


# GUAJAREAR: TERRITORY PROMOTION AND LEISURE EXPERIENCES IN WESTERN AMAZONIA<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** This article presents the results of the teaching, research, and extension project titled Guajarear: Valuing space and local culture in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim – Rondônia (“*Guajarear: valorização do espaço e cultura local no município de Guajará-Mirim – Rondônia*”). The project aimed to develop educational actions and tools towards adding value to local identity and enhancing regional tourism and leisure activities in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim. The proposed methodology consisted of mapping, visiting, experiencing, and describing local cultural and leisure spaces, conducting roundtable discussions with different local stakeholders to perceive

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the sense of belonging and local identity in the region, and creating digital tools to showcase these spaces to the local community and visitors/tourists. The achieved results included the mapping of leisure spaces and festive dates, as well as the diagnosis of possibilities for tourist development as a strategy for local community development.

**KEYWORDS:** Leisure. Community-based tourism. Sense of belonging.

### **GUAJAREAR: EXPERIÊNCIAS DE VALORIZAÇÃO DO TERRITÓRIO E LAZER NA AMAZÔNIA OCIDENTAL**

**RESUMO:** O artigo apresenta os resultados do projeto de ensino, pesquisa e extensão: “Guajarear: valorização do espaço e cultura local no município de Guajará-Mirim –Rondônia”. O objetivo do projeto foi desenvolver ações e ferramentas educativas para valorização da identidade local e potencialização de atividades de turismo de base comunitária no município. A metodologia proposta consistiu no mapeamento, visita, vivência e descrição de espaços de cultura e lazer locais, rodas de conversa com os diferentes atores locais em vistas da percepção do sentimento de pertencimento e da identidade local na região; e a criação de ferramentas digitais que apresentem tais os espaços mapeados. Os resultados alcançados foram o mapeamento dos espaços de lazer e datas festivas, bem como o diagnóstico das possibilidades de crescimento turístico como estratégia de desenvolvimento comunitário local.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Lazer. Turismo de base comunitária. Sentimento de pertencimento.

## **Introduction**

The relationship between the territorial space, the people who inhabit it, and their stories, make up, in some way, the local cultural identity. In this context, philosopher Stuart Hall (2006) highlights the ambiguity of globalization, which, while moving towards the homogenization of national cultures into global identities, also manifests the resistance and strengthening of local identities (sometimes as xenophobic fundamentalism, sometimes as resistance against extermination), the possibility of new identities emerging and the fascination and commodification of the local, seen as exotic.

In this regard, Milton Santos (2022) optimistically announced how the homogenization of cultures through the destructive imposition of a globalizing mass culture is an ideology that, in addition to not being achieved, dialectically favors local

communities to emerge from their own “places” and promote a new ethic and a new politics, based not on market values, but on mutual solidarity and full citizenship.

Thus, belonging and cultural knowledge are fundamental to a community identity. There must be a feeling of unity and belonging on the part of people, as it is in these places that social relationships are formed (CHAUI, 1989). Feeling like you belong somewhere is a condition of existence and is also an ecological condition of residence in the world (GRÜN, 2008). Furthermore, according to Freire and Vieira (2006), the concept of belonging, etymologically speaking, encompasses the idea of "belonging to" or "having a link with," and can refer to the individual's relationship with the place.

Based on everyday situations observed in the educational environment at the Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de Rondônia (IFRO), *campus* Guajará-Mirim, and previous conversations with local agents, such as professors from the Universidade Federal de Rondônia, *campus* Guajará Mirim, professionals from the Environmental Development Department of Rondônia State, and community leaders; the proposal to develop a project with regional impact that would help promote the development of local identity and belonging has emerged.

Turning the name of the municipality into a verb, a group of researchers linked to IFRO created the Guajarear project – an integrated and interdisciplinary teaching, research, and extension project – which combines knowledge of community-based tourism (CBT) and leisure to help develop a sense of belonging and engagement in local identities. In this article, the sense of belonging concept refers to the subjective and collective perception of individuals living in a given location, which allows for an identity bond with the territory.

Cities are distinguished from each other by fixed objects and flows, which give meaning to residents (SANTOS, 2022). Furthermore, they are configured by objective and subjective questions, therefore, the objective characteristics of Guajará-Mirim, the territory covered in the present study, are highlighted below. Located bordering Bolivia and western Amazon, the municipality of Guajará-Mirim is the second largest in territorial extension in the state of Rondônia, with a 24,856 km<sup>2</sup> area and 46,930 inhabitants (IBGE, 2021). Indigenous lands (TIs) represent 41.57% of the municipality's territory, while conservation units (UCs) occupy 50.49%. Therefore, legally protected areas total 92.06% of its entire extension. As a result of these factors, the city received the title of Green City in 2009, granted by the Instituto Ambiental Biosfera (CAVALCANTE *et al.*, 2014). Even with so many attractions and tourist and leisure potential in the region, the organized and planned practice of tourism development at a local level is still weak. In fact, research data from Benevides *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that the inhabitants of Guajará Mirim, despite seeing tourism possibilities, do not identify within themselves the conditions to change their socioeconomic reality and the empowerment necessary to solve social problems.

The Guajará-Mirim territory has great population and cultural diversity, with the presence of different human groups that have historically inhabited this space and make it the material base for the construction of their individual and community lives. This scenario of social diversity is made up of Bolivians, indigenous peoples (who inhabited this space well before any delimitation of borders), descendants of black Africans and Afro-diasporic people who remained in the Guaporé Valley after the first gold mining cycle in the 17th century, Europeans, Arabs, and Asians who came because of the Madeira Mamoré Railroad construction and the Catholic and Evangelical missions; Brazilians from the Northeast who came to act as rubber soldiers; among others.

Many leisure activities are routinely practiced by the local population in various urban and non-urban spaces. However, the Guajará-Mirim region lacks actions and projects that strengthen local communities and environmental issues (CAVALCANTE, *et al.*, 2014). Such relationships between human beings and their environment are based on decision-making and problem-solving processes (SÁ, 2005), and these can be transformed by educational processes.

The implementation of integrative educational (policy) projects and experiences, including leisure and CBT, can contribute to changing the attitudes and behaviors of the different social groups involved, providing a consciousness level development, especially of identity and the sense of belonging. Inhabitants of a certain location can develop knowledge, ethical attitudes, affection and a sense of belonging (they need to feel like “inhabitants”) (PARIS *et al.*, 2014).

In this context, CBT presents itself as a development model centered on resources: Human, natural, and infrastructure specific to a given location (BRASIL, 2010). CBT is considered the type of tourism in which the community organizes and provides services to visitors (ICMBIO, 2023), this being the protagonist (FABRINO; NASCIMENTO; COSTA, 2016).

The Ecotourism concept, which is a form of tourism, is relevant to the local reality as it represents a segment of the tourism industry that values the sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage, encouraging its preservation (BRASIL, 2004). Furthermore, it seeks to promote environmental awareness through the interpretation of the environment, contributing to the well-being of local communities (BRASIL, 2004).

Tourism and leisure are cultural phenomena that overlap. The terms leisure, *loisir* and *lazer* come from the Latin *licere*, meaning permitted, to be able, to have the right. Leisure can be considered as the experience of cultural activities, considering

available time/space and the attitude assumed by people in this type of experience (GOMES and PINTO, 2009) and as experienced (practiced or enjoyed) culture in people's available time (MARCELLINO, 1987).

It is necessary to consider leisure in its breadth, in terms of content, its educational aspect – object and instrument of education (MARCELLINO, 1987), and, above all, it is important to consider that it goes beyond a simple rest and entertainment, as it encompasses a broad and complex part of social life. Therefore, leisure can also serve as a foundation for driving change and developing a new social order, in addition to contributing to the formation of community identities, through interaction with culture and an educational process that promotes critical awareness.

The proximity between the individual and the environment (in tourism and leisure activities) allows interaction with nature and its variations (TAHARA; CARNICELLI FILHO, 2013). In this context, the relationships between adventure body practices (ABP) and the environment are a topic of great relevance for educational practices. Incorporating environmental education into adventure activities, such as implementing measures to minimize the impact on the environment, makes it possible to expand the educational aspect of these activities, promoting the development of essential processes to preserve and improve the environment quality.

Based on these factors, this project aimed to develop educational actions and tools, based on the IFRO, *campus* Guajará-Mirim context, with a view to valuing local identity and enhancing regional tourism and leisure activities in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim. With an interdisciplinary approach, the specific objectives involved: Mapping and describing local cultural and leisure spaces; holding discussion groups with different stakeholders regarding the perception of belonging and local identity in the region; promoting the project; organize a visit to a tourist attraction for the academic

community; and create a tourist map that presents the spaces for the community and visitors/tourists.

The expected results were to raise awareness among local groups about the cultural wealth and socioeconomic potential of CBT in the municipality, environmental education, and cultural identity appreciation. The aim of the research was also to provide a map of cultural and leisure spaces available for visits by the community and external tourists in Guajará-Mirim.

## **Methods**

The first actions carried out in the project (starting in October 2022) were the mapping and registration of ecotourism sites, leisure facilities, places intended for ABP and cultural manifestations in the Guajará-Mirim region. The mapping was carried out using social methodology, using the spoken map and the contribution of local residents in data collection. Visits were also made to the listed sites to record their location, using the free resources available on the Google Maps website. The Canva platform was used to artistically create the Guajará-Mirim tourist map.

In November 2022, the project was presented to the academic community of the IFRO, *campus* Guajará-Mirim. The activity was important in the project development to ensure the adherence of different local actors in the mobilization of the proposed actions.

The Guajarear project lasted 1 year, and during this period technical visits were made to leisure spaces and cultural events, including a technical visit to the Rio Pacaás Novos Extractive Reserve. To include the academic community, a visit was organized to a place with tourist potential in the region.

In addition, discussion groups were held with local bodies and agents, such as professors from the Universidade Federal de Rondônia, agents from the Environmental Development Department of Rondônia State, the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) in Guajará-Mirim, and residents with outstanding local knowledge. The conversations aimed to promote dialogue about the viability and impacts of CBT in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim and about possibilities of partnerships in environmental education actions. From the conversation circles, researchers recorded the main topics of the dialogue to support the development of the project's actions. No personal information was collected from the agents involved in the dialogues.

To constantly publicize the project's activities, a social network page (Instagram®) and blog were created using photos and information about the project. These platforms were used to hold a photography contest for the Guajará-Mirim region, with a physical exhibition of the photographs. To participate in this contest, participants should pay attention to the information contained in the notice published on the project pages and submit it to the organization of the Guajarear Project and the Semana das Licenciaturas event. Three jurors were appointed to select the photographs.

## **Results and Discussion**

The Guajarear project was presented to the academic community at the “I IFRO Dance Festival,” with an audience of approximately 200 people. By sharing the project's objectives, methodologies, and expected results with students and education workers, a space was opened for the subsequent exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, the project's exposure to the academic community provided opportunities for interdisciplinary



collaborations, which resulted in professors from different areas joining the project's activities.

Therefore, interaction with the academic community not only validated and enriched Guajarear, but also contributed to its continuity and improvement throughout its execution. Despite such importance, this was the only moment of presentation (FIGURE 1) to a large audience.

**Figure 1:** Presentation of the Guajarear Project to the academic community



**Source:** Guajarear Project image bank (2024).

Discussion groups were held with the local environmental management office from the State Environmental Development Department (SEDAM); the state management of SEDAM of the Pacaás Novos River RESEX; the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) of Guajará-Mirim; professors of the Graduate programs in Geography and Administration at the Federal Universidade Federal de Rondônia (UNIR); and residents with outstanding local knowledge, to discuss the CBT viability and impacts in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim and possibilities of partnerships toward environmental education actions. In addition, a

partnership was established with the “Viva Melhor” institutional project, and a planned visit by IFRO employees was made to Serra dos Parecis, a place with tourist potential in the region.

Considering that territories are shaped by historical processes and permeated by traditions and cultural expressions that contribute to local identity, it is crucial to acknowledge this characteristic, since denying such a finding could trigger an artificialization process of public spaces and, consequently, a feeling of loss by the local population (UNGHERI; MEDINA; PEREIRA, 2022).

Therefore, we initially investigated the cultural manifestations that take place throughout the year in the municipality (Table 1). We recorded 22 cultural manifestations, which are the best known and most attended. Of this total, 9 are manifestations linked to some Christian religion, which reflects the local religious culture.

**Table 1:** Mass cultural manifestations in Guajará-Mirim

CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS	
Hawaiian Dance	Our Lady of Aparecida Feast
Trail bike	Our Lady of the Rubber Tapper Feast
Parish Bingo	Saint Lucy Feast
Bull on the Roll	Saint Peter and Saint Paul Feast
Footvolley Championship	Saint Sebastian Feast
Evangelical Church Championship	Festival of August 6th (in Bolivia)
Iata Cavalcade	Divine Feast
Independence Week Parades	Divine Eternal Father Feast
Border Duel	Peacock Bass Festival
Meeting of the Children and Friends of Guajará	Bands and Fanfares International Festival
Expoagum	Pearl School Games

**Source:** Guajarear Project Database (2024).

Regarding physical spaces, 50 tourism locations, leisure facilities, locations for ABP and cultural events in the Guajará-Mirim region were registered (Table 2). There is

a large presence of places related to tourism and leisure outside the urban center. It is important to emphasize that we did not individually include in Table 2 private locations with culinary interests present in the urban area. Furthermore, in this area, we noticed a small number of leisure spaces, and they were in poor condition. In fact, Amazonian cities have been undergoing transformation processes where there is a shortage of parks and leisure areas; conservation units have precarious infrastructure and access to the few green areas is restricted (BAHIA and FIGUEIREDO, 2008).

It is important to highlight that the Amazonian city has been reference for the incorporation of new areas into the market and also for deforestation, changes in the land structure, and in the land use type (CASTRO, 2006). In this scenario, the spaces registered for ecotourism may undergo significant changes and impacts in the coming years due to the environmental destruction process.

The research revealed that tourism sites were scattered throughout the territory, perhaps because they were natural spaces and not built facilities. Although the space dispersion for leisure activities is interesting, the great distance between these spaces and homes can limit access. Conversely, in research carried out in the city of Belém, the concentration of leisure facilities was found in the urban center of Belém and in the most central neighborhoods (BAHIA; FIGUEIREDO, 2008). In other words, it is essential that analyses of Amazonian municipalities are not generalized, and that each territory is considered with its peculiarities.

As highlighted by Pina (2017), it is essential that spaces and equipment dedicated to leisure do not become mere "non-places." To this end, it is essential that its dynamics be deeply identitarian, relational, and historical, transcending the mere functionality of transit or passing visit places. These spaces must incorporate elements that reflect local identity, promote meaningful interactions between visitors, and have

deep roots in the community history, thus becoming places of true belonging and community experience.

At the time of writing this article, the municipality of Guajará-Mirim did not have a Municipal Tourism Plan, even though Municipal Law no. 1893/2016 had established the municipal tourism system (GUAJARÁ-MIRIM, 2016). The municipal tourism plan could address the lack of publicity and maintenance of spaces problem, since the absence of this type of action results in the population being unaware of their right to access. Furthermore, actions are needed to democratize access to spaces (MARCELLINO; BARBOSA; MARIANO, 2006).

The democratization process is the opposite of that of commodification. It is essential to consider that in the local tourism growth process, public spaces can acquire characteristics that resemble private spaces or become excessively focused on tourism (BAHIA; FIGUEIREDO, 2008). Therefore, a critical bias is necessary in the development of local public policies, favoring CBT as the driving force behind the process. In fact, a critical look at the landscape of cities allows us to understand them in depth, making it possible to establish a local identity portrait and recognize their material and immaterial historical heritage, which can support decision-making within the scope of public policies (UNGHERI; MEDINA; PEREIRA, 2022).

During conversations with the above-mentioned agents – and search for online records – we did not find consolidated experiences of CBT (and its public policies) in the Guajará-Mirim region, even though this is pointed out as a potential for local development (BENEVIDES *et al.* 2016). Records of specific activities were found, such as lectures for the development of CBT in the Rio Ouro Preto RESEX; however, the results of such intervention were not achieved by the present research. Future studies

aiming at understanding the historical construction of CBT in western Amazonia can detail its implementation in the region.

**Table 2:** Mapped locations of leisure/tourism activities

LOCATIONS	
Acrivale Parque de Exposições	PARNA of Serra da Cutia
Balneário do Célio	PARNA of Pacaás Novos
Balneário do Chico Zé	Parque Circuito
Balneário do Dólar	Guajará-Mirim State Park
Balneário do Serginho	Pedra da Memória
Balneário Nossa Senhora do Carmo	Pompeu (RESEX of Rio Ouro Preto)
Banho Folhinha	Porto Oficial
Banho Palheta	Praça do Celeste
Bumbódromo	Praça do Trem
Our Lady of the Rubber Tapper Cathedral	Praça Mário Corrêa
Jiquitaia Farm	Praia das três bocas
Surpresa Distric	Praia do Acácio
Encontro das águas	Praia do Milton
João Saldanha Stadium	Praia dos Amigos
Estrada do Trem	State REBIO of Traçadal
Municipal Trade Fair	REBIO Rio Ouro Preto
Afonso Rodrigues Gymnasium	RESEX Barreiro das Antas
Guajará Aqua Park	RESEX of Rio Cautário
Igarapé do segundo	State RESEX of Rio Cautário
Lagoa Azul	RESEX Rio Pacaás Novos
Municipal Market	Açaí Restaurant
Cachoeira Viewpoint	Serra dos Parecis
Laje de Pedra Viewpoint	Chicão Farm
EFMM Museum	Véu das Noivas (Paredão)
Pakaas Palafitas Lounge	Vila Iata

**Source:** Guajarear Project Database (2024).

We have created a local tourist map using our database of leisure and tourism spaces in Guajará-Mirim. Its first version was printed and displayed during the VI Encontro de Iniciação Científica e Inovação Tecnológica of the IFRO, *campus* Guajará-Mirim so that participants (students, teachers, and external community) could write leisure and tourism locations on the map (FIGURE 2). Based on these writings





The map development assumes that maps are essential tools for representing perspectives on spaces, directly influencing our conceptions and understandings of space (HARLEY; WOODWARD, 1987), and the production of maps for tourism are one of the most widespread forms of spatial representations in today's society (FERREIRA, 2020).

The Guajarear project ended its activities in October 2023; however, this product in the form of a tourist map will be made available to society and public bodies interested in using it. To our knowledge, this is the first and only tourist map of the city created to date and may help with local knowledge, identity, and democratization.

Creating the social network page on Instagram® (FIGURE 4) and the blog (<https://guajarear.wordpress.com>) has helped to promote the local activities carried out and to hold the photography contest.

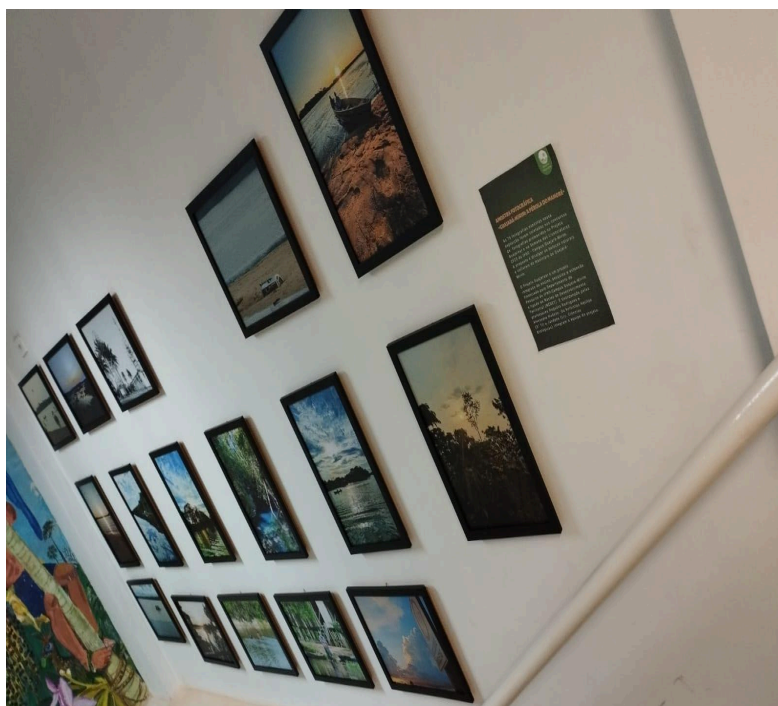
**Figure 4:** Guajarear Project page on social media



Source: Guajarear Project image bank (2024).

The main goal of the Guajarear photography contest was to enhance the tourist, scenic, and cultural potential of the municipality through visits and the perspective of local residents, thus contributing to the identity and sense of belonging. The notice with the rules and information was published on pages and also in apps and social network groups in which some researchers were included. In addition, photographs (with due authorization) of a similar competition held during IFRO's Semana das Licenciaturas were also included. In total, the contest received 76 photographs for consideration by chosen judges, and then 16 were selected for printing and display on *campus* (FIGURE 5). The contest managed to encompass both the academic and external community.

**Figure 5:** Exhibition of landscape photographs



**Source:** Guajarear Project image bank (2024).

It is important to emphasize that the results achieved in this study are limited to what has been presented. The sense of belonging and identity were not assessed through qualitative or quantitative methods that could indicate the influence of the tools developed by the Guajarear project on local communities.



## **Final Considerations**

The Guajarear Project development has provided systematization and analysis of the cultural and territorial reality in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim, highlighting its spaces' quantity and potential for leisure, tourism, and cultural manifestations. The interdisciplinary approach adopted revealed not only the importance of these spaces in the construction of local identity, but also highlighted the gaps and challenges that exist in promoting CBT and strengthening belonging and identity.

The leisure and tourism space mapping, combined with discussion groups with various local stakeholders, has allowed for a broader understanding on the strengths and weaknesses of the tourism and cultural scene in Guajará-Mirim. The population and cultural diversity present in the municipality reveals the complexity and richness of the relationships between the different groups that inhabit the region and must be considered in future projects.

The tourist map creation, a direct result from the project, represents an important milestone in the promotion of the city's leisure and tourism spaces. Furthermore, holding the photography contest was an attempt to enhance the local tourist, landscape, and cultural potential, and may have strengthened the sense of belonging and local identity of those involved.

It is essential to highlight the importance of public policies aimed at the development of CBT and the preservation of the cultural and natural spaces in Guajará-Mirim. The Guajarear project has demonstrated that strengthening local identity and stimulating tourism can contribute not only to the economic development of the region, but also to the culture and historical and environmental heritage appreciation.

Given the challenges faced and the potential identified throughout the project, it is essential that similar initiatives are encouraged and supported, both by the local community and by public bodies and teaching and research institutions. Only through a collaborative and integrated approach it will be possible to promote democratic tourist and cultural development in Guajará-Mirim and the region.

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