, 2012; Fuini, 2013). Although these theories offer valuable contributions to understanding territorial ties, social relations, and cultural dispositions in agritourism, they present limitations by underestimating the processual dimension of conflicts, power struggles, and institutional changes that can shape the implementation and maintenance of tourism on farms.

This article employs the Strategic Action Fields (SAF) Theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, 2012), which describes an ecosystem logic of how social orders are structured and where actors compete for advantages. The framework highlights a logic of action in which fields are interdependent (even if geographically distant), embedded in complex webs of other fields and interact through a consumption-based dynamic. The SAF Theory enables a dynamic reading of the social order, where actors build coalitions, dispute positions, negotiate legitimacy, and respond to exogenous shocks using their resources. This approach becomes particularly relevant in contexts marked by transformations, the entrance of new actors into the field, and innovations undertaken by farmers, as seen in agritourism in regions undergoing economic and social reconfiguration.

This article seeks to promote theoretical innovation by enriching the SAF Theory with the concept of Course of Action (Bertaux, 2014), emphasizing the agency of individuals intending to alter their social conditions.

Meanwhile, the empirical approach applies the Life Narratives Method (Bertaux, 2020) to understand the individual's social microenvironment.

Accordingly, the objective of this paper is to analyze agritourism (social situation) from the agriproducer entrepreneur (actor) perspective, to explore sequences of actions that involve historical background, resource use, engagement, and related themes, positing that markets develop from individual strategic action, social relations, and their structural interactions.

This introductory section outlines the research context, presenting the problem, question and objective, scope, justification, and the study structure. Section 2 introduces the theoretical basis, Section 3 describes the methodology, Section 4 presents and discusses the data, and Section 5 concludes with findings and suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Agritourism

Souza and Dolci (2019, p. 28) note "[...] a terminological confusion, with overlapping typologies, making it difficult to clearly define what is considered rural tourism" and other tourism types within Brazil's rural areas. Camarano & Abramovay (1999) argue that this confusion arises from the empirical growth of tourism in diverse rural regions, reflecting regional characteristics that blur into various concepts, manifestations, and definitions.

This study focuses on agritourism, a subset of rural tourism. Roman & Grudzién (2021, p. 5) explain that the primary distinctions between rural tourism and agritourism "[...] are essentially seen in the attractions offered and the accommodation conditions. In agritourism, guest rooms are located on an active farm". The authors compile the main definitions of agritourism in literature (2021, p. 6), which generally describes properties with active agricultural production that combine farming routines with leisure attractions in a rural setting.

This article adopts the Ministry of Tourism (MTur) definition stating (Brasil, 2010, p. 20):

> [The] activities within the property that generate complementary occupations to agricultural activities, remaining part of the property's daily routine, to a greater or lesser extent, are part of a process of adding services to agricultural products and non-material goods existing on rural properties (landscapes, fresh air, etc.), based on farming families' free time, occasionally hiring external labor (Campanhola & Silva, 2000, p. 148).

This definition emphasizes the tourist's involvement in the rural production process, encompassing "[...] the production of agricultural goods—sweets, jams, bread, coffee, cheese, wines, spirits—and experiencing daily rural life through planting, harvesting, and animal handling while absorbing the knowledge and practices of the countryside" (Brasil, 2010, p. 20).

Agritourism supports income generation, job creation, rural areas activation, nature conservation, and spaces linked to relaxation, recreation, and education for urban and rural populations alike. Sznajder et al. (2009, p. 9) classify these functions into three categories: psychosocial, economic, and spatial/environmental functions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Functions of Agritourism

Psychosocial	Economic	Spatial/Environmental
– Gaining new skills.	– Extension of accommodations facilities.	– Enhanced environments and nature protection.
– Meeting new people.	– Additional workplaces.	– The development of local infrastructure.
– Reviving rural traditions.	– Revenue source expansion.	– Improved value of houses.
– Education.	– Overcoming economic recession.	– Resource utilization.
	– Promotion of socio-economic development.	– Stopping mass migration from rural areas.

Source: Sznajder et al. (2009, p. 9).

2.2. Strategic Action Fields (SAF) Theory

Fligstein & McAdam (2010, 2012) developed the Strategic Action Fields (SAF) Theory on the understanding that collective strategic action is central to research on social movements and organizations. They argue that "each is fundamentally concerned with the efforts of collective actors to vie for strategic advantage in and through interactions with other groups in what can be seen as meso-level social orders" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, p. 4). The authors propose "[...] a general theory of social change and stability rooted in a view of social life as dominated by a complex web of strategic action fields" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, p. 4).

The theory rests on the goal of "[...] explaining the underlying structure and sources of change and stability in modern society's institutional life" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, p. 5). Key components of the theory include: a) strategic action fields; b) incumbents, challengers, and governance units; c) social skill; d) the broader field environment; e) exogenous shocks, field ruptures, and contention; and f) settlement (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, 2012).

Strategic Action Fields are meso-level social orders with flexible boundaries. The dynamics of stability and change within action fields reflect varying power relations within and between fields. Fields consist of actors with differing levels of power (incumbents and challengers), in interaction competing for advantages and include the presence of governance units and the State (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010).

The authors state that fields are embedded in complex webs of other fields where three characteristics can describe their nature: distance and proximity, vertical and horizontal relationships, and state or non-state fields Fligstein & McAdam (2010, p. 16). Fligstein & McAdam (2010, p. 8) note that action fields can undergo "three states: disorganized or emerging, organized and stable but changing, and organized and unstable, open to transformation".

Field interdependence fuels continuous changes, often due to exogenous shocks and disturbances. According to the authors and based on the theory elements represented by e) and f), the degree of change threat is "[...] determined by the highly contingent mobilization process [...]", showing the capacity for social construction and strategic agency foundational to the theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, p. 20).

It is central to the theory, the authors idea about social action and social skill. Fligstein & McAdam (2012) points out that social action occurs within meso-level social orders that guide what, when, and how people act, based on existing rules and resources. They argue that social action is essential for the strategic action field reproduction, and it requires individuals to interact to get what they need, communicate their identities, and coordinate with others to achieve desired goals (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). The authors define social skill as the human "ability to empathetically understand situations and, what others need and want and to figure out how to use this information to get what is wanted" Fligstein & McAdam (2012, p. 178).

However, the region studied is marked by the presence of entrepreneurs, coming from metropolises such as the city of São Paulo, stablishing farms and incorporating tourism in their daily routines. Gartner (1988) and Thornton (1999) argue that new business development should be studied focusing on the behaviors and activities of people trying to create businesses, where according to Aldrich (2005) is marked by a lack of a fixed sequence of activities and a long gestation period before the start of intensive activities by nascent entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the authors of this research, in accordance with Bertaux (2014), argue that the understanding of the individual's free action, with the projection towards the future, thought, anticipated, and translated into strategies aiming for a change in social condition (becoming an agriproducer), mark their identity in the field as well as in farming productions, being crucial to answer the question of this research. Accordingly, the Course of Action concept (Bertaux, 2014) is added to the SAF Theory to allow the analysis of the microsociological aspects that influence the actors in their establishment in the field.

2.3. Course of Action

Bertaux (2014) discusses the course of action positing that free action occurs at the actor's initiative, using his relative autonomy and freedom to engage in a long-term project, highlighting the timeline from beginning to end. According to the author, human action occurs:

> [...] in durée, perhaps over the course of years; even before being translated into acts, it is born from a project, a projection towards the future; it was thought out, reflected upon, anticipated, translated into strategy(ies). As it develops, it encounters unforeseen obstacles that modify its course; it is always an adventure in some way. And when it ends, it continues to live off its consequences: our remarkable acts follow us until our death. (Bertaux, 2014, p.255)

Bertaux (2014, p. 255) defines the course of action as the "ordered sequence of actions that the same person executes to, for example, achieve one of their projects (goal-oriented rational action) or defend a deeply held conviction". He emphasizes that action occurs in a specific context as individuals interact with other "who are distinctly equipped with resources and may be organized into institutions and networks" (Bertaux, 2014, p. 256).

Thus, the course of action assumes that individuals, using their resources (personal, subjective, and power), initiate actions intended to change social conditions. The sum of individual courses of action, through the engagement of other actors, can contribute to micro-level social change, generating meso and macro-level effects and participating in socio-historical construction (Bertaux, 2014).

3 Methodology

To achieve the proposed objectives, the Life Narratives Method by Daniel Bertaux (2020, p. 35) was selected. This method presupposes limited knowledge about society, where "each

person holds deep knowledge of the professional world they have worked in for many years and/or the social microenvironment where they have lived". Bertaux classifies this method as ethnosociological, combining ethnographic and sociological approaches to examine issues during the object construction phase. Bertaux (2020, p. 1) points that the life narrative is the result "[...] of a particular form of interview, the 'narrative interview', a moment in which the actor tells all or only part of his/her lived experience, placing emphasis on an aspect of social life".

The Life Narratives Method is in line with the framework proposed by Fligstein & McAdam (2012) when the authors state that "the framework can be explored through a wide variety of research techniques" and where, for historically oriented scholars, the SAF "(...) theory can be seen as a set of orienting concepts that analysts can use to make sense of actions in a particular strategic action field". (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 185)

This study follows the steps shown in Figure 1.

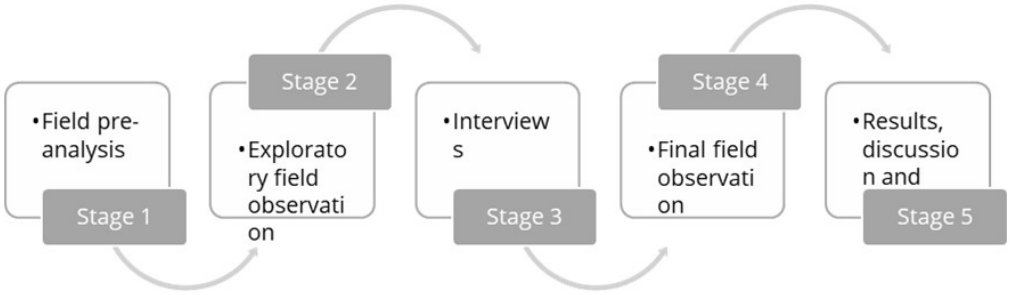

Figure 1: Research Stages
Source: The authors, adapted from Bertaux (2020).

Stage 1 involves analyzing available regional data from secondary sources. In **stage 2**, exploratory field observations were conducted in São Bento do Sapucaí in July 2022, visiting locations identified in stage 1. In **stage 3**, producer's interviews began. In **stage 4** entailed final field observations, following the narratives collection, through a trip in April 2023, to gather new insights and refine reflections on the narratives. Finally, in **Stage 5**, the narrative data are presented, and the results are discussed.

Narrative interviews (open-ended) were used for data collection, where the researcher posed an initial question. If further clarification on a point was needed during the narrative, filter questions were used to clarify the context. Interviews started with the question: **"Tell me about the moment you incorporated tourism into your farm".**

Narratives were collected remotely from January to March 2023, averaging two hours per interviewee on GoogleMeet®, allowing recording and transcription.

The participants were selected based on the following criteria: a) farms that adopt tourism according to the definition by Campanhola & Silva (2000, p. 148), as recommended by MTur (Brasil, 2010); b) located in São Bento do Sapucaí or surrounding areas; c) key actor, aged 18 or older.

A total of five rural entrepreneurs were interviewed, including two engaged in monoculture farming (olive and mushroom production) and three operating diversified polyculture systems (grapevines, olives, vegetables, and mixed crops with livestock).

The analysis of the narratives was developed simultaneously with the interviews, in line with Bertaux (202) who indicated the importance of transcription, rereading and listening as a way of refining the researcher and forming the "[...] progressive development in the researcher's mind of a reproduction of a mental model of what is happening within the social world studied" (Bertaux, 2020, p. 54). The author states that "[...] the moment of comparative analysis begins as soon as the second narrative interview is collected", thus highlighting the importance of comparisons between narratives becoming useful, cumulative, and showing recurrences (Bertaux, 2020, p. 112).

To ensure veracity, Bertaux identifies that if a coherent piece of a fragment of society is delimited in advance and, the more it is structured by social relations, such as a professional environment (agriproducers that adopt tourism), the narratives overlap, consolidate, and confirm each other, indicating the saturation phase. After five interviews, the authors realized that they were no longer facing new evidences, reaching saturation point.

3.1. Context of São Bento do Sapucaí Region

São Bento do Sapucaí is a Brazilian city located in the state of São Paulo. Founded in 1720, São Bento do Sapucaí is the region's oldest settlement. Initial colonization was driven by "bandeirantismo" (a movement of explorers in Brazil) and mining, as the area was thought to have gold reserves. Settlers, along with enslaved, established in ethnic enclaves. Catholicism and folklore later shaped the town's history. In 1914, the railway to Campos do Jordão, a neighboring town developed primarily for tuberculosis treatment and agricultural transport, isolated São Bento do Sapucaí, which had been the region's most influential town (São Bento do Sapucaí, 2022).

According to Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2022, São Bento do Sapucaí recorded 11,684 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022). Covering a total area of 279 km^2, the city has a population density of 41.37 inhabitants per km^2. Located 185 km from São Paulo, São Bento do Sapucaí is divided into the Urban Macrozone (city center) and the Rural Macrozone (neighboring districts, generally rural with smaller centers).

The city stands out for its agricultural vocation, sustained mainly by family farming. The farms are dedicated to permaculture, fungiculture, viticulture, olive growing, in addition to the cultivation of wild fruits, berries, bananas, portuguese chestnuts, hops, vegetables and legumes (São Bento do Sapucaí, 2022).

Lifestock also plays an important role in the local economy. Goat farming is one of the region's characteristic activities, complemented by cattle farming, with emphasis on the breeding of dutch cattle and the production of type B milk and its derivatives (São Bento do Sapucaí, 2022).

Agriculture and lifestock were responsible for 17.2% of the city's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020. In 2022, companies dedicated to agriculture, livestock and related services, concentrated 898 establishments, including micro and small businesses, representing 36% of active businesses and employing 175 formal workers (Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas, 2022).

The city offers cultural features like museums, tributes to famous citizens, local arts and crafts, churches, preserved colonial houses, and religious and folk events. Complementing these are natural attractions (waterfalls, rock formations, sports trails, hang-gliding, and paragliding sites), gastronomic experiences (bars and restaurants), and tourism support services (agencies and transport), forming the regional tourism offering.

Nearby cities with tourism potential include Campos de Jordão (40 km), Santo Antônio do Pinhal (36 km), Gonçalves (22 km), and São Paulo (185 km).

4 Results and Discussion

4.1. Evidence from field observation

In stage 1, marked by the analysis of data available about the region in secondary databases, when carrying out previous online research, it was noticed that the city of São Bento do Sapucaí concentrates agricultural producers with the incorporation of tourism in the properties and a variety of heritage elements in the composition of the tourist package, with relevance for this research.

The Field Observation (Stage 2), which took place in July 2022, in the city of São Bento do Sapucaí (SP), provided the initial clues to build an overall view of the region, in agreement with Bertaux (2020, p. 19), who pointed out that "the objective of field research is to describe a phenomenon and then understand its internal functioning".

During the exploratory observation, the researchers decided to stay in a chalet available by a rental platform, as well as not use their own vehicle, to expand the experiences with local actors. Five agriproducers were previously mapped in São Bento do Sapucaí and two in Santo Antônio do Pinhal with the incorporation of tourism on the properties. Of these, six were visited by the authors.

Among the visited farmers, two had their products available in the city's local markets, while one also sold products from other producers on his property. Of these, two made connections with other producers in the region while conducting guided tours on the crops. On the properties visited, it was noted a diversification of products, in addition to tourism, related to jams, chutneys, vinegars, mead, cachaça, peppers, breads and chestnut beers.

The observation included exchange with actors who have indirect ties with the farmers, as a way of ensuring the veracity of the narratives and avoiding the construction of an analytical model exclusively "from above", based only on the producers' statements as proposed by Bertaux (2020). These actors were a local restaurant owner, three taxi drivers, a tourist spot attendant, an owner of rental chalets who also sells typical artisanal sweets and an owner of rental chalets. The observation and reports were collected in the field diary and, contributed to understand the local dynamics, suggesting that tourism is a recent activity in the town, the resistance of residents to tourism activity, the small articulation between actors, price increases and migration during and after the pandemic period, the influence of neighboring cities that are more consolidated in the sector, and finally, the possible shortage of labor. Table 2 presents the main statements of the field observation.

4.2. Who are the producers

Five farmers, aged between 41 and 72, participated in this study (stage 3), according to the sociodemographic profile consolidated in Table 3.

Regarding schooling, it is observed that all interviewees have higher education, however, only one interviewee has an academic background in an area related to agriculture. Four interviewees began farming close to or after retirement from positions in their training areas. One interviewee transitioned from his/her career to farming soon after the birth of his children. The interviewees had no prior experience in agriculture but had historical and emotional ties with the city or the chosen cultivation. The producers began farming between 2009 and 2015 and incorporated tourism activities from 2012 onwards. Tourism activities began with visits to the farms and were later diversified into gastronomy, social events, and accommodation on the properties, thus maintaining the variation of cases within the situation category, as recommended by Bertaux (2020). Figure 2 presents the producers' timeline, indicating the dates when cultivation began, and tourism was introduced on the farms.

Table 2: Field observation

ELEMENTS	STATEMENTS
Tourism activity	We know that it's a foreigner when it kicks up dust or runs [in traffic]. You can see the sign, which is from the capital. **Taxi driver**
	Tourism in the city is not ten years old. The city's residents didn't like the arrival of outsiders. **Taxi driver**
Articulation between actors	I sell my sweets for 25 reais. If I leave them in these places, they'll sell them for 70 reais and won't even say they're mine. **Sweet confectioner chef**
	Oh, I always bring passengers, but I don't know them [the local producer farm]. **Taxi driver**
Price increase / migration	When I bought here, 20 years ago, I paid 0.25 cents [of a real] per square meter. Nearby, now you can find [land] for sale. The square meter is now [2022] going for around 160 reais. **Owner of rental chalets**
	There, in [name of the neighborhood] is where the outsiders [new residents from the capital] live. **Taxi driver**
Labor shortage	I have no one to pass on the candy recipes now. The younger ones are not interested. **Sweet confectioner chef**
	There are few options for registered jobs here. **Tourist attendant**
Neighboring cities	Most visitors are from São Paulo and, later, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro to a lesser extent. Most stay in the surrounding areas, Gonçalves-MG, Santo Antônio do Pinhal-SP and Paraisópolis-MG. These are the most sought after by tourists. **Waiter**

Source: The authors (2025).

Table 3: Farmers sociodemographic profile

	GENDER	AGE	SCHOOLING	MAIN CROP	TYPE OF PROPERTY	BEGINING OF CULTIVACION	TOURISM INTRODUCTION
F1	Male	72	Bachelor	Oliviculture	Monoculture	2011	2020
F2	Female	56	Graduate school	Fungiculture	Monoculture	2015	2019
F3	Male	66	Master	Vitiviniculture	Polyculture	2010	2020
F4	Female	64	PhD	Oliviculture	Polyculture	2009	2018
F5	Female	41	Graduate school	Vegetables	Polyculture	2017	2019

Source: The authors (2025).

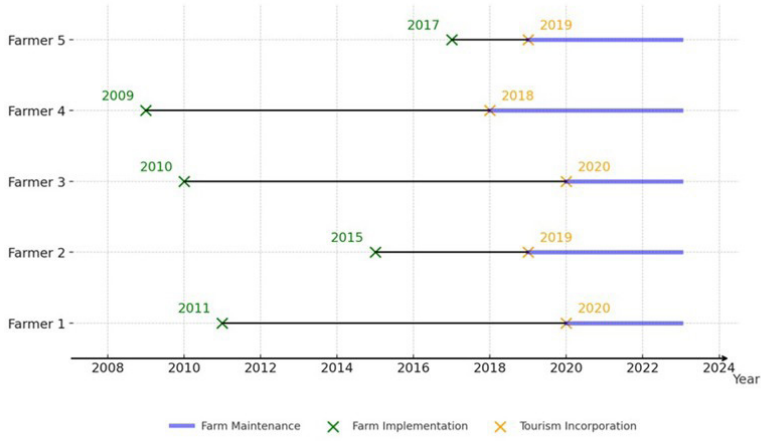

Figure 2: Farmers timeline

Source: The authors (2025).

Interviewees F1, F3, and F4 began their activities earlier, between 2008 and 2011. They were followed by F2 and F5 around five years later. However, all farmers introduced tourism at very similar times, suggesting recognition of the potential of the region's economy and even a close follow-up to the development of their predecessor farms.

All interviewees recognize the importance of tourism as a source of additional income and promotion of their products. The interviewees carry out the management activities of their properties with their spouses and, occasionally, with their children, configuring family properties. The historiogram presented in Table 4 contextualizes and summarizes the life of the participants, for greater depth and understanding of the stories told.

Table 4: Interviewees histogram

F1	Producer dedicated to olive growing in a monoculture farming area. Started planting on the property after retiring from the corporate market. Performs crop management activities on the farm with family support. Defines himself as an enthusiast of the sector, seeking to maintain the quality of the fruit, resulting in traditional products (minimal chemical additives). Understand tourism as a source of revenue to support operational costs and promote the product.
F2	Mushroom farming entrepreneur. Conducts her activities with spouse support and local labor. Through a combination of her passion for sports and food, she chose the city to host the mushroom cultivation. Her interest in mushroom farming arose during an international labor experience, where she had the opportunity to gain knowledge and begin research in the field. She expresses concern for the local community, food security, and innovation.
F3	Viticulture entrepreneur in a polyculture property. Acquired a property with portuguese chestnut production and later introduced viticulture, which became the main activity. Manages the family property with the family and a few employees. Views product diversification and the incorporation of tourism activities on the farm to generate revenue and ensure the financial viability of the main crop.
F4	Olive cultivation entrepreneur in a polyculture property (including cattle, coffee, and exotic/tropical fruits). Demonstrates concern for the local community, environmental conservation, and crop diversification. She is the first producer within the studied geographic area. Manages the farm with family support. Understands tourism as an essential factor for property development and market penetration.
F5	Agroforestry entrepreneur in a polyculture property (vegetables, legumes, roots, fruits and fruit and vegetable processing), along with tourism services (farm visits, lodging, and educational activities). Manages the property with spouse support. Highlights the importance of engaging residents and emphasizes the relevance of sustainable land management. Views tourism as a source of revenue to support operational costs and promote the product.

Source: The authors (2025).

The actions aimed at social change by the actors, aiming to establish properties, are illustrated in Table 5, which identifies the main elements that can occur in isolation or together for each producer, with the respective reports.

4.3. Recurrence of Narratives

To understand the underlying themes in the producers' narratives, oriented by the SAF Theory key components, the methodological stages and the emerging statements from the five participants were organized into five meaning units: a) The State, governance units, and research dedicated to the crops; b) Investment, resources, and diversification; c) History, culture, and influence from other fields; d) Exogenous and endogenous shocks and changes; and e) Tourism.

Each of these meaning units is detailed in the following sections.

Table 5: Social change elements

ELEMENTS	STATEMENTS
Historical-affective relations with the city / type of crop	My wife's family used to grow olives in Portugal. **F1**
	As a child, I used to go to the summer camp here. That's when I fell in love with the city. **F3**
	São Bento was the first city my husband took me to when we were still dating. **F5**
Close relationships	My daughter was already going to school, and we were working a lot. I practically only saw her on the weekends. We realized that São Paulo no longer made sense for the family balance. **F5**
Self-realization	I think there is a constant concern regarding quality. And, to have quality in the olive oil, there has to be quality throughout the entire process. It includes soil and leaf research and providing the olive grove with what it needs. Taking care of the environment where we are and the people. All of this will result in healthy olives. My business is to keep the olive oil and make it as pure and special as possible, to continue doing something cool, to pass it on. **F1**
	My goal is to make this company sustainable and independent of my personal capital. We have done something very special here, so it must be something cool and that make sense. **F4**
Sports practice, health, and nutritional education	Here is perfect for playing sports especially hang gliding. **F2**
	We brought students from the local school to see what organic farming was like, to see how composting and worm farming were done. They could see where the food in their lunch came from, right? **F5**

Source: The authors (2025).

4.3.1. The State and governance units

Participants pointed out the State and governance units' roles in structuring and sustaining farms. The State's involvement is particularly recognized for validating actors and their inclusion in formal competition (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010). Governance units support commercialization by providing producers with foundational resources.

The State operates through three spheres: federal (Brazil), State (São Paulo) and municipal (city of São Bento do Sapucaí). During the structuring phase, the State's influence appears through the Agriculture Office (Casa da Agricultura), which provides seeds, seedlings, and technical assistance for planting and establishing crops. Participants highlighted the significant role of the Minas Gerais Agricultural Research Company (Empresa de Pesquisa Agropecuária de Minas Gerais – Epamig), which offers consultancy for vineyards and olive growing. Interviewees F1, F3, and F4 especially valued Epamig's assistance during their properties' early stages.

In São Paulo State, the Department of Tourism (Secretaria de Turismo) developed the Gastronomic Route of the Paraíba Valley and Mantiqueira (Rota Gastronômica do Vale do Paraíba e Mantiqueira), which four interviewees joined. This route promotes products to customers and encourages producer interactions. Meanwhile, the São Paulo State Department of Agriculture (Secretaria da Agricultura do Estado de São Paulo) is identified as a potential funding source through the São Paulo Agribusiness Expansion Fund / Family Agribusiness Bank (Fundo de Expansão do Agronegócio Paulista / Banco do Agronegócio Familiar – Feap/Banagro), where one interviewee secured financing.

Participants cited challenges with State agencies, particularly the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social – BNDES) methodologies for rural credit, leading to misunderstandings about credit approval.

However, Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (2023)[1] reports that there are 75,430 rural credit beneficiaries in São Paulo, with 54,051 being family farmers and 21,477 other rural producers. The 2015-2022 program supported olive cultivation and other crops produced by participants, except mushrooms. Therefore, it can be deduced that the need to adapt regulations on the part of producers, combined with the high interest rate charged, are possible obstacles faced by them.

Obstacles were also reported with the National Health Surveillance Agency (Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária – Anvisa) regarding product regulation and inspection processes.

Locally, São Bento do Sapucaí's municipal government – specifically the Departments of Infrastructure, Security and Mobility (Secretaria de Infraestrutura, Segurança e Mobilidade), and Agriculture and the Environment (Secretaria de Agricultura e Meio Ambiente) – were most influent.

Some interviewees indicated the municipal administration positively, despite limited resources and infrastructure challenges, like road paving, essential for product transport, workforce access, and tourism.

Conversely, the Municipal Department of Agriculture and Environment was seen as an obstacle, with product regulation and infrastructure requirements for obtaining Municipal Inspection Service (Serviço de Inspeção Municipal – SIM), which certifies the quality and hygiene of products for sale.

Interviewees also highlighted agricultural research importance, although State-led research largely focuses on implementation, leaving a need for studies addressing exogenous (e.g., climate changes) and endogenous (e.g., soil and pest conditions) shocks. To bridge this gap, producers often rely on private consultants, universities, and own empirical experience.

Table 6 shows the relevant entities and corresponding statements.

Governance units also aid in workforce training, property management support, and industrial suitability after the implementation of the properties. The Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Enterprises (Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas – Sebrae) and the local commercial association support product sales, distribution, and promotion strategies while facilitating connections between producers and trade sectors for commercial event participation.

The National Service for Industrial Training (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial – Senai), identified by F5 promotes local workforce training and food product development support. Similarly, two interviewees cited the National Service for Commercial Training (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial – Senac) for its contributions to local workforce qualification and technical support for food product processing and factory adaptations.

Stefan et al. (2021) and Wojcieszak (2019) observed that collaborative strategies encourage rural product consumption and service offerings. The authors stress creating networks that foster producer cohesion to secure investment subsidies and meet ecological and cultural regulations involving diverse stakeholders.

4.3.2. Investment, resources, and diversification

All participants funded their property through personal investment, and only one (F5) used rural credit from the Feap/Banagro program after the property became operational.

Participants reported resources including labor, growing area, machinery, research access, network connections (promoted by governance units and the State) and shared knowledge within these networks, internet technology, website and social media development, online marketplaces, product distribution and work experience.

[1] Data accumulated and updated until 05/25/2023 (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social, 2023).

Table 6: State Entities

Agency	Forms of Participation	Statements
Secretaria de Turismo do Estado de São Paulo (SeTurSP)	Creation of tourist and gastronomic routes	The route was an initiative of the State Government. The goal is to promote products and producers within it to attract tourists to these regions. **F1**
		We've been participating in the Gastronomic Routes project. It provides numerous opportunities for small producers like us. **F2**
Coordenadoria de Assistência Técnica Integral (CATI)	Offering seeds, seedlings, and technical support	The Agriculture Office (Casa da Agricultura) is a valuable partner. When we had more proactive staff, the support was excellent, especially during our initial plantings. **F5**
Fundo de Expansão do Agronegócio Paulista / O Banco do Agronegócio Familiar (Feap/Banagro)	Granting of credit	We accessed resources to buy machinery. **F5**
Empresa de Pesquisa Agropecuária de Minas Gerais (Epamig)	Research and experimentation in agriculture and livestock in Minas Gerais	Epamig was important initially, but their focus on olive trees is somewhat limited. **F1**
		The double pruning project from Epamig was essential for us. **F3**
		In the case of Epamig, they were important, but they are very limited in what they do regarding research in the areas that we need, which would be in agronomy. **F4**
Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária (Anvisa)	Inspection and regulation of products, production space, and transportation	Anvisa complicates my ability to regulate one of my products nationally, yet it allows imports without regulation. This hinders product viability. **F2**
Secretaria de Infraestrutura, Segurança e Mobilidade	Creation and maintenance of municipal infrastructure	We still have rugged roads here. Even 4x4 vehicles can't pass through some areas. Access roads are generally poor. **F1**
		Transportation is a major issue. The main road is mostly in Minas Gerais, with just a short stretch in São Paulo. Despite limited resources, the city hall provides some support. **F4**
		Our relationship with city hall has always been strong. We've formed productive partnerships. **F5**
Secretaria de Agricultura e Meio Ambiente	Sanitary inspection of products, Municipal Inspection Service (SIM) seal for local product sales	Setting up a factory in a rural area for sanitary control is challenging. We're held to the same standards as large industries, even though we produce up to 20,000 units monthly compared to millions of tons by large companies. Regulations and infrastructure requirements are the same. **F5**

Source: The authors (2025).

Table 7 presents interviewees' comments on governance units.

Table 7: Governance units

Agency	Forms of Participation	Statements
Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas (Sebrae)	Training, promotion, and development of micro and small businesses	We've had a few meetings organized by Sebrae to connect local merchants with producers, but few producers are well-structured. **F2** Sebrae, Senai, and Senac are invaluable partners. Sebrae is always involved. Just yesterday, a Sebrae consultant helped us strategize on sales and social media promotion. We've also consistently participated in the Entrepreneur Fair through Sebrae. **F5**
Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial (Senac)	Professional education	Senac assisted me in creating technical sheets for [product name]. **F5** Senac provides culinary training. My current Chef, like the previous one, studied at Senac in Campos do Jordão. **F3**
Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (Senai)	Workforce training and support for product development	Senai is helping me redesign the factory layout. **F5**
Associação Comercial (local)	Developing commercial strategies and networking	Innovation is crucial for discovering new tourism niches. Post-pandemic, flexible remote work has emerged, and the local Commercial Association is adapting to these shifts, addressing common struggles collaboratively. **F2**

Source: The authors (2025).

Consistent with literature findings by Mastronardi et al. (2020), Pato (2020), Hardesty & Leff (2020), participants diversified their offerings through packaging, processing methods (e.g., jams, chutneys, powders, seasonings, preserves, drying, and deep-freezing), incorporating local species into the crop, improving online presence for presenting the farm and products as well as providing direct sales and through marketplaces, and participating in collective product baskets.

Labor shortages impact sowing, pest control, and harvesting activities. Participants pointed low agricultural labor availability, with a concentration of elderly workers, while younger workers prefer formal employment in bars, restaurants, and guesthouses. These observations align with findings in literature by Wojcieszak-Zbierska et al. (2020) and Roman & Grudzién (2021) and are supported by secondary data revealing a high unemployment among the population (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010).

Table 8 indicates the main comments.

4.3.3. History, culture, and the influence of neighboring fields

São Bento do Sapucaí environment may have foster heritage preservation and social cohesion and its relatively late adoption of tourism. Interviews suggest that both history and geography have facilitated the revival of neighborhood associations and the creation of new ones. These local ethos advocate for public demands, particularly for infrastructure needs, like lighting, paving, sanitation, transportation, healthcare, education, and agricultural oversight. Such coalitions support resource flow to producers, which, as Fligstein & McAdam (2010, p. 5) argue, undergo constant changes. These coalitions appear to promote collective learning and innovation.

Table 8: Investments, Resources, and Diversification

ELEMENTS	STATEMENTS
Investment	There is a significant cost factor; the investment was substantial and entirely funded from personal resources. **F1**
	We relied solely on our resources. **F2**
	All resources used were our own. **F4**
	Initially, funding came from personal resources. My husband continued working in São Paulo to inject funds and establish the property. Once we began planting and had a foothold as rural producers, we gained access to financing. **F5**
Resources	It's very challenging to find labor during harvest season. To cope, I often bring in workers from other municipalities. **F1**
	We created an infrastructure that allows for year-round production, but costs are high since all employees are fully registered, work in uniform, and adhere to strict hygiene protocols. **F2**
Diversification	Some strategies have evolved. Some producers started creating boxes or baskets of Mantiqueira products, prompting me to develop a 100 ml bottle. Usually, I use 250 ml bottles. **F1**
	During the pandemic, I created seasonings using mushroom powder. This helped develop new products that add value and reduce waste since many producers discarded large quantities of mushrooms. **F2**
	More people began buying online, discovered us, and we increased our promotions. Today, we sell all over Brazil, with well-balanced demand. **F2**
	Online sales had already been active, but they improved during the pandemic. These 50 ml olive oil bottles were specifically made for regional product baskets. **F4**
	I aim to diversify further with milk, cheese, and tropical fruits unique to this region that aren't commercially widespread. We're researching these to create a competitive edge. **F4**

Source: The authors (2025).

Narratives also highlight the importance of field relationships, supporting the broader field environment. New fields may arise from opportunities identified by actors, often originating in neighboring fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010). Tourism development in Campos do Jordão in the 1970s provided the foundation for exploring nearby municipalities (Campos do Jordão, 2022). Strategic fields have flexible boundaries, allowing actors to identify others involved and "[...] the interpretative framework that strategic actors, individual or collective, bring to make sense of what other actors are doing" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, p. 12).

Table 9 summarizes these elements and corresponding statements.

Producers generally interact with others in similar agricultural activities, regardless of location. These connections occur through producer associations, commercial events, and State agencies or simply following and creating ties with international producers. Subsequently, relationships tend to occur by geographic region, reinforcing local producer coalitions to secure development resources and promote their products and services. Connections between different agricultural sectors, typically take place at events hosted by SeTur-SP, which are conducive to collective learning.

Literature findings show the loss of identity in regions and reveal the importance of heritage preservation as a driver of tourism, due to its ability to integrate man with nature, and play an important role in maintaining the population, economic, environmental, and social value of regions (Stefan et al., 2021 van Sandt et al., 2019).

Table 9: History, culture, and the influence of neighboring fields

ELEMENTS	STATEMENTS
Local Social Coalitions	Five years ago, São Bento didn't have any associations. We revived the [neighborhood name] association, which had been inactive for 30 years, and encouraged other neighborhoods to organize as well. Today, there are eight neighborhood associations. The city's political scenario has been completely transformed. Neighborhood development and public action planning are no longer solely dependent on city council members or the State. The Executive Branch now largely depends on decisions made by each neighborhood's associations. **F5**
Neighboring Fields	Mantiqueira itself is a significant attraction. Over the past ten years, you can observe a shift in the production profile; most producers are small-scale. Some have substantial investments, while others not. There's production of beer, cheese, olive oil, mushrooms, jams, and more. Small producers often support each other. Some routes are formalized, while others form spontaneously through recommendations, creating a network of mutual support. **F1**
	There's no real competition here in town. Small producers are spreading out. Sometimes new ones emerge that we don't even know about. **F2**
	P01 produces olive oil here, and it's excellent. We all know each other. I think our relationships benefit us more than create competition. There are still plenty of tourists to go around, so we end up helping each other. **F3**
Space for Collective Learning	At an event organized by the Tourism Department, I met [producer name], who shared that she uses ants in her cheese—the same ants that are pests on my crop. **F1**
	After the pandemic restrictions eased, the Tourism Department provided crucial support, introducing us to many sectors through events focused on gastronomy and direct-to-consumer engagement. Many producers from São Paulo attended, making it an excellent opportunity for networking. **F2**

Source: The authors (2024).

The existence of collaborative networks and routes is widely discussed in the literature, as it enables the construction of product networks, gastronomic circuits, educational farms, agricultural practices, and health and nature tourism in clusters, allowing the exchange of knowledge, training, and experiences (Wojcieszak, 2019). Stanovčić et al. (2018) suggest that the possibility of clustering is an important tool for overcoming several limitations of fragmented rural households, through the organization and promotion of attractive tourist routes. Therefore, the development of small businesses through the creation of collaborative networks makes it possible to promote an integrated tourism model, which can combine various forms of tourism consumption.

4.3.4. Endogenous and exogenous shocks and change

Exogenous shocks can disrupt the stability of strategic action fields and directly affect essential resource availability in the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010).

Participants reported both endogenous and exogenous shocks. Endogenous shocks related to seasonality, infrastructure needs for tourist and labor access, product distribution, and labor shortages. Exogenous shocks included the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with climatic changes, pests, and the Russia-Ukraine war.

Rising production costs from labor shortages, higher fertilizer prices (due to the Russia-Ukraine war), and crop losses from climate change and pests, drove producers to increase investment in tourism activities, generating revenue to offset agricultural maintenance costs. Events like the pandemic disrupted State-actor relationships, encouraging direct alliances among actors, stimulating the capacity for innovation, enhancing product and service diversification, and intensifying tourism activities, as detailed in Table 10.

Table 10: Consequences of Endogenous and Exogenous Shocks

ELEMENTS	STATEMENTS
Endogenous Shocks	The soil and climate here in Brazil are unique. An ant can devour an olive tree in just one night. **F1**
Exogenous Shocks	The pandemic disrupted tourism activities. With the decrease in visits, I dedicated myself to researching plant physiology and connecting with others to discuss the challenges we were each facing. **F1**
	Due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, some of the inputs we use suddenly tripled in price or became nearly impossible to obtain. **F1**
	Apart from the "red zone" period when everything was closed, we benefited. With international tourism and air travel reduced, tourists began arriving by car, especially from São Paulo, which is our primary market. In 2022, these shifts created a safer tourism experience for us. **F4**

Source: The authors (2024).

Uncertainty and change are seen in the literature as economic impact drivers, influencing diversification to mitigate economic consequences (Mastronardi et al., 2022; Oleksenko et al., 2021).

4.3.5. Tourism

Farmers described incorporating tourism activities after the initial phase of establishing their properties and the first harvests. This early form of tourism generally emerged without prior planning, taking place as visits to promote and sell products, and helped subsidize production costs. These visits were often driven by the producers' relationships with neighboring producers and tourists recommendations (word of mouth).

As agricultural activities became more structured, field maintenance strategies prompted further diversification, reinforcing producers' identities. Tourism activities evolved from simple visits to include a broader array of offerings: gastronomy based on farm-sourced ingredients, harvest tourism, lodging, social events, and educational tourism.

The producers regularly follow the consolidated national or international oil and wine tourism routes in countries such as Italy, Spain, France, and Portugal, seeking references regarding the practices employed in tourism on farms and creating links with other producers of the same crop.

Despite limited effective planning by the State, local government and, governance units to enhance tourism in the region and support producers, tourism remains a crucial pillar for agricultural activities, generating revenue and promoting products according to the farmers narratives. Table 11 illustrates these observations.

4.4. Discussion

The data from the farmers' narratives align with findings in existing literature as noted by Mastronardi et al. (2020), Pato (2020), Hardesty & Leff (2020), van Sandt et al. (2019), Stefan et al. (2021), Wojcieszak-Zbierska et al. (2020), Roman & Grudzién (2021), supporting the methodology proposed in this article.

According to the available literature, farmers describe innovations related to the incorporation or expansion of digital tools for the promotion and sale of products and services. Additionally, innovations related to product diversification were reported, expanding products and services portfolio, as well as in forms of processing and trading. The farmers mention that the tourist flow, although initially interrupted, was redirected, attracting tourists seeking outdoor experiences, with lower health risks and greater contact with nature. The importance of collaborative

networks, with or without the presence of the State, was also reported by farmers as a vector of development for the geographic area studied and for companies, driving innovations, the valorization of local products and local economic development.

Table 11: Introduction of Tourism Activity

ELEMENTS	STATEMENTS
Establishment	When the olive trees began producing, oleotourism became a revenue stream that helped sustain the olive grove. It covered some basic expenses and promoted the olive oil, which is one of my goals. People are curious since they don't know much about olive oil. **F1**
	Initially, our business wasn't designed or prepared for tourism. But since São Bento is a tourist town, things started happening naturally. The tourism department reached out to us to participate, and soon we started receiving visitors and selling products to tourists. Today, tourism is fully integrated into our work. **F2**
	My wife is Catholic, so we built a chapel on the hill. Our daughter's wedding took place there, and it went well. We eventually turned the property into an event venue, leveraging the crop and natural surroundings. **F3**
	We noticed that people were interested. Initially, we had no tourism infrastructure. When we built the olive mill, my husband suggested putting extra effort into the architecture to attract visitors. Soon, people began visiting [in 2012, just before the first harvests]. We hired staff for weekend tours, and as interest grew, we opened a restaurant. This greatly enhanced the experience, turning it into a complete package. **F4**
	We began by welcoming people in a motorhome that we had used for a family trip. As interest increased, I built two chalets. Many tourists visited to learn about my agroforestry planting method and even helped with harvests. Later, I began offering planting courses on-site. **F5**
Maintenance	Tourism is crucial for educating consumers about mushroom farming and the health benefits mushrooms offer. Most of my sales come from people who have previously visited the farm or from recommendations by those visitors. **F2**
	My products are available on markets in São Paulo, which provides visibility, but most sales happen directly at the farm. **F4**
	Labor-intensive agriculture isn't viable in market terms unless you add value through products and tourism. Fortunately, tourism is well-established here, with a strong customer base from São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and even some from Rio. People visit our region and nearby towns. **F4**

Source: The authors (2024).

By incorporating the concept of Course of Action, the analysis validates the approach based on farmers' life narratives. As Bertaux (2020, p. 21) states, the data from narratives "[...] reveal how a social situation operates, what its internal tensions are, and how its dynamics of transformation unfold".

Considering the socially driven actions of actors aiming to establish themselves in their fields, the logic guiding the implementation process, diversification on properties, and participants' identities becomes apparent, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Property planning is supported by tangible and intangible resources mobilization based on elements driving social change (historical-affective relations with the city or type of crop / close relationships / self-realization / sports practice, health, and nutritional education). This combination shapes producers' identities, directly influencing the diversification implemented on their farms.

The theoretical perspective proposed in this research (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, 2012) offers a framework to interpret the studied environment, focusing on strategic actions of actors sharing similar social situations (incorporating tourism into farms).

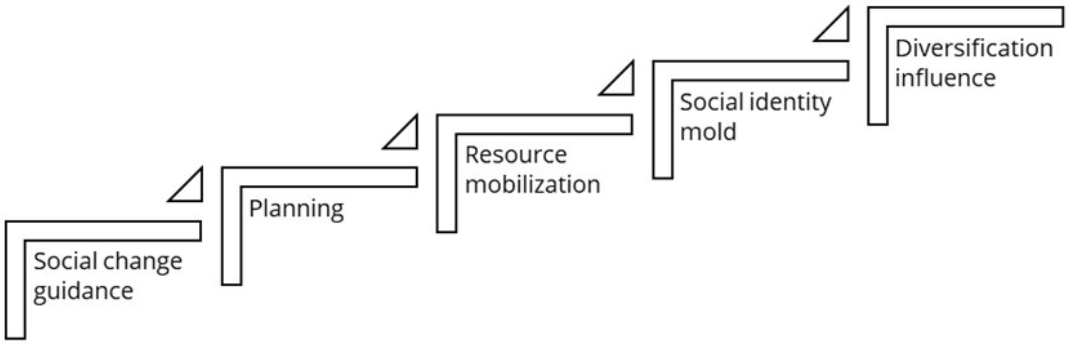

Figure 3: Social Logic
Source: The authors (2024), based on Bertaux (2014).

In agreement with Fligstein & McAdam (2010) when indicating that new fields appear close to existing fields, it is possible to observe that, based on the city's history, field observations and narratives, tourism in the city of São Bento do Sapucaí was influenced by surrounding cities that were already structured for tourism (Campos do Jordão, Santo Antonio do Pinhal and Gonçalves).

Fligstein & McAdam (2010) compared the structural relationship between fields to russian dolls. Based on field observations and narratives it is possible to understand that each interviewee's farm is a field, which is related to other farms (similar fields), forming fields among themselves, and varying by type of management and location. The relationships also occur with State fields, government entities at various levels, marked by the federal, state and municipal spheres (SeTurSP, CATI, Feap/Banagro, Epamig, Anvisa, Departments of Infrastructure, Security and Mobility and Agriculture and the Environment), as well as by governance units (SENAI, SENAC, SEBRAE and local commercial association) facilitating the general functioning of the system.

Within the study's geographic area, narratives suggest that the farmers studied are organized with a low hierarchical structure where incumbents and challengers are not defined yet. Resources among the investigated actors are relatively balanced and of similar scope. As Fligstein & McAdam (2010, p. 14) observe "if the actors in a Strategic Action Field have roughly the same size and power, they may form political coalitions to organize a field", actors are leading the formation of political coalitions to achieve field stability. Local internal coalitions are evident through neighborhood associations, commercial association initiatives, and state-supported coalitions, such as tourism routes, collective products baskets, and indications of farms visits among producers. Therefore, a transition from an emerging space to a stable one is observed.

The structuring stage begins with agricultural property planning, guided by social logic, where actors anticipate resources within the context of the intended social world. Initial resources include prior and acquired experiences, research access, relationships with other actors and fields. At this moment the elements that drive social change (historical-affective relations with the city or type of crop / close relationships / self-realization / sports practice, health, and nutritional education) condition the actor's initial actions, especially regarding location and type of crop.

Following the planning stage, producers gather the essential resources to establish their properties, adding financial resources, farm area and infrastructure, machinery, labor, seeds, and plants. The State participates by formalizing farms and providing access to other resources, providing certificates for the products, production, and trade.

These steps shape producers' identities within the field, impacting property types (monoculture/polyculture) and cultivation methods (organic vs. pesticide use) in the farm´s implementation phase. Small-scale product diversification emerges after this stage. Tourism is incorporated only after the property becomes operational, providing an additional revenue stream to subsidize agricultural production and enabling product promotion and sales, often before the first harvest.

During implementation, governance units assist producers in managing farms. The State encourages relationships through commercial events and tourism routes, where products and destinations are promoted. Throughout this process, obstacles may arise as endogenous or exogenous shocks, prompting collective learning by existing social interaction and fostering innovation.

Consequently, based on the research, the framework identifying the process of structuring and maintaining tourism on farms is proposed in Figure 4.

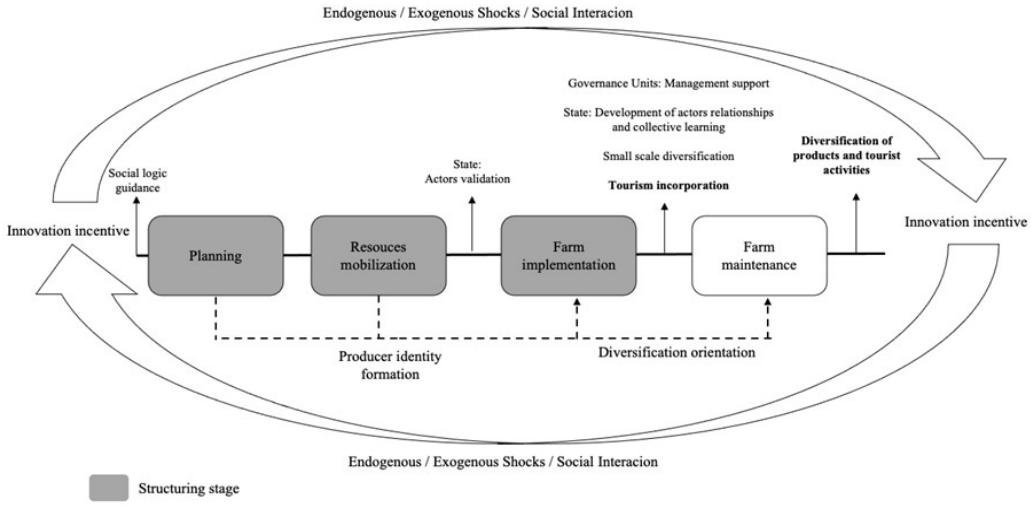

Figure 4: Framework Model
Source: The authors (2024).

5 Conclusions

This study analyzed the process of structuring and maintenance of tourism in farms through strategies implemented by agricultural producers.

The theoretical framework was developed based on the SAF Theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, 2012) and Course of Action (Bertaux, 2014). Empirical research examined the actions of agricultural producers who incorporated tourism into their farms, using Life Narratives Method (Bertaux, 2020)

The objective outlined in this research was achieved by analyzing the structuring processes of rural properties incorporating tourism activities from the actor's perspective, highlighting relevant actors involved, the relationships among them, endogenous and exogenous shocks encountered, and revealing the process of sustaining action fields.

The findings demonstrate that elements and phenomena within the SAF Theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2010, 2012) effectively analyze the proposed segment, offering insights into the social relationships involved in structuring and sustaining tourism farms. By considering the contexts and structures of these properties, the theory provides a systemic view of the market, emphasizing its processes of change marked by innovations undertaken by producers.

This research contributes theoretically by offering an integrated view of the social environment, marked by small agricultural entrepreneurs, managing family-run properties. The Course of Action enables a retrospective analysis of actors with comparable resources, similar constraints, and shared action logics in the studied field. The findings show that the actors' courses of action, relationships among them, and interactions with structures are key to establishing and sustaining their enterprises.

Furthermore, this study highlights that the actors' social logic, aimed at establishing themselves in their desired environment, drives their strategic actions, shaping property diversifications in terms of products and services offered. Environmental changes, particularly related to exogenous shocks, led actors to form coalitions promoting diversification and innovation, fostering collective learning.

The findings of this research can inform public and private strategies for systematically developing tourism in areas with farm potential. The results advance knowledge in Tourism, Agritourism, and Economic Sociology by providing key concepts within a relevant and growing academic area.

Future research could expand on this study by analyzing farmers from other tourist and gastronomic routes within São Paulo and other states. Examining State and governance unit actors to expand or contrast these findings could yield valuable insights.

Authors' contributions:

FB: Conception/design of the study, Data collection, Analysis and interpretation, Writing of the manuscript, and Critical review. DSM: Conception/design of the study, Analysis and interpretation, and Critical review. MFS: Conception/design of the study, Analysis and interpretation, and Critical review.

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Nothing to declare.

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Research data is available upon request.

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