Original article

Núcleo de Estudos, Pesquisas e Projetos de Reforma Agrária – NERA, Presidente Prudente/SP, Brasil.
ISSN: 1806-6755
Rev. NERA | Presidente Prudente, SP | v. 28, n. 4 | e11040 | 2025.
DOI: 10.1590/1806-675520252811040en

Riverside trajectory, public policies and socio-environmental dynamics in the Ilha Grande Agroextractive Settlement Project, Belém, Pará, Brazil

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Abstract

The municipality of Belém, state of Pará, comprises 36,81% of its territory in island areas. Within these insular territories, the national land tenure regularization policy has recognized the rights of traditional resident populations and established seven Agroextractive Settlement Projects (PAEs) between 2006 and 2009. Among these, the PAE Ilha Grande Belém was selected as a case study in order to analyze its trajectory since its creation, access to public policies, and the dynamics of socio-environmental transformations in the context of proximity to a capital city. This study grounded in semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and literature review. The findings reveal that, historically, many riverine inhabitants were subordinate to a “patrão” — the alleged landowner of the island. The implementation of the settlement policy marked a significant milestone and facilitated access to other public programs. Nevertheless, the population continues to face challenges due to the inefficacy of essential public services such as education, healthcare, and access to potable water. Market pressures from agroextractive activities and tourism present opportunities for these communities, yet they also highlight transformations that warrant deeper investigation into potential socio-environmental risks.

Keywords: Traditional population; riverine community; rural development.

Trajetória ribeirinha, políticas públicas e dinâmicas socioambientais no Projeto de Assentamento Agroextrativista Ilha Grande, Belém, Pará, Brasil

Resumo

O município de Belém, Pará, configura-se com 36,81% do seu território em ilhas. Nesses territórios insulares, a política nacional de regularização fundiária reconheceu o direito de populações tradicionais residentes e criou sete Projetos de Assentamento Agroextrativista (PAE’s) entre os anos de 2006 e 2009. Dentre esses, foi selecionado para estudo de caso o PAE Ilha Grande Belém, com o objetivo de analisar sua trajetória desde a criação, acessos às políticas públicas e as dinâmicas de transformações socioambientais no contexto de proximidade a uma capital. O estudo embasou-se em entrevistas semiestruturadas, pesquisa documental e bibliográfica. A análise identificou que, historicamente, grande parte dos ribeirinhos esteve sujeita a um patrão, o suposto proprietário da ilha. A política de assentamento representou um marco relevante e, a partir dela, foi possível o acesso a outras. Ainda assim, a população se ressente da ineficácia de políticas públicas essenciais como educação, saúde e água potável. Pressões mercadológicas do agroextrativismo e atividades turísticas configuram oportunidades para as comunidades, mas evidenciam

transformações que requerem maior investigação acerca dos possíveis riscos socioambientais.

Palavras-chave: População tradicional; comunidade ribeirinha; desenvolvimento rural.

Trayectoria ribereña, políticas públicas y dinâmica socioambiental en el Proyecto de Asentamiento Agroextractivo Ilha Grande, Belém, Pará, Brasil

Resumen

El município de Belém, estado de Pará, presenta un 36,81% de su territorio conformado por áreas insulares. En estos territorios, la política nacional de regularización de la tenencia de la tierra reconoció los derechos de las poblaciones tradicionales residentes y creó siete Proyectos de Asentamiento Agroextractivista (PAEs) entre los años 2006 y 2009. Entre ellos, se seleccionó el PAE Ilha Grande Belém como estudio de caso con el objetivo de analizar su trayectoria desde la creación, el acceso a políticas públicas y las dinámicas de transformaciones socioambientales en un contexto de proximidad a una capital. El estudio se basó en entrevistas semiestructuradas, análisis documental y revisión bibliográfica. El análisis identificó que, históricamente, gran parte de los habitantes ribereños estuvieron subordinados a un *patrón*, supuesto propietario de la isla. La política de asentamiento representó un hito importante que posibilitó el acceso a otras políticas públicas. Sin embargo, la población manifiesta insatisfacción ante la ineficacia de servicios esenciales como la educación, la salud y el acceso al agua potable. Las presiones del mercado vinculadas al agroextractivismo y al turismo configuran oportunidades para las comunidades, pero también evidencian transformaciones que requieren una mayor investigación sobre los posibles riesgos socioambientales.

Palabras clave: Población tradicional; comunidad ribereña; desarrollo rural.

Introduction

The municipality of Belém, Pará, has 36.81% of its territory on islands (39 in total), 16.8% on the mainland, and the remainder on water surfaces (46.42%). Belém's islands fringe the city, preserve strong identities shaped by water–forest interactions, and account for 80% of its municipal vegetation cover—299,000 km² (FADESP, 2024). These areas safeguard socio-environmental heritage and provide numerous ecosystem services, including food provisioning, raw materials, medicinal resources, and the regulation of water and climate.

As part of the preparatory efforts for the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-30 – UNFCCC), to be held in November 2025 in Belém, research that supports local governments in fostering public policies for integrated and participatory management of insular areas—grounded in sustainability—is of substantial relevance. In this context, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (2024) presents an assessment of ecosystem services, risk analysis, and climate vulnerability for Belém, aiming to:

> not only mitigate environmental impacts, but also promote climate justice, social inclusion, and sustainable economic development, ensuring a more

> balanced and secure future for all inhabitants of Belém (ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, 2024, p. 2).

COP-30 has stimulated academic debate and is expected to position the Amazon as a central actor in the global climate agenda, advancing governance frameworks that reconcile sustainable development with climate justice, given the uneven exposure of populations to projected critical climate thresholds (Nobre *et al.*, 2025). The event has been promoted as the "Amazon COP," projecting an image of environmental leadership. However, Colón (2025) warns that the conference may turn into a "climate carnival," potentially sidelining local communities and exposing contradictions in the appropriation of Amazonian territories for large global agendas.

Considering these dynamics, it is essential to recognize that urban space and its riverside zones are not merely physical substrates or natural scenery, but socially produced spaces (Lefebvre, 2001). Lefebvre (2001) argues that space is continuously produced through social, economic, and political relations and therefore expresses the struggles and contradictions embedded within it. The term *ribeirinhos*, as defined by Castro (1998), refers to social groups whose livelihoods are based on resources from forests and waterways. These resources are embedded in their ways of life as a fundamental dimension transmitted across generations.

In the case of the southern islands of Belém, this production of space incorporates traditional knowledge, extractivist logics[1], and urbanization pressures, revealing disputes over recognition, permanence, and rights (Silva, 2024). According to Joint Normative Instruction No. 17/2009 (Brazil, 2009), traditional riverside peoples, in their environmental management practices, engage in "*agro-extractivismo*," defined as:

> "[the] combination of extractive activities with cultivation, husbandry, and processing techniques; oriented toward diversification, species consortium, imitation of the structure and patterns of the natural environment, and the use of techniques generally developed from traditional knowledge and practices, from the understanding of ecosystems, and from regional ecological conditions" (Brazil, 2009, p. 2).

The establishment of the *Projeto de Assentamento Agroextrativista* (Agro-Extractive Settlement Project, PAE) by INCRA Ordinance No. 268/1996 inaugurated a phase of valuing standing forest and securing territories for these populations. The PAE was created as a "differentiated" settlement category, intended for "the exploitation of areas endowed with extractive resources through economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sustainable

[1] Extractivism in the Amazon estuary, initially characterized as traditional and sustainable (Homma, 1992), has been reshaped by market-driven pressures, giving rise to a form of commercial neo-extractivism (Acosta, 2013) that stresses ecosystems and reduces the floristic diversity of riverside forests (Freitas *et al.*, 2025). This dynamic demands a systemic perspective that articulates ecological impacts, socioeconomic transformations, and community practices.

activities, to be carried out by the populations that occupy or will occupy the aforementioned areas" (INCRA, 1996, p. 1).

Maia *et al.* (2017), within the framework of the Second National Agrarian Reform Plan (Brazil, 2003), analyzed PAEs as instruments of land regularization for a considerable number of riverside families in *várzea* ecosystems—areas that belong to the Union's patrimony. For the islands of Pará, Maia *et al.* (2017) note that this policy recognized the rights of extractivist riverside populations and promoted the creation of PAEs following the Technical Cooperation Agreement signed in 2005 between the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) and the Secretariat of Federal Heritage (SPU) (Brazil, 2005).

The objective of SPU's "*Nossa Várzea Project*" was to promote the citizenship of traditional riverside communities, in harmony with sustainable development, through the granting of the *Termo de Autorização de Uso* (Authorization of Use Term, TAU). The TAU guaranteed secure land tenure, ensuring the socio-environmental function of property and enabling access to other governmental social policies (Alves, 2016).

Seven PAEs on the islands of Belém, capital of Pará, were created between 2006 and 2009, settling 796 families (verified operational figure) across an area of 5,723 hectares. These PAEs, along with eleven others, make up the current eighteen established in the Metropolitan Region of Belém (RMB), located on islands in the municipalities of Belém, Ananindeua, and Barcarena, under the jurisdiction of INCRA's Regional Superintendence of Belém—SR01 (Brazil, 2025).

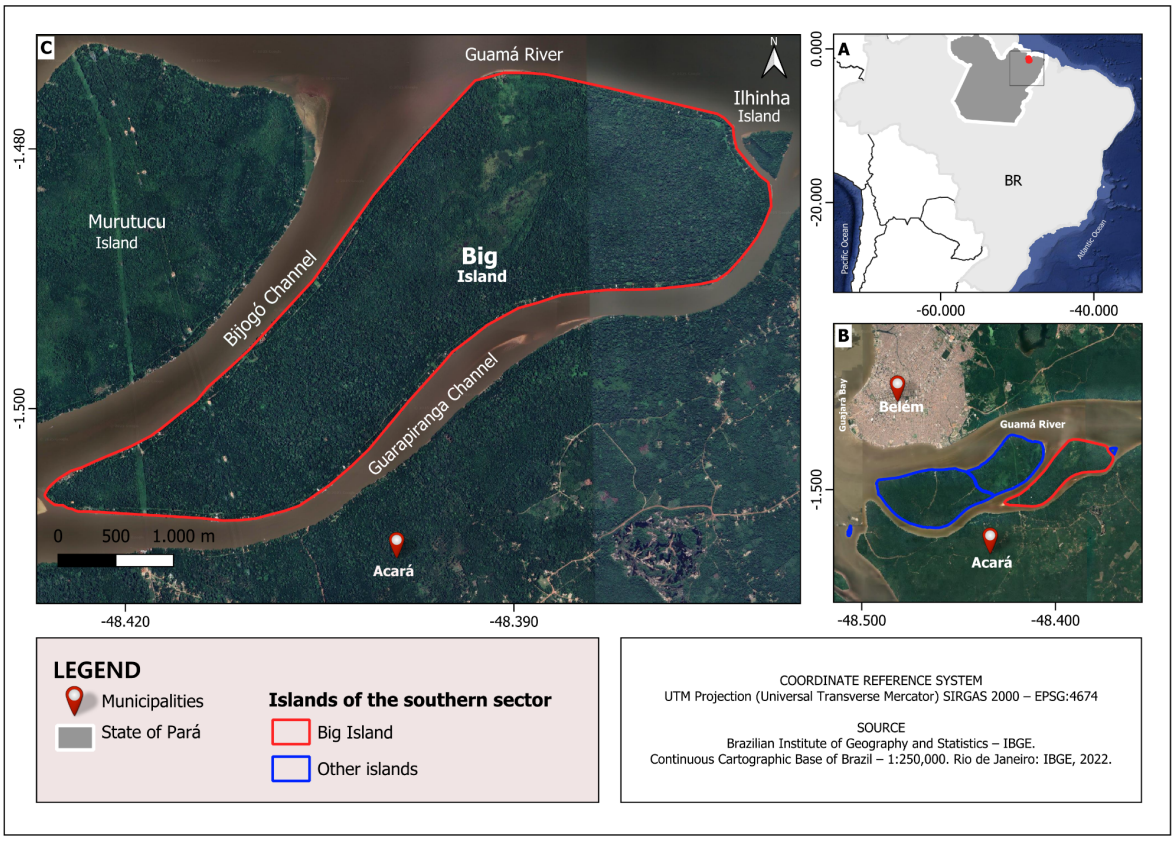
The Southern Sector 9Setor Sul) of the municipality of Belém (PA) is composed of seven islands: Ilha Grande, Ilha do Combu, Ilha Murutucu, Ilha do Maracujá (Cintra), Ilha Negra, Ilha Porticarvônia (Ilhinha), and Ilha dos Patos (Papagaios). Among these, the PAE modality was implemented on the first four (Brazil, 2025). To investigate an island constituted as a *Projeto de Assentamento Agroextrativista* (PAE) in proximity to an urban center, the PAE Ilha Grande Belém (Figure 1) was selected as the case study.

The criteria for this selection considered that traditional insular populations of Belém have historically suffered from a degree of invisibility, threats to their territories, and vulnerability due to underreported official data and the absence of public policies (Vicente *et al.*, 2022). Additional motivations, particularly related to the geographic delimitation within the Setor Sul de Ilhas, included the increasing urban pressure that has encroached upon traditional practices and threatened local ways of life (Silva, 2024; Silva *et al.*, 2023).

The municipality of Belém has a population of 1,303,403 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022), of whom 78,377 live in the insular portion. According to the *Laudo Agronômico de Fiscalização* prepared for the creation of PAE Ilha Grande Belém (INCRA, 2006c), Ilha Grande covers an area of 923.65 hectares, ranking as the second largest island in the Southern Sector and located 12.20 km in a straight line from the municipal center. For administrative purposes of the Municipal Government of Belém, the island (as well as all

islands in the Southern Sector) is linked to the *Distrito Administrativo do Outeiro* (DAOUT) (Secretaria Municipal de Coordenação Geral do Planejamento e Gestão de Belém, 2020). This arrangement complicates recognition and access to public policies, as the Ilha do Outeiro's area of influence is considerable. The current revision report of the Municipal Master Plan (FADESP, 2024) highlights the need to create the Distrito Ilhas Sul, which, if implemented, would significantly improve communication between this sector and municipal management.

Figure 1: Map of the study area. A – Location in the state of Pará, Brazil; B – Southern Island Sector (Setor Sul de Ilhas) of the municipality of Belém, Pará; C – Ilha Grande.



Source: Authors (2025); Elaborated by Géssica da Silva e Silva.

In this context, the objectives of the study were to understand and analyze the trajectory of a *ribeirinho-urbano* way of life in Belém as an agrarian reform settlement, its access to and challenges with public policies, and how residents perceive the changes brought about by market expansion in the region.

The article is structured into four sections: **The creation of PAE Ilha Grande Belém**, which discusses the trajectory of the riverside territory until its establishment as a settlement; **Installation Credit Policies and rural extension**, and **Policies for the provision of essential services**, which contextualize public policies; **Current perspectives:**

opportunities or vulnerabilities? which presents local perceptions of ongoing socio-environmental changes.

Methodological Procedures

Research Characterization and Sampling

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature (Gil, 2008), and data were collected between November 2022 and May 2024. Participants included *agroextrativistas*, both first-generation settlers (*assentados*) and second- and third-generation descendants of PAE Ilha Grande Belém. Semi-structured interviews[2] were conducted with 29 family units, community leaders, technical staff from INCRA, and personnel from the *Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado do Pará* (EMATER-PA). The interviews followed a script containing broad questions addressing historical trajectories, public policies, and socio-environmental challenges.

Interview transcripts and field audio recordings were analyzed using Context Coding (Bogdan; Biklen, 1994), seeking information related to the overall situation examined in the study. Additional methodological procedures included bibliographic research, photographic documentation, and analysis of documents available in online databases and in the archives of INCRA and EMATER-PA.

Results and Discussion

The Creation of PAE Ilha Grande Belém

Beginning in the late 1950s, most of Ilha Grande came under the control of a supposed landowner. This individual lived in the island's northwest region, on Fazenda Nazaré. This property engaged in cattle ranching and extracted *açaí* palm heart (Euterpe oleracea Mart.) and rubber latex from rubber trees (*Hevea brasiliensis* (Willd. ex A. Juss.) Mill. Arg.). According to the interview data, at that time, the farm area was divided into plots allocated to families from Ilha do Marajó who came to work for the landowner. Their obligation was to give up part of what they produced through *meia* (sharecropping: half of production) or *terça* (one-third of production), meaning they were required to surrender half or one-third of the products or livestock they extracted. A foreman of the "*patrão*" collected products from the *ribeirinhos* weekly:

> "There was a time when I raised a lot of pigs. I had up to 25 castrated pigs here in the yard. But if you raised a pig and sold it, the money had to be split

[2] The study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Universidade do Estado do Pará and approved through Plataforma Brasil (CAAE No. 019823.6.00005174). Participation was conditioned on informed consent and the signing of the Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido (TCLE), in accordance with Resolution No. 466/2012 (Brazil, 2013). The identities of all participants were preserved.

> in half — half was his, the owner's. Back then nobody could get anything for themselves here; everything was split in the *meia*. People in those days didn't lift their heads around here, they just worked for others." (Agroextrativist, A1, 63 years old).

Ilha Grande comprises federal public *terras de Marinha*, property of the Union, and therefore could not legally have a private owner (Brazil, 1988). The situation described reflects a form of illegal appropriation—possession exercised through subjugation of residents ("tenants"), who were brought in to work and live under a system of patronage. Starting in the 2000s, *agroextrativistas* from the portion of the island under the "*patrão's*" control, dissatisfied with the regime, began mobilizing for recognition of their territories with INCRA and SPU.

The creation of the Ilha Grande settlement in 2006, formalized through INCRA Ordinance SR-01 No. 278/2006, resulted from collective local organization in resistance to longstanding mechanisms of domination. This occurred in parallel with INCRA's broader policy of land regularization through PAEs, made possible by the Technical Cooperation Agreement between SPU and INCRA (Brazil, 2005). In this document, SPU authorized INCRA to establish sustainable settlement projects aimed at promoting land regularization of *várzea* areas in the Amazon region, intended for traditional populations already residing in those territories.

Nonetheless, the private farm continued to claim presence on the island, and local conflicts persisted, as documented by INCRA (2006c), hindering the full implementation of the project and preventing the issuance of definitive land titles to the communities. According to Nóvoa (2025), only now—almost 20 years after the creation of the PAE—has the Federal Regional Court of the 1st Region (TRF1) ordered the cancellation of the private property registration on the island, as it exceeded the island's actual size and concerned public land belonging to the Union.

The struggle for territory on Ilha Grande must also be understood as resistance to historical mechanisms of domination. Haesbaert (2004) emphasizes that territory is not merely physical space, but a space of power and identity, where local populations exercise the right to remain and build their lives autonomously. Similarly, Oliveira and Mota (2022) argue that in Amazonian agro-extractive settlements, land regularization alone does not dismantle structural inequalities; ongoing social struggle is essential to securing dignified permanence in the territory.

In this context, the defense of territory by traditional populations is also situated within the framework of socio-environmental justice, understood as the articulation of social equity, territorial rights, and environmental conservation grounded in recognition of local knowledge and ways of life (Acselrad, 2009). Thus, remaining in the territory represents not

only a land-related issue, but the right to reproduce a social, cultural, and ecological life threatened by the exclusionary logic of capital.

Following the settlement's creation, the Plano de Uso (PU) for PAE Ilha Grande Belém was approved in 2007 (INCRA, 2007). According to the PU:

> "The livelihood of the residents of PAE ILHA GRANDE will rely on the traditional combination of productive activities that do not destroy the ecological bases of production and thus allow their maintenance over the years. Among the various productive activities are agricultural, forestry, extractive, artisanal, and fishing practices." (INCRA, 2007, p. 2).

In practice, the PU functions as a regulatory framework for natural resource use within the PAE, prepared by INCRA and submitted for approval by the *assentados*. As in Almeida's (2021) critiques, the PU in this case proved to be a technical document conceived in the simplicity of a single meeting, with limited consideration of local specificities. Moreover, although the document mandates that the project be conducted on a sustainable basis, no subsequent monitoring by INCRA or the provision of public policies to support environmental, economic, or social development occurred.

Installation Credit Policies and Rural Extension

With the creation of PAE Ilha Grande Belém, 99 families were *assentadas* (agrarian reform settlers), totaling 312 residents (Brazil, 2006b). However, given the 18 years that have passed since its establishment, a new registration process is needed, as new family units have emerged. Currently, 180 family units are recorded by EMATER-PA. This means that 81 new families—including second- and third-generation descendants of the original *assentados*—remain invisible to the PNRA and without access to agrarian policy.

When a PAE is created, each family unit receives its registration and becomes a beneficiary of the PNRA, is entered into the Agrarian Reform Project Information System (SIPRA), and gains access to agricultural credit policies. Regarding the installation and development of productive activities within a settlement, the Second National Agrarian Reform Plan (II PNRA) provides resources to beneficiaries. The so-called *Crédito Instalação* is the first stage of financing granted by INCRA and is regulated by Decree No. 11.586/2023 (Brazil, 2023).

Between 2006 and 2009, the lines of *Crédito Instalação* under the categories "*Habitacional* (building materials)" and "*Apoio Inicial*" (basic inputs for agro-extractive activities) were made available to the beneficiaries of PAE Ilha Grande. Only 56 of the 99 *assentado* family units received access to these credits. According to interviews with INCRA, from 2009 to 2025, no additional credit lines were granted by the institute beyond those initial ones.

Regarding rural technical assistance, EMATER-PA was unanimously recognized for its satisfactory performance. Documentary data indicate that 68% of the *assentados* are beneficiaries of the State Program for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (PROATER), coordinated by EMATER-PA, which provides technical guidance for cultivation/ management and authorizes eligibility for agricultural credit lines available to PNRA beneficiaries.

Approval of agricultural credit projects began in 2008, two years after the settlement's creation. Since then, a total of 94 projects have been submitted for financing through the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF), particularly through credit lines C, B, and Floresta, according to EMATER-PA. One of the gaps perceived by *agroextrativistas* concerns the need for credit lines better adapted to their context, enabling financial access without the usual risks of indebtedness.

With the growing market value of *açaí* in recent years, accounts from *agroextrativistas* on Ilha Grande reveal that the implementation of the PAE increased purchasing power, resulting in improved housing and boats—similar to the context described by Ribeiro (2020). The increasing commodification of *açaí* in Amazonian *várzeas* reflects a transition from traditional extractivism to a capitalist logic that generates both opportunities and risks to ecological sustainability (Freitas *et al.*, 2025) and to the sociocultural fabric of communities (Brondízio *et al.*, 2016). This reconfiguration is intensified by proximity to urban centers such as Belém, making the *ribeirinho* territory a space contested between tradition and market logics (Pereira *et al.*, 2024).

Policies for the Provision of Essential Services

In the historical balance of settlement policy, the Second National Agrarian Reform Plan (Brazil, 2003) for islands and *várzea* areas in the Pará estuary received intense criticism. It was often considered political opportunism that inflated settlement numbers by incorporating pre-existing traditional populations without providing basic infrastructure, such as access to water and sanitation (Paulino *et al.*, 2016). It also created conditions for land grabbing, land concentration, and undermined the potential of agrarian reform itself (Oliveira, 2007; Alentejano, 2022). Maia *et al.* (2017) argue that the National Land Regularization Policy became confused with agrarian reform, masking its numbers and failing to promote local development for extractivist families, who remained abandoned.

More broadly, the provision of essential public services in rural Amazonian settlements continues to face structural challenges, including limited access to healthcare, education, and energy—challenges linked to territorial precariousness and inadequate infrastructure (Souza *et al.*, 2022).

On the islands of the Metropolitan Region of Belém (RMB), where state presence is often fragmented and intermittent, the absence of territorially integrated public policies

undermines the effectiveness of agrarian reform (Costa; Bringel, 2020). Furthermore, as highlighted by Lopes (2020), institutional domination and social resistance dynamics in insular communities reveal a pattern of historical neglect by public authorities, hindering the development of participatory and sustainable policies in these territories.

For the PAE analyzed here, data from *agroextrativistas* indicate that public services remain scarce and inadequate to meet the population's basic needs, compromising minimum conditions for a dignified life (Table 1). Even though they are geographically close to the state capital, these communities face barriers in accessing medical care, public transportation, education, water supply, and other essential services. These gaps demonstrate that proximity to urban centers does not guarantee equitable access to public policies.

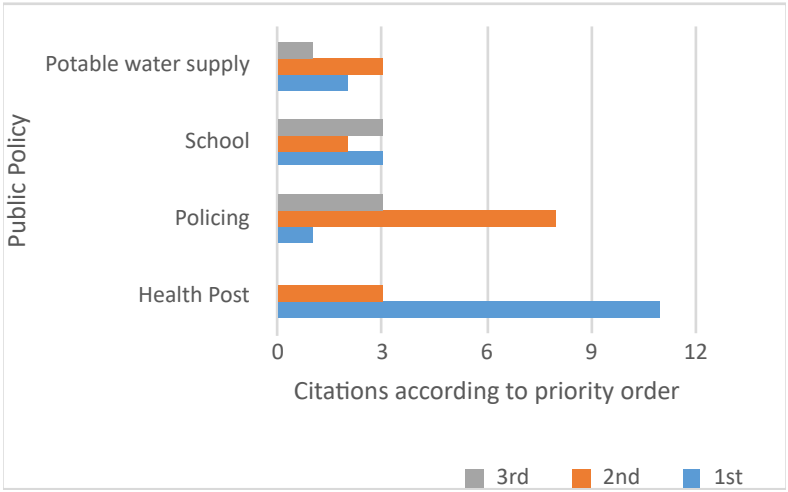
Table 1: Summary of the profile of public services offered on Ilha Grande, Belém.

PUBLIC SERVICE	SUMMARY
EDUCATION	Only one school exists on the island; some grade levels are accessed in Belém or Acará.
WATER	A community supply network is under development, though it still faces technical difficulties.
HEALTH SYSTEM	The nearest Primary Health Care Unit is located on another island, Combu Island.
SEGURANÇA	The environment is unsafe due to insufficient public services and infrastructure.
ENERGY	In 2010, an electrical power grid was made available.
TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM	There are boats operating on regular routes; however, the cost is high and there is no public collective transportation.
SANITATION	There is no sewage collection system; wastewater disposal relies on septic tanks.
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT	Public waste collection is deficient and ineffective, and open burning has become a common practice.

Source: Authors, based on field research (2025).

Figure 1 presents the ranking of perceived demand for essential public policy services among *agroextrativistas*. Health services, policing, education, and potable water were identified as top priorities. For health care, residents rely on the *Unidade Básica de Saúde* (UBS) on Ilha do Combu or on health units in Belém. They report dissatisfaction with service quality and express the desire for a health post on Ilha Grande, a *Programa Saúde da Família*, or at least a river ambulance. For many Amazonian *ribeirinho* communities, access to health care is hindered by logistical precariousness and long distances, making medical services extremely inefficient (Domingos; Gonçalves, 2019).

Graph 1: Ranking of perceived demand for public policy services.



Source: Authors, based on field research (2025).

Regarding policing — the second most cited category — residents expressed frustration with public inefficiency. Armed robberies, home invasions, and assaults on local shops are reported as frequent occurrences. Education ranked third in priority. The community highlights the availability of only one school. A further concern relates to students' need to travel to Belém or the municipality of Acará to attend high school or higher education. This is perceived as problematic because, as one participant stated, "children are going too young off the island to continue their studies" (Agroextrativista, A3, 58 years old).

On Ilha Grande, access to potable water previously depended on purchasing water from natural springs. Water from wells is not considered safe for consumption, and—as in many other islands of the region—there is no public water supply system (Veloso; Mendes, 2014). Since 2023, a community-based water system has pumped water from Acará, though it faces technical limitations and operates without public support. Public water supply systems in Amazonian *ribeirinho* communities face chronic challenges, including logistical costs, fragile management structures, and limited prospects for integrated planning, underscoring the precarious presence of the state in these regions (Souza *et al.*, 2012).

Sanitation and solid waste disposal conditions were also documented during interviews, though not highlighted in the ranking. Sanitation is precarious, with no sewage collection system; residents rely on septic tanks. Solid waste collection is officially scheduled weekly, but in practice, it occurs only occasionally. The community's current solution has been burning waste. A comparable pattern occurs on Ilha das Onças (PA), where water contamination and insufficient waste collection and treatment highlight serious failures in public policy across *ribeirinho* territories (Neu *et al.*, 2016).

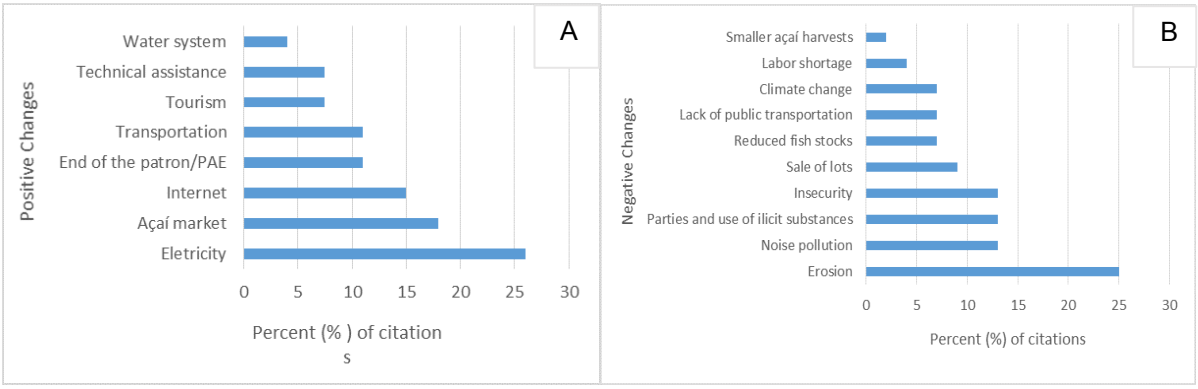
Regarding mobility and connectivity, residents of Ilha Grande engage in daily patterns of fluvial commuting. Travel to Belém (continental portion) was the most frequently cited route, used for commerce, banking, health services, leisure, education, voting, work, and religious activities. The municipalities of Acará and Ilha do Combu were the second and third-most common destinations, respectively. However, these movements significantly affect household income due to the lack of collective public transportation — the only available option being the municipal *barco-escola*.

The absence or precariousness of essential public policies in insular agro-extractive communities illustrates what Haesbaert (2004) calls “structural peripheralization,” which, in the Amazonian context, is expressed not only through physical distance from urban centers but, above all, through political and institutional distance. In the context of PAEs, Incra Normative Instruction No. 129/2022 (INCRA, 2022) establishes that settlements should include essential infrastructure — such as health, education, energy, sanitation, and mobility — through integrated and multisectoral approaches, promoting rural development as a territorial process. However, as the analytical data presented here for Ilha Grande demonstrate, there is a chronic mismatch between formal land policies and the materialization of social guarantees in territories inhabited by populations that have historically acted as environmental stewards.

Current Perspectives: Opportunities or Vulnerabilities?

Perceptions of positive and negative changes over the past ten years (Figure 2) indicate, according to *agroextrativistas*, eight positive changes and ten negative ones. The arrival of electricity in 2010 ranked first among positive transformations, cited by 26% of respondents. In second place (18%) was the increased market value of *açaí*, which significantly strengthened the local economy. Internet access, which became more widely available on the island, accounted for 15% of mentions. Other positive aspects reported, in descending order, include: creation of the PAE and the end of the patronage system, increased availability of regular fluvial transport to the continental seat, growth of tourism, technical assistance, and the installation of the water supply system.

Graph 2: Ranking of changes over the last 10 years. 2A – Positive changes; 2B – Negative changes.



Source: Authors, based on field research (2025).

Although tourism was cited as a positive change, it is directly linked to the top three negative issues: erosion (25%) caused by increased boat traffic, noise pollution, parties, and illicit activities (13% of citations). Additional grievances, listed in descending order, include: insecurity due to precarious public fluvial policing, land parcel sales, declining fish stocks, lack of collective organization, climate change, labor shortages, and smaller *açaí* harvests (Figure 2). The socio-environmental transformations identified in the interviews are increasing and consistent with findings from Silva (2024) and Silva *et al.* (2023).

Over the past decade, leisure tourism has influenced the economy of the islands along the Rio Guamá, particularly Ilha do Combu and, more recently, Ilha Grande. Ilha Grande has been progressively incorporated into Belém's tourism circuit through restaurants, floating bars, event venues, and a labor force shared with Combu, generating employment and income associated with a growing influx of tourists. However, alongside this "progress," deficiencies in sanitation, water insecurity, and vulnerabilities in *ribeirinho* ways of life persist (Lima *et al.*, 2020; Nunes; Furtado, 2023).

Touristification, guided by market logics, promotes the "commoditization of territories" (Campanhola; Silva, 2000), transforming *ribeirinho* landscapes and cultures into marketable attractions, which intensifies real estate speculation (Acserald, 2010). Studies have identified impacts on Combu, such as erosion, lack of sanitation, and loss of biodiversity (Rosa; Cabral, 2016; Silva *et al.*, 2023). For Ilha Grande, *agroextrativistas* already perceive changes in *bem-viver*, especially related to noise pollution: "Those who are making money from tourism think it's all good, but for those who aren't — like the older residents — there's no peace anymore. You can't even lie in your hammock on a Sunday because there are boats passing every minute." (Agroextrativista, A3, 58 years old)

The expansion of tourism in the study area has attracted young people, and labor for agro-extractive work is becoming scarce, leading to the abandonment of productive

areas. This pattern aligns with Bastos (2019), who notes the outmigration of young people from rural settlements in search of more immediate or urban livelihoods, weakening traditional agro-extractive practices and compromising the social and economic sustainability of these territories.

According to INCRA records, nearly 20 years after its creation, PAE Ilha Grande Belém remains in Implementation Phase 03 — corresponding to the creation of the settlement — and definitive land titles have not been issued to the families. Interviews with agroextrativistas reported the sale of plots (referring to built improvements), especially riverfront areas, for tourism-related uses — a process described as “desterritorialization” (Fernandes, 2005; Oliveira, 2004).

The sale of *ribeirinho* land on the islands of Belém should not be interpreted through an individual-blame framework, but rather as symptomatic of broader territorial marginalization. In the absence of public policies guaranteeing infrastructure, land security, and the valuation of traditional ways of life, communities become vulnerable to the logic of tourist-driven real estate speculation. This process reshapes the landscape and transforms territory into a commodity, eroding the prospects for cultural and material continuity of *ribeirinho* forms of existence. As Silva (2024) notes, in the southern islands of Belém, land sales have occurred amid territorial loss, urban pressure, and the erosion of local ways of life, directly threatening the permanence of traditional populations in their historical spaces.

Another contradiction within the territory concerns the absence of integrated governance across the islands, as illustrated in the following excerpt from an interview with the land regulation authority: “In the case of Ilha do Combu, it is simultaneously a settlement, an APA, and yet the Municipal Government of Belém, when issuing permits, treats it as if it were simply a neighborhood of the city.” Such interpretations by regulatory agencies weaken both agrarian reform policy and environmental conservation instruments, opening the door to the disorderly expansion of tourism and land speculation.

Currently, as COP-30 approaches, tourism in these islands has intensified at an alarming pace. This mega-event has heightened the capitalist logic of touristification: programs such as Capacita COP 30, which offer training in sustainable tourism, English, and digital marketing to residents—including those on Ilha Grande—have reinforced territorial fragmentation driven by tourism promotion (Couto, 2025). Furthermore, business initiatives estimate that more than 40,000 visitors will be attracted to Ilha do Combu during the conference, turning it into a “showcase of Amazonian tourism” (Melo, 2025). The arrival of COP-30 exacerbates the commodification of land across the islands.

Given these controversial dynamics, it is increasingly urgent to promote integrated governance in insular territories that reconciles tourism, agrarian reform, and conservation. FADESP (2024), in its technical report for the revision of Belém’s Municipal Master Plan, argues that a new municipal economic agenda centered on social inclusion and sustainable development is essential, “prioritizing an ecology-based bioeconomy that reinforces territorial

planning as a powerful mechanism to make the municipality more just, spatially organized, and economically sustainable" (FADESP, 2024, p. 169).

Final Considerations

The study found that the creation of the PAE represented a partial rupture with the previous regime of territorial subjugation, but did not guarantee the consolidation of an effective model of socio-environmental justice in the territory. Land recognition for the traditional communities of Ilha Grande resulted from local collective organization opposing historical systems of domination, while INCRA was implementing land-recognition policies for PAEs across the estuarine islands of Pará.

However, land regularization still lacks effective coordination with existing public policies. Despite the creation of the settlement in 2006, a considerable gap remains between legal territorial recognition and its materialization in dignified living conditions. INCRA's discontinuities in access to *Crédito Instalação*, deficiencies in housing and basic infrastructure, and the lack of issuance of collective land titles highlight institutional gaps and omissions.

Although EMATER-PA provides technical support for productive activities, key obstacles persist, including the absence of credit lines adapted to the *agroextrativista* context and the invisibility of new family units (second and third generations) not included in the official II PNRA registry. These gaps threaten the continuity of traditional ways of life and the sustainability of the settlement itself.

New drivers of economic transformation—such as mass tourism, illegal land speculation, and the rising market value of *açaí*—have influenced the changes occurring on Ilha Grande. These changes range from the erosion of collective labor and the decline of extractive activities to growing pressure on common natural goods. Gaps in state action—whether in territorial planning, compliance with management and conservation protocols, or the provision of essential services—expose a concerning decline in *bem-viver* among affected communities.

Ilha Grande faces significant vulnerability to the socio-environmental transformations described here. This condition compromises not only territorial rights and the ways of life of traditional communities, but also broader global environmental commitments, particularly in the context of COP-30 in 2025. Ultimately, the study hopes that insular territories will be recognized beyond the lens of market-driven tourism and incorporated into public policies grounded in integrated territorial planning and inclusive management, with protections for contexts of socio-environmental vulnerability.

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Translator's notes (TN)

Glossary of Key Portuguese Terms

This article retains selected Portuguese terms that denote culturally and institutionally specific concepts within Amazonian socio-environmental and agrarian contexts.

- Agroextrativista — Traditional producer whose livelihood integrates cultivation and forest extractivism.
- Agroextrativismo — Hybrid production system combining agriculture and extractive practices.
- Assentado / Assentados — Beneficiary of an Agrarian Reform Settlement (agrarian reform settler).
- Barco-escola — Municipal school boat for riverine student transport.
- Bem-viver — Locally grounded notion of well-being tied to ecological and cultural continuity.
- Distrito Administrativo do Outeiro (DAOUT) — Administrative district responsible for the southern islands of Belém.
- PAE — Projeto de Assentamento Agroextrativista — Agro-Extractive Settlement Project (INCRA modality).
- Plano de Uso (PU) — Natural resource–use plan for PAEs.
- Ribeirinhos — Traditional riverine populations dependent on forest and aquatic ecosystems.
- Terras de Marinha — Federal coastal lands belonging to the Union.
- Várzea — Amazonian floodplain ecosystem.
- Termo de Autorização de Uso (TAU) — Authorization of Use Term for land regularization.
- Programa Saúde da Família (PSF) — Brazilian community-based primary healthcare model.
- Crédito Instalação — Initial INCRA financing line for productive and housing infrastructure.
- SIPRA — Agrarian Reform Project Information System.
- PRONAF — National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture.
- PROATER — State Program for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension.

- Territorialização / Desterritorialização — Processes of territorial consolidation or loss.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the interviewed agroextractivists and the Graduate Program in Environmental Sciences at the State University of Pará (UEPA).

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How to cite this article

COSTA, Denise Cristina Torres; LUCAS, Flávia Cristina Araújo. Riverside trajectory, public policies and socio-environmental dynamics in the Ilha Grande Agroextractive Settlement Project, Belém, Pará, Brazil. **Revista NERA**, v. 28, n. 4, e11040, oct.-dec., 2025. https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-675520252811040en.

Research data availability statement

Regarding the availability of the research data, the authors of the manuscript "**Riverine Trajectory, Public Policies, and Socio-Environmental Dynamics in the Ilha Grande Agro-Extractive Settlement Project, Belém, Pará, Brazil**" state that:

The dataset supporting the findings of this study is not publicly available.

Individual Contribution Statement

The scientific contributions presented in the article were jointly developed by the authors. **Denise Cristina Torres Costa** was responsible for Project Management, Data Curation, Investigation, Formal Analysis, and Conceptualization. **Flávia Cristina Araújo Lucas** was responsible for Supervision, Methodology, Writing (original draft), and Writing (review and editing). She also contributed to Visualization, Writing (review and editing), and Validation.

Received for publication June 16, 2025.
Returned for review on August 04, 2025.
Accept the publication on October 30, 2025.

This article was edited by Lorena Izá Pereira.