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## Small towns in the southwest Bahia identity territory

### Pequeños pueblos en el territorio de identidad del suroeste de Bahía

### Cidades pequenas no Território de Identidade do Sudoeste Baiano

Ana Emília de Quadros Ferraz <sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0137-3787>

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<sup>1</sup> PhD and Post- Doctorate in Geography from Sergipe's Federal University - Brazil; Master in Social Sciences from PUC –SP. Graduation in Geography from Bahia's Southwest State University - UESB. milaferraz@gmail.com – She works at Bahia's Southwest State University - UESB - Brazil

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#### Abstract

The topic is developed in the Southwest Bahia's Identity Territory (TISB) and makes an approach to small towns. The territories are heterogeneous, and also the cities. For that, it was decided to conduct a survey in twenty-three cities. Inequalities are remarkable. However, there are similarities not only restricted to population's, but also to socioeconomic aspects. Represented as concrete spaces, lived fully on a daily basis, small cities are revealed in the research carried out to young residents. Among several aspects, the residents' view of the city. It is clear that a human being can only intervene in a space, if recognized as a social construction. The individual needs to know well the place where he/she lives to act as a transforming agent.

**Keywords:** Small towns. Identity Territory. Geography.

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#### Resumen

El tema se contextualiza en el Territorio de Identidad del Sur oeste de Bahía (TISB) y hace un acercamiento sobre pequeña ciudad. Los territorios son heterogéneos, como lo son los municipios. Por lo tanto, se decidió realizar una encuesta en veintitrés ciudades, consideradas pequeñas. Las desigualdades son sorprendentes, sin embargo, hay similitudes que no se limitan al aspecto de la población, sino también a el socioeconómico. Como espacios concretos, experimentados a diario, las ciudades pequeñas se revelan en investigaciones realizadas como jóvenes. Se abordaron varios aspectos y expresaron la opinión de los residentes sobre la ciudad. Se entiende que solo se puede intervenir en el espacio, cuando se lo reconoce como una construcción social y que es necesario conocer el lugar donde se vive para actuar como un agente que transforma una determinada realidad.

**Palabras llave:** ciudad pequeña. Territorio de identidad. Geografía

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#### Resumo

A temática se contextualiza no Território de Identidade do Sudoeste Baiano (TISB) e faz uma abordagem sobre cidade pequena. Os territórios são heterogêneas, assim como são os municípios. Assim, optou-se pela realização de uma pesquisa sobre vinte e três cidades, consideradas pequenas. As desigualdades são marcantes, contudo existem semelhanças que não se restringem ao aspecto populacional mas, também, socioeconômico. Enquanto espaços concretos, vividos cotidianamente, as pequenas cidades são reveladas

nas pesquisas realizadas com jovens. Vários aspectos foram abordados e expressam o olhar do morador acerca da cidade. Entende-se que só se pode intervir no espaço, quando é reconhecido como uma construção social e que é preciso conhecer o lugar onde se vive para atuar como agente transformador de determinada realidade.

**Palavras - chave:** Cidade pequena. Território de Identidade. Geografia.

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## Introdução

Although the study of small towns is challenging, it feels stimulating to share research experiences carried out in cities this size. Along the article, the scope of work carried out is contextualized, a brief debate about the small towns is presented, and aspects of everyday lives are analyzed.

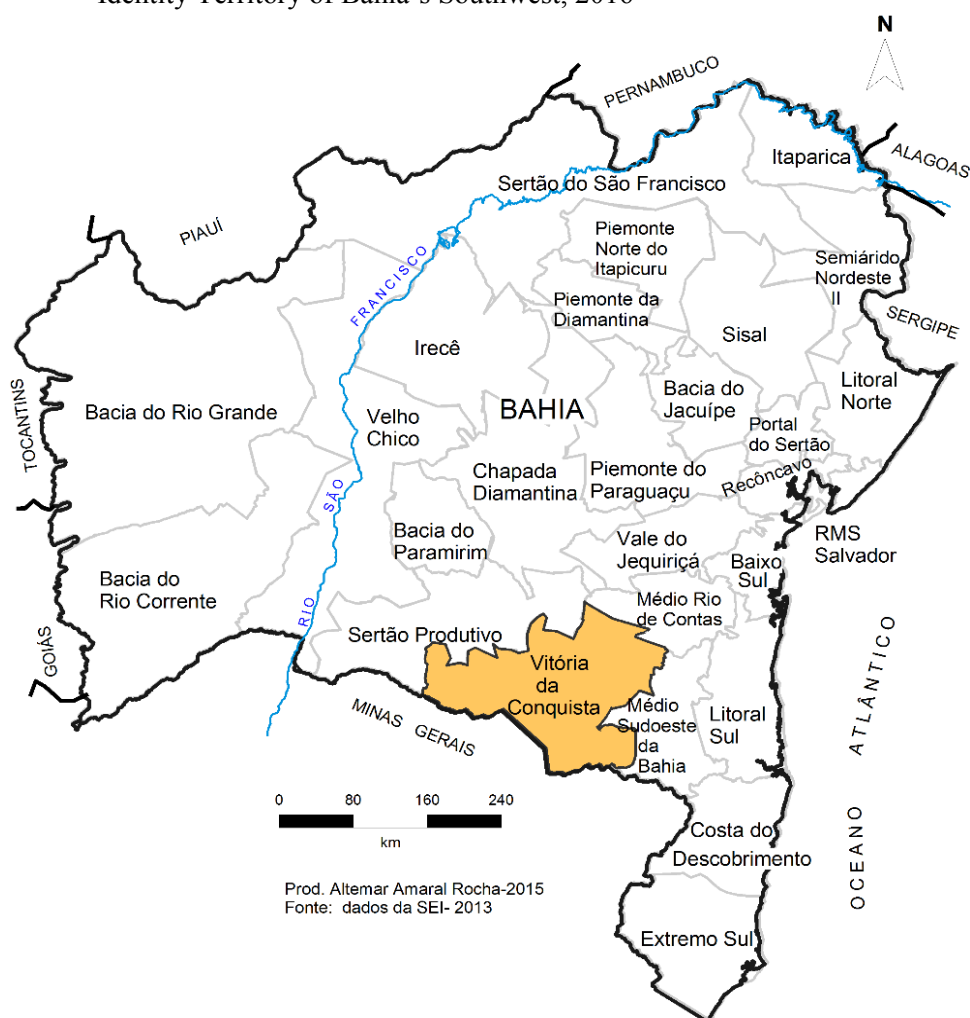
## Few aspects of the Southwest Bahia Identity Territory

Bahia's State Identity Territories were defined, in 2007, by the Economic Superintendence and Bahia's Social Studies (SEI, 2018). Currently, this regionalization serves as a basis for public policies implemented at the state's level. Again, this regionalization was used in this work, as it is agreed with Santos, D. (2018) when he clarifies that, the region's definition implies the existence of a thematic outline, and subsidizes the geographic discourse. In the author's words:

Reaffirming the definition of region, regardless of the subject's epistemological explanation, implies the existence of a thematic cutout by the observer. Likewise, it is also worth remembering that the existence of mountainous or flat, forested or desert, urban or agrarian regions or any other boundaries' forms to identify the territory can only happen if we look at our eyes. As, in the end, nothing prevents a city from being surrounded by a forest or being located on a mountain. At this point the perceived and ordered become discourse or, still, that landscape and territory become region, in other words, the geographic discourse itself (SANTOS, D., 2018, p. 51).

According to this subdivision, there are twenty-seven Identity Territories in Bahia's State, as shown in Map 1. These presents the state divided into territories. Still, we give emphasis Bahia's Southwest.

Map 1 - Map of Bahia's State, divided by identity territories, taking into consideration the Identity Territory of Bahia's Southwest, 2016



Source: FERRAZ, Ana Emília de Quadros et al., 2016.

These territories are not homogeneous and express the heterogeneity found in Bahia's State. Thus, according to Ritter (2011), it is difficult, within the scope of difference, to establish a:

[...] criteria to identify and spatialize the “territory’s identity” or in other words, the “territory of a particular identity”. Finally, how to define practical purposes in an unreal homogeneous space. In a continuous shape to increase heterogeneity; and how to materialize the “territory” as a responsive scaling planning unit for medium and long term policies, when the spontaneous paths point to a multi-territoriality (RITTER, 2011, p. 107).

Remarkably, it stands out the weaknesses in this regionalization. “Identity Territories” is one idea that it receives. However, these “Identity Territories” receive criticism from researchers, because of their weaknesses. Though the debate’s relevance is taken into consideration, it was not the main goal of this research to discuss these

debates as a criteria, processes and consequences of such regionalization. Therefore, only the territorial section, pre-marked through Bahia State's government, was used as the area covered by this thesis. Yet, part of the citizens are not treated as a homogeneous unit, as Santos M. (2004) mentioned. Hence, there is no homogeneity in the space.

A heterogeneity's expression can be seen when analyzing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Bahia's state, divided by Identity Territories. According to SEI (2013), Bahia has a GDP - Gross domestic product (in 2013) of approximately, R \$ 204 billion. TISB (Bahia's State Identity Territories) GDP is around R\$ 7 billion, contemplated as sixth largest in Bahia. This figure represents only 3.5% of state's GDP and is below the figures from other territories such as: Metropolitano de Salvador (43.4%), Portal do Sertão (7.1%), Bacia do Rio Grande (5.2%) Litoral Sul (4.7%) and Litoral Norte (3.9%) represented in (Table 1). This situation demonstrates a huge economic and social disparity, within the state.

Table 1 – Bahia's Identity Territories, Bahia's GDP by territory, and full scope of percentage's participation, laid out in decreasing order, 2013

Identity Territory	GDP (2013)	Percentage Participation
Metropolitano de Salvador	88.604.433.058	43,4%
Portal do Sertão	14.528.442.740	7,1%
Bacia do Rio Grande	10.564.216.579	5,2%
Litoral Sul	9.591.435.993	4,7%
Litoral Norte e Agreste Baiano	7.971.265.164	3,9%
Sudoeste Baiano	7.232.334.791	3,5%
Recôncavo	5.942.814.587	2,9%
Baixo Sul	5.840.811.443	2,9%
Extremo Sul	5.637.057.822	2,7%
Costa do Descobrimento	5.003.290.243	2,4%
Sertão do São Francisco	4.514.490.034	2,2%
Sertão Produtivo	4.137.281.355	2,0%
Sisal	3.857.083.550	1,9%
Médio Rio de Contas	3.577.651.657	1,7%
Semiárido Nordeste II	2.803.317.489	1,4%
Chapada Diamantina	2.627.172.192	1,3%
Irecê	2.603.925.095	1,3%
Bacia do Rio Corrente	2.579.115.183	1,3%
Velho Chico	2.403.357.551	1,2%
Piemonte Norte do Itapicuru	2.161.312.226	1,1%
Vale do Jiquiriçá	2.127.465.259	1,0%
Piemonte do Paraguaçu	2.052.115.078	1,0%
Médio Sudoeste da Bahia	2.001.387.414	1,0%
Itaparica	1.817.177.809	0,9%
Bacia do Jacuípe	1.799.490.180	0,9%
Piemonte da Diamantina	1.541.946.546	0,7%
Bacia do Paramirim	744.929.732	0,4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>204.265.320.770</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

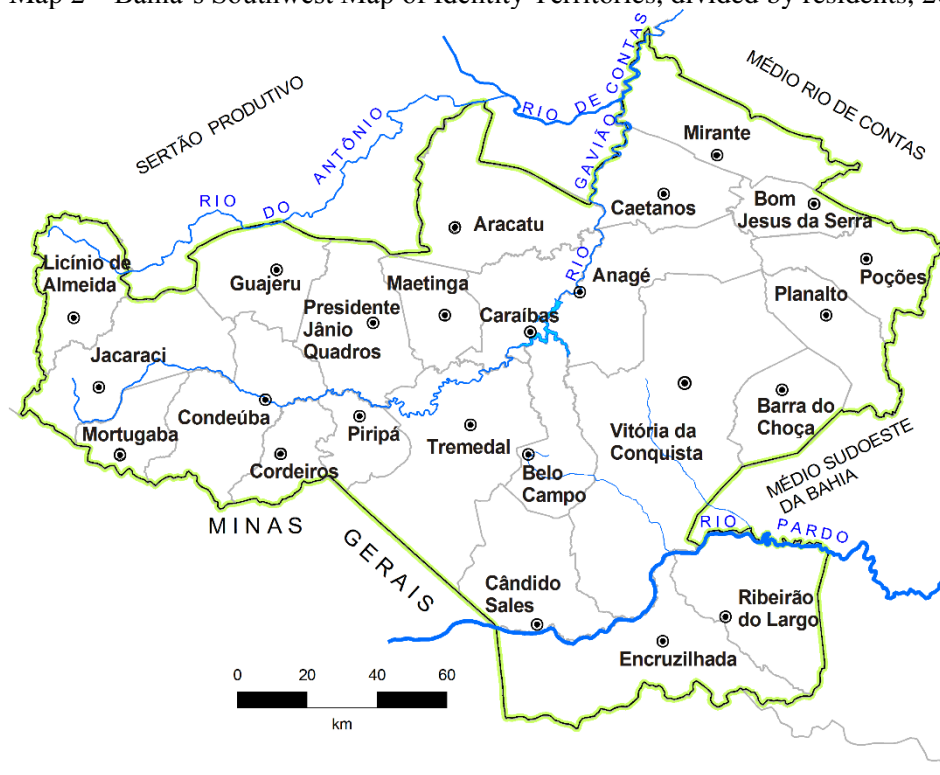
Organization: Ana Emília de Quadros Ferraz

Source: SEI, 2013. (Note: The last Identity Territory's available update refers to 2013)

The highest GDP is from Salvador's urban area (Bahia State's capital), which concentrates 43.4% of Bahia's GDP. On the opposite hand, the Bacia do Paramirim with 0.4% (SEI, 2013). Bahia's state is strongly marked by differences, accentuated within the Identity Territories themselves.

Moreover, the TISB (Bahia's State Identity Territories), for instance, expresses the situation of space's heterogeneity. This Identity Territory is composed of twenty-four towns, as shown in Map 2. The area is 26,809.99 km<sup>2</sup> total, distributed in a very distinct way among residents.

Map 2 – Bahia's Southwest Map of Identity Territories, divided by residents, 2020



Source: Elaborado por Rocha (2020), adaptação de FERRAZ, Ana Emília de Quadros et al., 2016.

Particularly, the 2010 Geography and Statistics Brazilian Institute (IBGE) Demographic Census, presents a total population of TISB as 695,302 inhabitants. This is the fourth largest population among Bahia's territories. In such way, the density's demography is roughly 25.9 inhab./km<sup>2</sup>. This is a heterogeneously distributed population, as witnessed in Table 2.

Table 2 - Population's total and population's percentage, in decreasing order, of Bahia's Southwest Identity Territory residents, 2010

City	Total	%
Vitória da Conquista	306.866	44,1
Poções	44.701	6,4
Barra do Choça	34.788	5,0
Cândido Sales	27.918	4,0
Anagé	25.516	3,7
Planalto	24.481	3,5
Encruzilhada	23.766	3,4
Tremedal	17.029	2,4
Condeúba	16.898	2,4
Belo Campo	16.021	2,3
Aracatu	13.743	2,0
Presidente Jânio Quadros	13.652	2,0
Jacaraci	13.651	2,0
Caetanos	13.639	2,0
Piripá	12.783	1,8
Mortugaba	12.477	1,8
Licínio de Almeida	12.311	1,8
Mirante	10.507	1,5
Guajeru	10.412	1,5
Caraíbas	10.222	1,5
Bom Jesus da Serra	10.113	1,5
Ribeirão do Largo	8.602	1,2
Cordeiros	8.168	1,2
Maetinga	7.038	1,0
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>695.302</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Organization: Urban Center and Territorial Studies - CEUT/UESB

Source: SIDRA/ IBGE, Demographic Census 2010.

Vitória da Conquista's city looms in the territory, covering 44.1% of the total population, that is 306,866 people in 2010. The second largest city in inhabitants' number is Poções, with 44,701 people, followed by Barra do Choça, with 34,788 residents. Four towns have between 23,766 and 27,918 inhabitants, fourteen towns have 10,113 to 17,029 and only three have amid 7,038 to 8,602.

The historical territory formation processes in Vitória da Conquista's city, among other factors, play a polarizing role in the region. These inhabitants' centralization is due to the basic needs' services available in that city. Notably services related to health, education and commerce. Equally, public sector's services are provided at federal, state and municipal levels.

As a matter of fact, the TISB population's majority, 64.8%, is urban. The city with the largest urban population is Vitória da Conquista, with 89.5% of residents in the city and villages nearby. Except Poções's city, with 77.5% of citizens, there are less

than 70% of urban residents in other cities. Even though a detailed assessment indicates sixteen municipalities in the territory, most residents live in rural areas. Mirante's city rural population, for example, has 82.8% residents. Among several other municipalities following the same aspect, a high percentage of rural population. For instance: Anagé (80.7%), Aracatu (71.3%), Bom Jesus da Serra (72.6%), Caetanos (75.9%), Caraíbas (75.4%), Condeúda (55.8%), Cordeiros (68.8%), Encruzilhada (78.4%), Guajeru (80.1%), Jacaraci (63.9%), Maetinga (60.0%), Mortugaba (52.8%), Piripá (51.5%), Presidente Jânio Quadros (69.2%) and Tremedal (76.9%), as proved in Table 3.

Table 3 - Rural and urban population, in absolute and relative numbers, of the municipalities of Bahia's Identity Territory residents, 2010

City	Rural	%	Urban	%
Anagé	20.592	80,7	4.924	19,3
Aracatu	9.805	71,3	3.938	28,7
Barra do Choça	12.381	35,6	22.407	64,4
Belo Campo	6.992	43,6	9.029	56,4
Bom Jesus da Serra	7.345	72,6	2.768	27,4
Caetanos	10.348	75,9	3.291	24,1
Cândido Sales	8.632	30,9	19.286	69,1
Caraíbas	7.709	75,4	2.513	24,6
Condeúda	9.436	55,8	7.462	44,2
Cordeiros	5.617	68,8	2.551	31,2
Encruzilhada	18.636	78,4	5.130	21,6
Guajeru	8.335	80,1	2.077	19,9
Jacaraci	8.728	63,9	4.923	36,1
Licínio de Almeida	6.058	49,2	6.253	50,8
Maetinga	4.221	60,0	2.817	40,0
Mirante	8.698	82,8	1.809	17,2
Mortugaba	6.590	52,8	5.887	47,2
Piripá	6.588	51,5	6.195	48,5
Planalto	9.612	39,3	14.869	60,7
Poções	10.042	22,5	34.659	77,5
Presidente Jânio Quadros	9.454	69,2	4.198	30,8
Ribeirão do Largo	3.955	46,0	4.647	54,0
Tremedal	13.090	76,9	3.939	23,1
Vitória da Conquista	32.127	10,5	274.739	89,5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>244.991</b>	<b>35,2</b>	<b>450.311</b>	<b>64,8</b>

Organization: Urban Center and Territorial Studies - CEUT/UESB

Fonte: SIDRA/IBGE, Demographic Census 2010.

Remarkable inequalities strikes. Nevertheless, there are similarities between the residents in the TISB's area, not restricted to the population's aspects alone. The resident's contribution to the TISB's GDP (Table 4), represents unique region characteristics. Again, the biggest discrepancy is established between Vitória da Conquista compared to the other cities.

Table 4 – Cities GDP of Bahia's Southwest Identity Territory, in decreasing order, 2016

City	GDP R\$ milhões	%
Vitória da Conquista	6.226,15	66,9%
Barra do Choça	501,70	5,4%
Poções	468,59	5,0%
Planalto	223,30	2,4%
Encruzilhada	181,80	2,0%
Cândido Sales	174,51	1,9%
Anagé	160,38	1,7%
Condeúba	126,99	1,4%
Belo Campo	118,41	1,3%
Tremedal	116,14	1,2%
Licínio de Almeida	101,05	1,1%
Jacaraci	94,75	1,0%
Aracatu	89,35	1,0%
Mortugaba	86,81	0,9%
Ribeirão do Largo	84,52	0,9%
Caetanos	77,19	0,8%
Presidente Jânio Quadros	74,39	0,8%
Piripá	66,48	0,7%
Caraíbas	66,43	0,7%
Mirante	59,73	0,6%
Guajeru	55,18	0,6%
Cordeiros	52,83	0,6%
Bom Jesus da Serra	52,29	0,6%
Maetinga	46,06	0,5%

Organization: Ana Emília de Quadros Ferraz

Source: SEI, 2016. (Note: The last Identity Territory's available update refers to 2016)

Vitória da Conquista stands out with more than R\$ 6 billion in figures, representing 66.9% of the territory's GDP, in 2016. All in all, approximately 72.1% comes from the service's sector that has increased numbers, 14.4% comes from the industrial sector, 1.8% from the agriculture sector, and 11.7% from products taxes' collection (SEI, 2016).

In detail, the other twenty-three municipalities present a GDP less than R\$ 501.70 million. Barra do Choça and Poções contributed 5.4% and 5%, respectively. Thirteen TISB municipalities have GDP's of less than R\$ 95 million. In these cities, the main GDP's contribution comes from the services sector. Citizens acting as employers, along with other public services, are responsible for this performance linked to the tertiary economic sector.

That is to say, TISB presents a great diversity. Consequently, it is a challenge to study its municipalities and respective cities, especially small ones. Even though,

The special look at small towns is not isolated from the rest of the urban network. Even so, it seeks to understand the dynamics'



locations in interaction, in movement, according to the realities approach considered the other urban centers and the human flows existing between them (ENDLICH, 2009, p. 27).

The territory presents contradictions related to inhabitants' profiles. The first contradictory aspect is the number of inhabitants, second their place of residence, and finally the GDP and development indicators. These contradictions must be considered as relevant in problems' debates, discussions, and, especially in the public's policies definitions for territory development.

Analysing the data in TISB, the city with the greatest economy and population expression is Vitória da Conquista. This is considered a medium-sized city. Given that, it was decided to conduct a survey involving the other twenty-three cities, considered small. Despite the number of inhabitants and specificities in contrast, the other twenty-three cities that take part of the TISB were considered small. However, these cities are the basis of this article. It should be noted, nevertheless, that there is a risk with this conduct. Sometimes equalling what is different, can bring problems, a concern shared by Fresca (2010).

The word small is an adjective, it refers to the notion of size, dimension and when related to cities, an association between a small number of inhabitants with a small area - in the measurable sense - occupied by a city. [...]

Still, one of the most used criteria to delimit the small cities' cut has been the population data. [...]

Using this principle to characterize a small city; there is a risk of matching cities that are essentially different. In other words, the number of inhabitants as a variable will produce a biased result. For instance, considering cities with similar populations to be small, but not taking into account the single characteristics of each one. It will not allow the understanding of the different insertions. Moreover, each urban nucleus in their networks or region. This prevents the understanding of their roles, their areas of influence, their internal and external integrations to the networks, among other fundamental aspects to classify a city as small. Obviously, depending on the study and objectives, nothing prevents the number of inhabitants from being used, but the necessary reservations must be made, according to the main goals established in the research (FRESCA, 2010, p. 76).

Despite understanding this issue, after presenting the territory, it was decided to define the twenty-three cities as small, a fact that will certainly unfold a future research addressing this problem. In addition to this matter, for each of the cities, single analysis was executed supporting specific debates.

Urban phenomenon studies has aroused the interest of different researchers and research groups, from different Brazilian regions. Therefore, it has contributed to the debate. When studying small cities, in the Paraná's countryside, Endlich (2009) highlights:

The regional reality encourages reflection upon small cities. Therefore, it is neither about making apologies for this locality type, nor about incorporating bitter cries about the big city. Still, is about respecting and recognizing concrete spaces, often ignored in the political and academic scene (ENDLICH, 2009, p. 22).

Bahia's regional reality refers to this reflection, and also contributes to the state's understanding. In Bahia, efforts have been made to study small and medium-sized cities. As a result of these efforts, every two years, since 2009, the Bahia's Symposiums on Medium and Small Cities have taken place, in which research on the theme is presented. It provides elements for a broader debate on the small cities concept. Likewise, the researcher adds:

For medium and small cities, more than the population classification as medium or small, which would only define them as medium or small cities, it is important to understand their characteristics, their daily lives, their functions and their forms (HENRIQUE, 2010, p. 46).

The main goal of this article is to collaborate with discussions on these spaces, reporting the research's experience refined in them. This effort is lined with the Endlich's thought (2009, p. 30), who states "It is, then, about recognizing the existence of smaller cities. These locations make up a significant part of the Brazilian's territory; furthermore, demographically are still spaces for a significant part of society".

Granted that the division is limited to small cities, we turn to Maia (2010) to start a discussion about the urban's size adjective. The numerical intervals, used to classify small, medium and large cities. The numbers are up to 20 thousand, from 20 thousand to 500 thousand and more than 500 thousand people, respectively. The author helps to infer that these numbers are too discrepant and insufficient for analysis of these spaces. To illustrate, a city with 21 thousand inhabitants, regardless of where it is located, is different from a city with 490 thousand inhabitants. How then could we define both as medium-sized cities? How could we classify small cities only if there are less than 20 thousand inhabitants?

There is no consensus in literature about what would be the numbers and qualitative criteria to classify cities as small, medium and large. Maia (2010, p. 22) points out that “The effort to overcome such nomenclatures has been made, however, it is not yet possible to point to another denomination that turns to a concept. Hence, the preservation of the classificatory names”.

In the study considered, cities such as Barra do Choça and Poções, with respectively 22,407 and 34,659 urban residents, were considered small. As well as cities like Mirante, with an urban population of 1,809 and others with an urban population below 20,000 (see Table 3). As Maia (2010) notes:

[...] one cannot fail to consider the population count when one wants to think about what is called a small and medium-sized city. Still, what is said is that neither this data does reflect the cities studies dynamism, nor the synonymous from the reality (MAIA, 2010, p. 18-19).

Taking into account population counting characteristics, it is necessary to consider the scale of analysis, and the location of these cities in the territory. Because as Maia (2010, p. 19) states, “[...] considering the Brazilian territory [for example], a city of 100 thousand inhabitants in Bahia’s countryside is not the same as a city with the same population in Sao Paulo state [...]”. Not even cities with the same classification, and located in the same region, are the same; or completely different, because the dynamics produced by a geographic network build unique relationships and produce unique spaces within the whole.

In this project, we chose to dialogue with: Endlich (2009), to base, and properly undertake an analysis of the small city in Bahia’s state. In his book “Thinking the roles and meanings of small cities”, Endlick makes a specific study on small towns in Northeast Paraná’s state; and, with Gonçalves (2005), who analyses small towns in Agreste Potiguar. The author’s analysis reveals similarities with the small cities of Bahia and contributes for the conceptual deepening, yet, for the understanding of experienced processes.

In the first place, one can only intervene in space when it is recognized as a social construction. It is compelling to know the space where you live. This space acts as a transforming agent for a given reality. Second of all, it is necessary to recognize oneself as a space-producing agent. Then, recognize oneself as a transforming agent of

space. Hence, the research field has prioritized listening to youth living in these small cities, with daily experiences. Endlich (2009) helps us to understand the local community's participation, when he exposes:

Those men who share the same space, and the same historical moment, not satisfied with the human and social life conditions, will be able to tread together the construction of a new dimension of social relations, and perhaps they will be able to share the same dimension of autonomy (ENDLICH, 2009, p. 35).

In the job field, workshops were held in each city with young people who were in high school. These moments were marked by debates about existing problems in the city, also possibilities of solving them and positive points of small cities. During the debates, an awakening to a more active presence of young people in the construction of the city was encouraged. The City Decree, Law No. 10,257, was presented. It's the main legal instrument related to Brazilian urban policy and the exercise of citizenship. The students were inspired to debate the issues, mediated by the researchers.

During the workshops, videos were shown, texts readings were made, preparation and presentation of posters were made, as shown in (Panel 1). After reflecting on the reality experienced, the students pointed out the positive and negative characteristics of their city, while elaborating possible solutions to the problems listed.

Panel 1 - Workshops highlights held in a High School, in TISB small city, 2015 and 2016



Source: Project "Training Community Leaders and Small Cities Agenda in Vitória da Conquista's Identity Territory", 2015 and 2016

Throughout the whole project's accomplishment, readings were carried out, surveys from primary and secondary, as well as sources and fieldwork taken in all 23 cities, with iconography's production. Photographs were produced in each of these features: streets, houses, squares, churches, street markets, shops, health centers, hospitals, schools, courts, rivers, landfill, etc. (Panels 2 and 3).

Panel 2 – TISB Small Towns's Landscapes, 2015 e 2016



Source: Field works "Graduation of Community Leaders and Agenda for Small Cities in the Identity Territory of Vitória da Conquista", 2015 and 2016

Panel 3 – Landscapes representing problems in small TISB cities, 2015 and 2016



Source: Project Field Works "Graduation of Community Leaders and Agenda for Small Cities in the Identity Territory of Vitória da Conquista", 2015 and 2016

These images were produced aiming to register urban landscapes and guiding empirical studies to provide theoretical advancement. This idea is corroborated by Gonçalves (2005, p. 18), when he states:

[...] The systematized information's limited availability on the urban at its lower boundaries, places us in front of the need to produce more empirical studies, so that the reflection on the theme can be enriched and advance theoretically (GONÇALVES, 2005, p. 18).

Each of the photographed elements is essential to deepen the understanding of the city. According to Gonçalves (2005), farmer's market and flea markets, for example, are important places to be analyzed. Because, "they constitute an economic, social and cultural event, which bring together sellers and buyers of various goods in a given location, on a regular basis" (GONÇALVES, 2005, p. 144). The author adds:

We realize that open markets play a significant role in the economic life of small cities and through them we can see how the products supplied by large companies, and the regional economic production itself, reach the population's consumers. Thus, shows the insertion of such cities in the capital consumption cycle (GONÇALVES, 2005, p. 148).

Similarly to the farmer's market and flea market, each of the other aspects photographed reveals its continuous city's production process, its uniqueness in its entirety. As supported by Santos, M. (2004)

[...] The totality category is like a key to the understanding of this movement [...] the space, with the endless succession of forms-content [...], meanwhile we consider it as existing within a permanent process of totalization, at the same time, a process of unification and fragmentation and individuation take place. This is how places are created, and are recreated and renewed, with each movement of society (SANTOS, M., 2004, p. 25).

It was also a concern in this study to register aspects of urban problems experienced in small cities, as highlighted by Gonçalves (2005, p. 17). In his analysis of Agreste Potiguar, he states, "Our look is directed to small urban centers, areas that also express serious social, economic and environmental problems in the landscape, which add up to the majority of Brazilian citizens".

The direct observation exercised, the data collected, the readings carried out and the information obtained in the workshops helped to understand the researching reality and make it possible to unveil characteristics of small cities, through the eyes of those who live in it daily. About this type of conduct Endlich (2009), in his study, states:

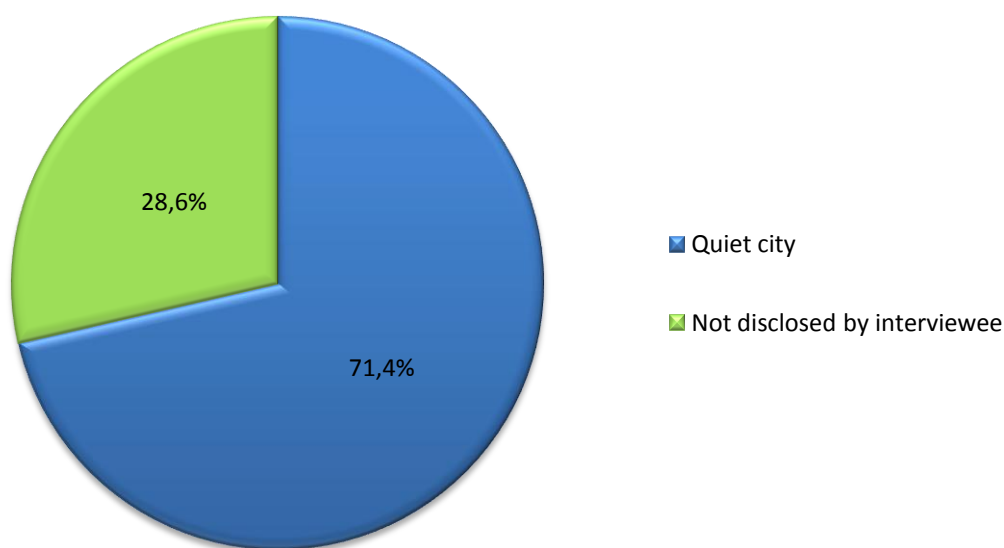
This conduct sought avoiding a discourse about it, and incorporated even if minimally, people's manifestations. For that, it was necessary to take into account the construction of empirical knowledge, contemplating the social and the human aspects, as Freitas (2002, p.24) rightly points out, one does not work with a numb object that is merely contemplated to know it. Provided that, the analysis includes

subjects' lives who have a voice and express themselves in different ways (ENDLICH, 2009, p. 288).

As concrete spaces, experienced on a daily basis, small towns are revealed in the speeches, drawings, narratives and posters produced by young citizens. Several aspects were addressed and express the resident's view of the city. In this article, graphs 1 to 5 present some of the data collected during the research responses. This information allows further analysis about small cities, especially those in Bahia's countryside.

A persistent element that appears is the serenity's restraint feeling. Considered as a positive point of the small cities surveyed. In 71.4% of cases, the subject's residence city is mentioned and classified as quiet (Graph 1). However, as Endlich (2009, p. 293) warns, "The immediate association of these attributes with certain spaces, in this case small cities, should also be prudent. Despite the tranquility that seems to prevail in these cities, there, too, is discernible the time consumed by work".

Graph 1 - Young citizen's evaluation of small towns in the Southwest Bahia's Identity Territory, about their respective residence city, 2015



Source: Essays produced by high school students, during their MEC / UESB extension program project titled "Training small cities' young leaders and their agenda in Vitória da Conquista's territory of Identity", 2015.

Despite emphasizing peacefulness as a positive city's aspect, paradoxically, young people point out this quality as a negative point. Violence growth and the leak of police force, as can be seen in Graph 2, stands out. This same paradox was verified by

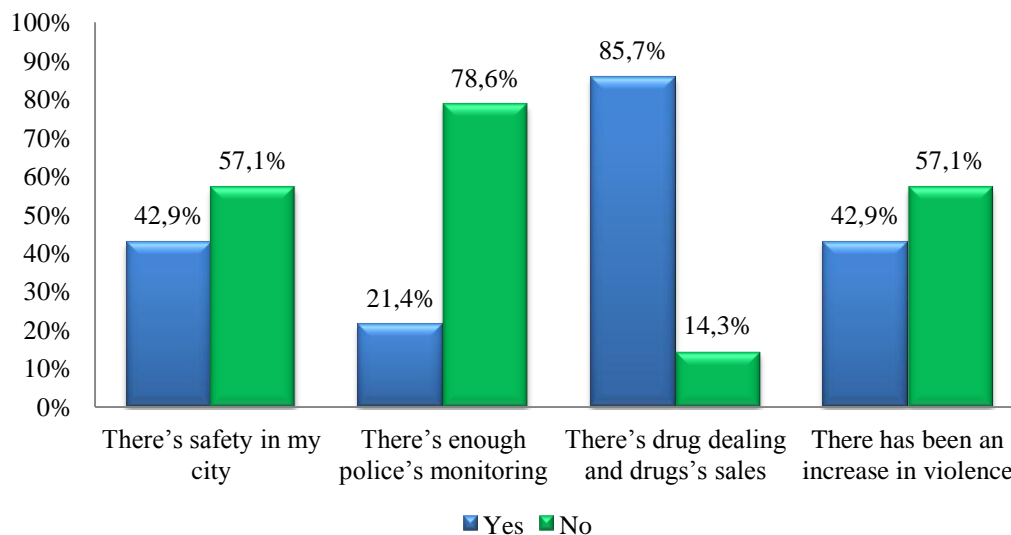
Endlich (2009), because when she reports her research's experience in small towns in the Northeast of Paraná, she exposes:

One more quality valued by the locals is safety. It's likely to be in a comparative nature, and influenced thoughts by the media. However, it must be said that there are demonstrations concerning problems with safety. These dubious assessments indicate a transformation process pointing to the characteristic of loss. So the residents, based on their own experience, sometimes state the presence of security and sometimes the lack of it (ENDLICH, 2009, p. 294).

As exposed by the author, in the TISB's cities surveyed, security still abounds as a positive point.

Related to infrastructure, Graph 3 summarizes elements pointed out by young's residents. Most of them affirm there are negative points in the small cities in which they live. The downpoin[s] were the lack of: sanitation (78.6%); landfill (71.4%); and accessibility (42.9%). They also point out that public streets paving and lighting are poorly distributed and do not serve the urban population equally.

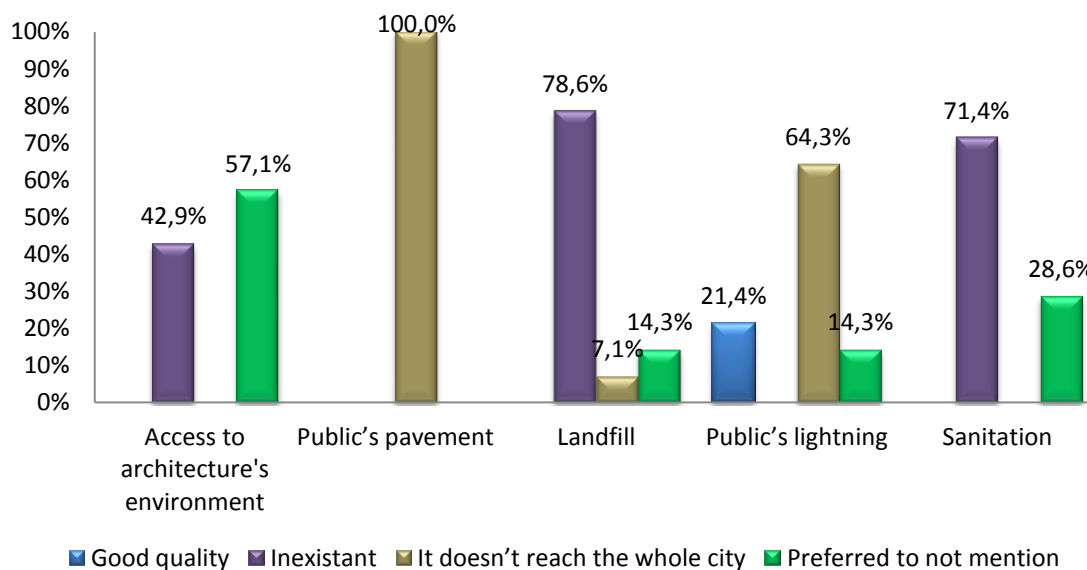
Graph 2 - Young citizen's evaluation of small towns in the Southwest Bahia's Identity Territory, about their city's safety, 2015



Source: Essays produced by high school students, during their MEC / UESB extension program project "Youth Leadership training - young leaders and their agenda in Vitória da Conquista's territory of Identity", 2015.



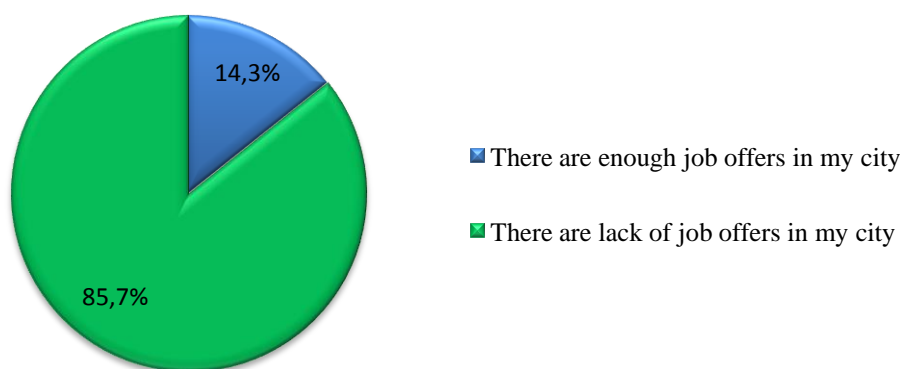
Graph 3 - Young citizen's evaluation of small towns in the Southwest Bahia's Identity Territory, city's infrastructure aspects, 2015



Source: Essays produced by high school students, during their MEC / UESB extension program project "Youth Leadership training - young leaders and their agenda in Vitória da Conquista's territory of Identity", 2015.

Another negative element pointed out among the cities surveyed is the lack of job offers, as shown in Graph 4.

Graph 4 - Young citizen's evaluation of small towns in the Southwest Bahia's Identity Territory, about their city's available job offers, 2015



Source: Essays produced by high school students, during their MEC / UESB extension program project "Youth Leadership training - young leaders and their agenda in Vitória da Conquista's territory of Identity", 2015.

According to young citizens as well as information provided by IBGE and SEI, most of the jobs offered in TISB's small towns are linked to city halls. There is a shortage of job offers. This aspect is verified, by Gonçalves (2005), when he affirms:

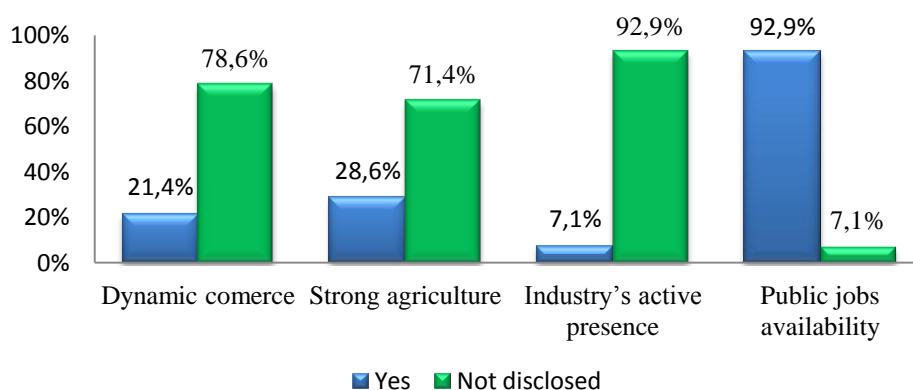
In most cities analyzed, the tertiary sector provides simple services and employs civil servants, corresponding to a large portion of jobs available in Agreste Potiguar's small towns. Existing businesses require little manpower. Family's employment predominates in these businesses [...] (GONÇALVES, 2005, p. 113).

Besides, the author corroborates Agreste Potiguar aspects that are also recognized in TISB.

[...] We realized that unemployment, lack of perspectives, social problems, among others, are examples of real inconveniences, are part of the vast majority of small town's residents in Agreste Potiguar's daily lives. [...] The main source of economic resources, in most cases observed, is the State. The state provides welfare programs, public jobs and retirement benefits. In some cases, the situation is so dire that the very administrative and economic viability of such urban centers is called into question (GONÇALVES, 2005, p. 135).

Graph 5 details TISB'S youth evaluation on aspects such as the cities' economy where they live and reinforces the situation reported by Gonçalves, not reserved exclusively to a single region in Brazil.

Graph 5 - Young citizen's evaluation of small towns in the Identity Territory Southwest Bahia's, about the economy in their city, 2015



Source: Essays produced by high school students, during their MEC / UESB extension program project "Youth Leadership training - young leaders and their agenda in Vitória da Conquista's territory of Identity", 2015

The residents dependence on public employment reveals a serious situation in these small towns: the practical persuasion imposed by political groups in power. This occurrence leads to an assessment of

Thinking about man's space through small cities bias leads to its ideal and utopian dimensions opposition, philosophically pointed out as

places that favor political participation, with the concrete dimension, because in small cities it is observed that participation is treed with people's intimidation and social conflicts (ENDLICH, 2009, p. 315).

During the workshops, there were events presented in different cities such as: the recording of all the project's activities made by the students participating, with the goal of showing it to the mayor. Also, were presented statements such as "We are afraid to point out the city's problems here in the workshop's surveys, because we can suffer consequences from it." (J. P. M. S., Oral report, MEC / UESB extension program project "Youth Leadership training - young leaders and their agenda in Vitória da Conquista's territory of Identity", 2015). Thus, it was a challenge to work on participations and young training leaders in this context.

### **Final considerations**

The Identity Territories established by Bahia's state government are not homogeneous, nor are the residents and cities that take part in these regional cuttings. The studies reaffirmed that there is no space's homogeneity. Despite revealing the similarities between cities surveyed, each place is unique and expresses its totality. The inequalities are remarkable. However there are similarities between the municipalities in the TISB region, not restricted to the population's aspect alone.

Located in the TISB, Vitória da Conquista's city stands out in population, social and economic terms. Also, in the territory as a whole, these factors contribute to classify its municipal headquarters as a medium city. All the other 23 cities in terms of their territories were considered small, although it is understood that we find qualitative and quantitative differences between them.

The majority of the 24 TISB cities, more specifically sixteen of them, concentrates the majority of their population in the countryside. Aracatu, Bom Jesus da Serra, Caetanos, Caraíbas, Condeúda, Cordeiros, Encruzilhada, Guajeru, Jacaraci, Maetinga, Mirante, Mortugaba, Piripá, Presidente Jânio Quadros and Tremedal are rural cities.

The territory presents contradictions related to the resident city's profile, deeply, in number of inhabitants, residence's place, GDP and development indicators. These contradictions were considered relevant in discussions about issues, challenges and possibilities for political engagement of young city dwellers.

There is unity in the academic community's debate about the right criteria of how to define cities as small, medium and large. Still, efforts have been made to overcome such denominations. More than adjectivating the size of a city, it is important to understand how to live in that city. This was the methodological path undertaken with this projects' development presented in this article. We chose to name all TISB's cities as small, except Vitória da Conquista. We decided to focus our efforts showing young people daily lives, who live in these cities.

The debate encouraged young people to think about their cities. It made it possible to systematize agendas to be led by them. It is understable that one can intervene in space when it is recognized as a social construction. It is necessary to know the place where one lives to act as a transforming agent of a given reality.

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