

*Corporate usage of the territory and the new territorial division
of labour in Rio Grande do Norte's clothing industry*

*Uso corporativo do território e a nova divisão territorial do
trabalho da indústria do vestuário no Rio Grande do Norte*

*Uso corporativo del territorio y la nueva división territorial
del trabajo de la industria de vestuario en Rio Grande do
Norte*

Leonardo da Silva Galindo
Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte
leonardogalindo.ufrn@gmail.com

Francisco Fransualdo de Azevedo
Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte
ffazevedo@gmail.com

Abstract

Clothing production in Rio Grande do Norte (RN) used to be characterized by a concentration of companies and job opportunities in Natal. Recently there has been a reduction of this concentration in the aforementioned capital, while a contrary movement has been observed in the countryside of the state. The aim of this paper is to understand the changes in the territorial division of labour in the clothing industry in RN. Methodology included bibliographic review, systematization of secondary data and empirical research. We have proposed a redefinition of the division of labour, with agents promoting corporate usage of the territory. This causes dispersion of the production units that perform sewing services to municipalities in the Seridó region of the state. In contrast, the large factories continue to be in charge of production by performing other stages of the production process in the cities of Natal and Pamamirim. The outsourcing of sewing production consolidated in Seridó an internal division of labour focused on the textile and clothing sector, with some municipalities sewing for large factories, while others specialized in producing clothing accessories and household textile articles.

Keywords: Rio Grande do Norte; garment; clothing; territorial division of labor; outsourcing.

Resumo

A produção do vestuário no Rio Grande do Norte (RN) caracterizava-se pela concentração de empresas e empregos em Natal. Recentemente houve redução dessas variáveis na capital, enquanto observou-se movimento contrário no interior do estado. O objetivo deste artigo é compreender as transformações na divisão territorial do trabalho da indústria do vestuário no RN. A metodologia contemplou revisão bibliográfica, sistematização de dados secundários e pesquisa empírica. Constatamos uma redefinição da divisão do trabalho, com agentes promovendo um uso corporativo do território. Este provoca a dispersão de unidades produtivas que realizam serviços de costura para municípios do Seridó potiguar. Já as grandes fábricas continuam no comando da produção realizando outras etapas do processo produtivo em Natal e Parnamirim. A terceirização da costura consolidou no Seridó uma divisão interna do trabalho voltada ao setor têxtil e de confecções, com alguns municípios realizando a costura para grandes indústrias, e outros se especializando em produzir acessórios do vestuário e artefatos têxteis para uso doméstico.

Palavras-chave: Rio Grande do Norte; vestuário; divisão territorial do trabalho; terceirização.

Resumen

La producción de vestimenta en Rio Grande do Norte (estado de Brasil) se caracterizaba por la concentración de empresas y empleos en Natal. Recientemente ha habido reducción de esas variables en la capital, mientras que había movimiento opuesto en el interior del estado. El objetivo de este artículo es comprender las transformaciones en la división territorial del trabajo de industria del vestuario en el RN. La metodología incluyó revisión bibliográfica, sistematización de datos secundarios y la investigación empírica. Observamos una redefinición de la división del trabajo: varios agentes promovieron un uso corporativo del territorio llevando la dispersión de unidades productivas que realizan servicios de costura para municipios del Seridó potiguar. Las grandes fábricas continúan al mando de la producción realizando otras etapas del proceso productivo en Natal y Parnamirim. La tercerización de la costura consolidó en el Seridó una división interna del trabajo dirigida al sector textil y de confecciones, con algunos municipios realizando la costura para gran industrias, y otros especializándose en producir accesorios de la vestimenta y artefactos textiles para uso doméstico.

Palabras clave: Rio Grande do Norte; vestimenta; división territorial del trabajo; externalización.

Introduction

In the Brazilian socio-spatial formation process, industry and its production vectors were established mainly in the Concentrated Region (SANTOS, SILVEIRA, 2004), with regional particularities according to the interests and spatial logic of the companies. In the Northeast Region there was a productive specialization in sectors characterized by the employment of cheap labour (REONLON, 2013), but in practice largely restricted to the metropolitan regions of the state capitals (such as Fortaleza, Recife and Natal).

In Rio Grande do Norte (RN) the production of clothing stood out and historically was characterized by higher spatial concentration in Natal and Parnamirim (AZEVEDO, GALINDO, 2016; FIERN, 2016). However, since the 2000s there have been changes in the territorial division of labour in the clothing industry in RN, with a decrease in establishments

and jobs in the capital and growth of these variables in the hinterland, especially in the Seridó Potiguar region.¹

Within this context the objective of this article is to understand the changes in the territorial division of labour in the clothing industry in RN. To this end we identified the agents involved in the creation of a new territorial configuration for the establishment of these changes: The State (Public Banks; Municipal Power; Economic Development Secretariat of RN - SEDEC, Legislative Power) System S - SEBRAE and SENAI; large industrial groups and small scale entrepreneurs.

Theoretical research was based on the concepts of territory and place. The first is understood in terms of the “used territory” category. According to Santos (2005, p. 255) “é o uso do território [...] que faz dele objeto da análise social [...]. O território são formas, mas o território usado são os objetos e as ações, sinônimo de espaço humano, espaço habitado”. Territory is used by everyone: people, institutions, companies, etc., leading to the creation of various forms of use. But some agents are better able to produce the territorial configuration that best suits their interests.

In capitalism the state and multinationals - as the agents with the greatest capacity for action (SANTOS, 2012) - practise a corporate use of the territory, which according to Kahil (2010, p. 478) is the “forma hegemônica de compartilhar o espaço no capitalismo contemporâneo”.

The corporate use of the territory is characterized by hegemony in the production of norms and objects that meet the rationality of the state and large companies and “tem a força de determinar a tendência de todas as demais formas de desenvolvimento do processo de produção material da vida na fase atual do capitalismo” (KAHIL, 2010, p. 478).

In turn, the production of a system of norms and objects depends on the formation of an organizational solidarity, which “supõe uma interdependência até certo ponto mecânica, produto de normas presididas por interesses de modo geral mercantis, mutáveis em função de fatores do mercado.” (SANTOS, 2001, p. 48). According to Santos and Silveira (2004, p. 290) “cada atividade [...] produz sua própria divisão do trabalho”. In this context the role of “place” is questioned. Each place has singularities that make it more conducive to housing certain activities than others. For Santos

Os lugares se distinguiriam pela diferente capacidade de oferecer rentabilidade aos investimentos. Essa rentabilidade é maior ou menor, em virtude das condições locais de ordem técnica [...] e organizacional [...]. Podemos, também, falar de *produtividade espacial* ou produtividade geográfica, noção que se aplica a um lugar, mas em função de uma determinada atividade ou conjunto de atividades. [...]. Tal produtividade pode não ser duradoura, desde que outro lugar passe

¹ The Seridó Potiguar region is formed by 24 municipalities, located in the centre-south of RN. For more information on the territorial formation of the region, see Morais (2004).

a oferecer àquele produto melhores vantagens comparativas de localização. (SANTOS, 2012, p. 247-248).

Thus we will be discussing how the corporate use of the territory, arising from the organizational solidarity of the agents mentioned, created conditions for changes in the division of labour in the clothing industry that allowed the development in certain places in the RN of the activity referred to.

Secondary data include: IBGE, with the database “annual industrial survey” and “1970 industrial census”; the RAIS platform of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, which presents developments in the number of establishments and the population employed in the production of clothing by municipality; and the Federation of Industries of the state of Rio Grande do Norte (FIERN) with the “Industrial Guide” database that presents the addresses of companies operating in the sector, number of employees and telephone contact details.

The field research consisted of simple, systematic observation and semi-structured interviews with SEDEC and SEBRAE representatives and with owners and workers of small outsourced units of productions doing sewing work. It took place between July 6 and October 18, 2017, in 15 municipalities: Natal, Parnamirim, Sao Jose de Mipibu, Vera Cruz, Ceará-Mirim, Santa Cruz, Acari, Parelhas, Jardim do Seridó, Sao Jose do Seridó, Cruzeta, Jucurutu, Sao Francisco do Oeste, Sao Vicente and Lajes Pintadas.

The document FIERN Industrial Guide pointed to the existence of 149 small outsourced units of production doing sewing in the state. The interviews covered data from 66. Another 28 had ended their activities and 5 were not in fact small outsourced units of production doing sewing. The others were not visited or did not provide data for the research.

The territorial division of industrial work in Brazil

According to Santos and Silveira (2004) there are as many territorial divisions of work as there are activities undertaken. What about the industrial sector? The “manufacturing industries” section includes companies from various segments such as food, beverages, textiles, clothing and accessories, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery and appliances, motor vehicles, etc. Each encompasses companies of varying sizes and productive space circuits operating on local, regional, national, and global scales.

Figure 01 is a simplification of Brazil's territorial division of industrial labour. It reflects the spatial distribution of productive units and workers in formal employment. To provide a simplified picture this representation condenses a great diversity of industry typologies and enterprise topologies. Note the industrial use of the territory is denser in some places and thinner in others.

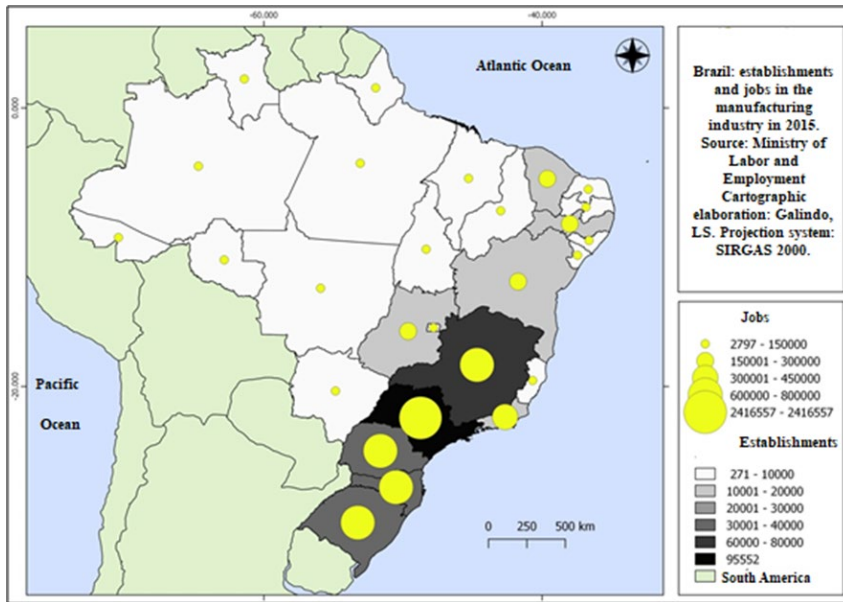


Figure 01: Brazil: Number of manufacturing establishments and jobs in 2015.
Source: GALINDO, 2018.

Just five federative units (São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná) housed 68.65% of industries in 2015 and 69.97% of jobs (RAIS, 2016). In São Paulo there were 26.60% of the industries and 33.08% of the workers. What explains the current territorial division of Brazil's industrial work?

The territorial division of industrial labour results from the process of socio-spatial formation, in which the places that make up the current Brazilian territory assumed different functions. In São Paulo the occupation of the territory was done mainly by the coffee monoculture (CANO, 1998a). To this is added the development of a consumer market brought about by the presence of salaried immigrant labour of European origin during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Consequently there was a greater deepening of capitalist relations of production in São Paulo compared to the Northeast, which contributed to an industrialization process in the early twentieth century. This process was intensified by events such as the Great Depression; the actions of the Vargas government; The Second World War; by the investments of multinational companies (CANO, 1998a; FURTADO, 2007).

The industrialization process was consolidated in São Paulo and other states of the Centre-South when SUDENE's action began to promote the industrial use of the territory in the Northeast. This development arose out of the sugarcane economy on the eastern coast, cattle raising and cotton growing in the semi-arid zone (ANDRADE, 1995). These were the main activities developed until the mid-1960s.

In this context the formation of the Concentrated Region (SANTOS; SILVEIRA, 2004) was mainly driven by industrial activity, which stimulated the integration of the national territory through the construction of highways and other infrastructure (FURTADO, 2007; REOLON, 2013; PEREIRA JUNIOR, 2011).

Although the Concentrated Region is currently defined by the command role of the financial, trade and services sector, it is no wonder that it houses more than two thirds of Brazil's industrial establishments. In this sense, “o trabalho já feito se impõe sobre o trabalho a fazer. A atual repartição territorial do trabalho repousa sobre as divisões territoriais do trabalho anteriores.” (SANTOS, 2012, p. 141). This still reflects differences in industrial density. In 2015 the northeastern states housed 13.71% of manufacturing industries and 13.61% of formal jobs. But Bahia, Ceará and Pernambuco accounted for 67.62% of the region's productive units and 67.02% of the employed labour force (RAIS, 2016).

We come to the second explanatory factor for the current division of industrial labour: although it has higher density in the Concentrated Region, a part of the manufacturing sector is distributed, reflected in the spots and dots in the three northeastern states mentioned above.

This fact stems from the existence of actions that promoted the spatial deconcentration of the productive units: SUDENE from the 1960s (MOREIRA, 1979), and the “War of Places” in the 1990s (SANTOS; SILVEIRA, 2004). They boosted the industrial use of the territory through coordinated action between the State and companies such as tax waivers and the creation of infrastructure: highways, ports and land donation (PEREIRA JÚNIOR, 2011).

These actions led to a “concentrated deconcentration” (REOLON, 2013), with the transfer of production units to the interior of the state of São Paulo and to the three northeastern states mentioned - especially to the metropolitan regions of their respective capitals. However production control remained centralized thanks to advances in information and communication technologies. (REOLON, 2013; PEREIRA JUNIOR, 2011, SILVA, 2013).

The spatial displacement of industry occurred more towards the northeastern states due to the lower organization of the local workforce and lower wages (REOLON, 2013; PEREIRA JÚNIOR, 2011) than in the Concentrated Region. In this context what role does Rio Grande do Norte play in industrial production? What are the characteristics of the manufacturing industry present in the state?

The manufacturing industry of Rio Grande do Norte: productive specialization in articles of clothing

The Rio Grande do Norte does not figure highly in the Territorial Division of Industrial Labour in Brazil in regards to both the number of establishments and the number of jobs. The state had 1.02% of the country's industrial units and only 0.83% of formal employment (RAIS, 2016). Despite the low presence, the RN participates in the division of

industrial work by housing companies in the textile and clothing sector, whose production / marketing covers the entire national territory.

Clothing industries were RN's largest industrial employers in 2015. Of the 60,461 secondary sector workers, more than ¼ of them were engaged in clothing manufacturing² (RAIS, 2016). In total numbers were 16,220 workers, representing 15.38% of the labour force in the Northeast region, and 2.84% of that in the country. (RAIS, 2016). As for the value of production (Figure 02), it accounted for 15.79% of the total generated in the Northeast (behind only Ceará) and for 2.32% of the national total (IBGE, 2016).

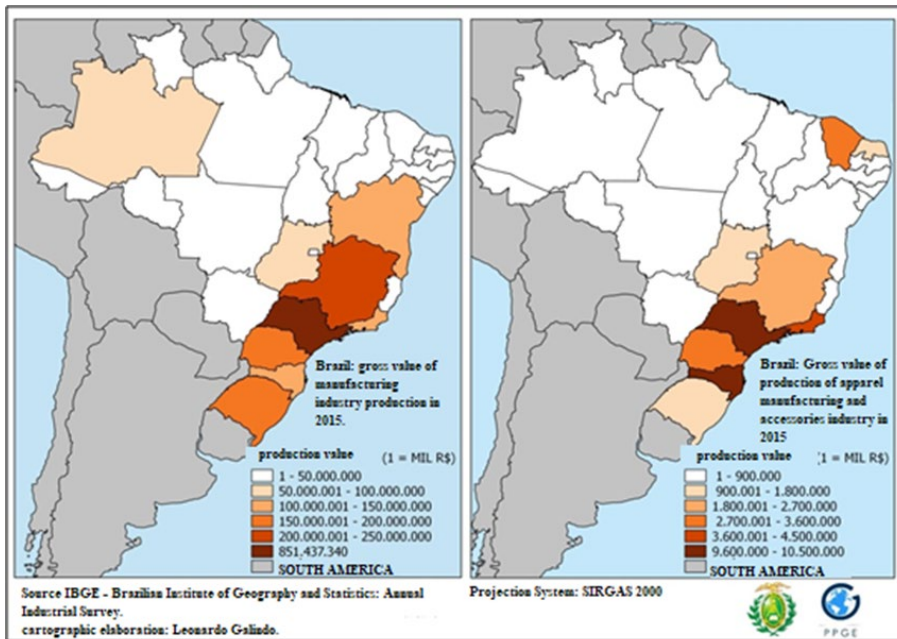


Figure 02 (a and b): Brazil: Gross value of production of manufacturing industry (a) and clothing industry (b) by state of the federation in 2015.

Source: IBGE, 2016; **Elaboration:** Galindo, 2018.

Although featuring less than in the states of Ceará, Bahia and Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte participated in the industrial restructuring process that Brazil went through, attracting some productive segments, especially in the manufacture of clothing. An important contributory factor in this was State action, which created favorable conditions (normative and infrastructural) for the allocation and performance of companies. We highlight SUDENE; planning policies in the 1970s (BARBOSA, 2015); industry attraction programs such as PROADI and Pró-Gás in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively; and the

² For IBGE (2007) the manufacture of articles of clothing involves the production of “men’s, women’s and children’s clothing (shirts, shirts, blouses, dresses, skirts, trousers, suits, coats”, etc.).

creation of industrial districts. Such actions resulted in the selective construction of infrastructure, prioritizing some portions of the Potiguar territory.³

State policy related to corporate policy has focused on the industrial use of the territory in RN mainly in the metropolitan region of Natal, which has two industrial districts: the Advanced Industrial Center, and the Industrial District of Natal (ARAÚJO, 2009).

The state action, although aimed at attracting a variety of industrial activities, ended up benefiting the production of clothing in Rio Grande do Norte. In 2010, 50.93% of the establishments in the sector were located in Natal and Parnamirim (RAIS, 2016). Nonetheless, we note an ongoing change that begins in the 2000s and intensifies from 2010 onwards - the dispersal of this activity inland, especially in the eastern Seridó microregion (figure 03).

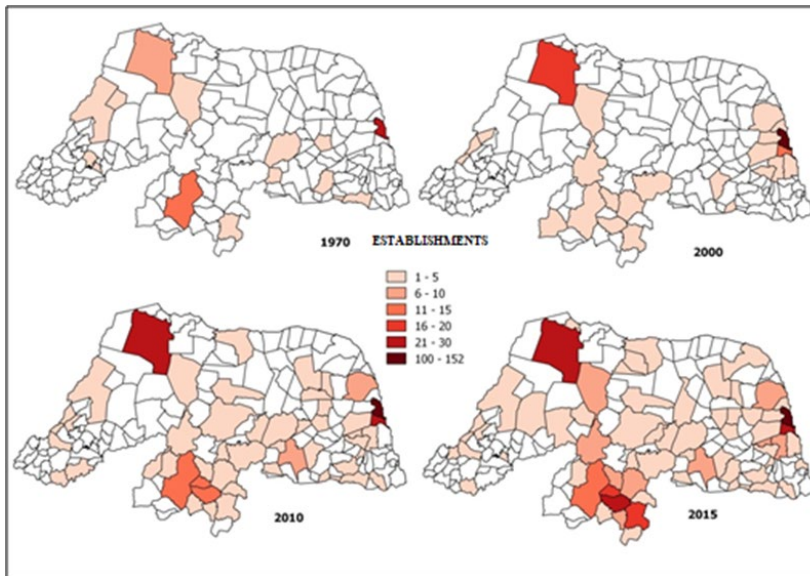


Figure 03: Rio Grande do Norte: Evolution in the number of clothing industry establishments between 1970 and 2015.

Source: IBGE, 1970; RAIS, 2016. Developed and adapted by GALINDO, 2018.

Data from the 1970 Industrial Census and the RAIS Platform show that although Natal continues to have the largest concentration of establishments, more than half of the municipalities now report this activity, with significant growth in Mossoró and the Seridó region. Information from FIERN (2016) showed that more than half of Mossoró's production units are small standardised clothing companies,

³ For more information on PROADI, Pro-Gas and industrial districts, see: Barbosa, 2015; Tavares, 2017; Araújo, 2006; Galindo, 2018.

while in Seridó there has been the spread of small outsourced units of production involved in sewing work.

Small outsourced units of production involved in sewing work and the new territorial division of labour in the clothing industry in Rio Grande do Norte

In talking of “small outsourced units of production” we refer to the stage of clothing production that involves the “industrial ... [manufacturing of] ... of blouses, shirts, dresses, skirts, pants, suits and other garments (cutting and sewing collars, cuffs or other parts of clothes)”(IBGE, 2016). SEBRAE (S.D) has a more precise definition:

Facção é o nome dado às confecções que prestam serviços para outras empresas do ramo que possuem marca própria e foco na comercialização, dentro da cadeia produtiva do setor têxtil. Em geral uma facção não vende seus produtos diretamente no varejo, realizando somente trabalhos de corte, montagem e acabamento de peças do vestuário para outras confecções. (SEBRAE, p. 2, s.d).

The “small outsourced unit of production” is the industrial establishment (figures 4 and 5) that performs one or more stages of the production of clothing (cutting and sewing, for example) for an industry or retail company. Their owners do not have command over the type of clothing or the amount of pieces produced.



Figure 04: Employees working in a small outsourced unit of production in the municipality of Parelhas. **Source:** Author's photo, 2017.

Figure 05: small outsourced unit of production facade in Acari, RN. **Source:** Author's photo, 2017.

Small outsourced units of production have been registered in RN since the late 1990s in Natal, Ceará-Mirim, Jardim do Seridó and São José do Seridó. They provided sewing services mainly to RMNor do Brasi⁴, whose main clients were C&A, Renner and Zara (TAVARES, 2017; ARROYO, GOMES, 2013).

In 2000, a factory of the company Cia Hering was installed in Parnamirim, which according to Tavares (2017) sought to take advantage of the existing network of small

⁴ In field research we found that the company ended its activities in RN.

outsourced units of production in the state, given that the company was already using this service in Santa Catarina (LUCLKTENBERG, 2004). The emergence of small outsourced units of production in the Northeast took place in the context of the productive restructuring of the clothing industry, which reorganized its production processes and outsourced some steps, such as sewing, as studied by Silva (2013):

A dispersão da produção, especialmente da subetapa da costura do circuito espacial de produção do vestuário, ocorreu principalmente em virtude dos altos preços da mão de obra nas áreas de produção mais antigas como São Paulo, dos incentivos fiscais, tributários e territoriais oferecidos às empresas para se deslocarem para o Nordeste. O aumento da facilidade proporcionada pela maior densidade de transportes e comunicações também contribui com fatores fundamentais para o deslocamento da produção para outras regiões do território brasileiro e mesmo do estado de São Paulo (SILVA, 2013 p. 5).

Despite this arrangement, most jobs and establishments related to clothing production were still located in Natal in 2010. Regarding the amount of jobs, the spatial concentration was mainly due to the Guararapes factory (now Riachuelo group), which added more than half of the workers (GALINDO, 2018). This industrial group controls all stages of the clothing production process, which according to Silva:

na etapa de produção há a concepção da peça, elaboração do design, escolha da cor, modelagem e costura. Na sequência vem a distribuição, que se organiza de acordo com o ator que esteja no comando do circuito, isto é, o ator que comanda a acumulação (grandes marcas, redes varejistas, comerciantes de pequeno porte, feirantes etc.) (SILVA, 2013, p. 2)

The company's plant in Natal was responsible for the following steps: fabric production (for some garments); washing; cutting and sewing. From 2013, the factory started to outsource part of the sewing stage, contributing to a new spatial configuration of the clothing industry in the state, with the encouragement of the creation of small outsourced units of production doing sewing work.

This change was possible thanks to a process of organizational integration involving several agents, enabling the corporate use of the territory by the clothing industry in Rio Grande do Norte. To this end, the Pró-Sertão⁵ program was created in 2013 by SEDEC. In 2015, the program was managed by SEBRAE / Natal. In field research, we interviewed the then assistant secretary of SEDEC⁶, who presented us with information about the operation of Pró-Sertão:

É fundamental destacar que o Pró-Sertão foi uma ideia do Governo, iniciada 100% na SEDEC. Somente após a consolidação com empresas do setor expandiu-se para demais parceiros, como pensado desde

⁵ For more information see Galindo (2018) and SEBRAE (2013).

⁶ Interview granted on 07/06/2017.

sempre, mas somente “divulgado” quando certa de interesse das empresas nos moldes do promovido-idealizado. [...]. Fundamental também foi à articulação SEDEC com SEBRAE e sistema S para estruturar o projeto e sua execução com iniciativa privada.

The Assistant Secretary points out that SEDEC's role was to organize the various stakeholders in “generating and initiating the programme”. Among these stakeholders are: the large apparel industries that command the outsourcing process (Guararapes and Hering, with factories in Natal and Parnamirim respectively); the state (municipal power, state government through the Secretariat of Economic Development, public banks); the S system (SEBRAE and SENAI) and the owners of small outsourced units of production involved in sewing work.

In order to enable the corporate use of the territory by the clothing industry, the State acted in several ways, especially the financing of the purchase of sewing machines. Entrepreneurs of 53% of the companies visited in the empirical survey obtained all their sewing machines from credit offered by Banco do Nordeste and another 9% acquired part of the machinery thanks to the credit provided by that bank (GALINDO, 2018).

Regarding the municipal power, in 9 of the 15 municipalities visited, at least one of the following actions was registered for the benefit of the sector: donation of land for the construction of a sewing shed; concession of public buildings for the operation of the small outsourced units of production; provision at a notional rent of the building; forming partnerships with SENAI and PRONATEC⁷ for professional training; and subsidies of water and / or electricity costs for the small outsourced units of production (GALINDO, 2018).

SEBRAE gives operational help to Pró-Sertão by guiding owners of small outsourced units of production in various aspects of their work: hiring, training and organizing labour; organization of the contact between the entrepreneur and the industry; advice - compliance with labour laws, how to get credit, etc. Professional training is provided by SENAI through the industrial and mechanical sewing machine courses.

By investing in outsourcing, large industries reduce costs in regards to the purchase and maintenance of machinery, as well as labour costs. Guararapes' factory in Natal, for example, had approximately 12,000 employees in 2012 (FIERN, 2014), and was responsible for parts of the transportation and food / lunch costs of these employees.⁸

All these costs were eliminated by outsourcing the sewing stage. Most of the small outsourced units of production are in small municipalities, with a population of 2 to 15 thousand inhabitants (IBGE, 2018) and distributed throughout urban areas. Thus the employee can travel to work in a few minutes by walking, cycling or on motorbike, and eat at home during the lunch break.

⁷ Federal Professional Training Program created in 2011 and currently deactivated. For the clothing sector, he offered the courses of sewing machine mechanic and industrial sewing.

⁸ The company's factory continues to operate with fewer employees compared to 2012.

All agents involved in making clothing production viable benefit from the following: large industries are able to reduce their costs and increase their profit margins; small municipalities start generating jobs where there were usually no formal employment options and raise more ISS. Despite the low wages, (at minimum wage) there is a dynamization of the local economy with effects on the upper and lower circuits of the economy, especially from the increased circulation of money in free markets. A small middle class is also created in the small towns used by the owners of small outsourced units of production.

Public banks such as Banco do Nordeste, together with SEBRAE and SENAI, end up promoting the increase of capitalist relations of production in the interior of the state and increase profit margins. For workers in the municipalities there is a decrease in dependence on public policies of income transfer and retirement of the elderly, as well as decreasing the propensity to migrate.

And what is the result of all these actions? At the end of 2016 there were 149 small outsourced units of production involved in sewing work in RN, 64.4% of them in the Central mesoregion, especially in the Seridó Oriental; 21.48% in the eastern Potiguar mesoregion, 8.72% in the agreste and 5.6% in the western Potiguar mesoregion (figure 06). When we consider the number of formal work ties, 67.56% were in the Central mesoregion and only 14.1% in the eastern Potiguar. There were 3,696 people working in the small outsourced units of production in 2016 (FIERN, 2016).

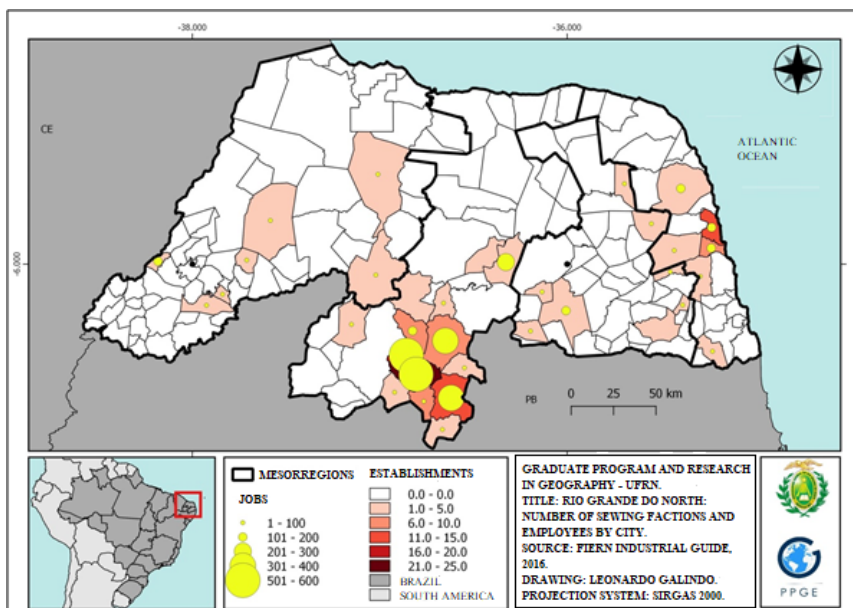


Figure 06: Rio Grande do Norte: Number of Establishments and Jobs in small outsourced units of production involved in sewing work in 2016.

Source: GALINDO, 2018.

What explains the largest concentration of establishments in Seridó? Why did these factions not settle in the NMR, which is closer to the contracting factories or elsewhere, such as west and north of the NN? We use the analytical category “territorial formation” and the concept of “place.” The first “dá aos lugares especificidades, criando diferenciações espaciais e dotando os lugares de aptidões que permitem a instalação, ou não, de determinadas atividades” (DANTAS, 2016, p.197). The second is understood as a “funcionalização do mundo” em que se realiza um conjunto limitado de “possibilidades” (SANTOS, 1996, p. 13-14).

In this sense Natal and Parnamirim became the places of clothing manufacturing in RN. With the new territorial division of labor of the companies of the sector, these cities reinforce their command role in the production of clothes in RN. Large industries continue to perform some stages of manufacturing, such as cutting fabrics; distribution and supervision of garments sewn by factions, doing quality control, and finally the distribution of clothing to retail chains throughout Brazil.

Natal still presents itself as a sewing machine marketing centre serving outsourced companies from all over the state. However, both Natal and Parnamirim have been losing production-related employees due to the reduction of labour in large industries and the closure of small outsourced units of production operating in their territories. In the field research we found only three companies operating in Natal, with the municipality of Parnamirim losing all its productive units (GALINDO, 2018). The active small outsourced units of production in the capital were less dynamic than those in the interior, with fewer employees and parts produced.



Figura 7: small outsourced units of production in Natal/RN.
Source: GALINDO, 2018.

The price of urban land is higher in Natal and Parnamirim than in the interior of the state. In fact, while in Seridó sewing sheds were rented or ceded, all three factions active in

Natal functioned in the homes of the entrepreneurs themselves (figure 07). In this context, we met a businessman who moved his production unit from Natal to Vera Cruz in order to save on the rent of the shed, transportation and food charges.

But why didn't small outsourced units of production thrive in places closer to Natal and around? A first consideration is that the number of formal jobs in the capital is larger compared to the countryside. These jobs are also accessible to most of the ordinary residents. They can travel daily by public transport and take up formal vacancies in the commerce and services sectors.

Residents in the other mesoregions (Central and West) do not have the same ease of commuting to work in Natal because of the greater distance from the capital. Then we come to the role played by the Seridoense municipalities (southern part of the central mesoregion).

Productive specialization in the textile and clothing industry: the new internal division of labour in Seridó Potiguar

In the Brazilian socio-spatial formation process, each place assumed certain economic functions. The northeastern semiarid zone, of which Seridó Potiguar is part, stood out for its cotton production and related industrial activities (AZEVEDO, 2013). Despite the decline in this activity, know-how related to the industry has stimulated the emergence of companies linked to the textile and clothing sector.

With the productive restructuring since the 1970s, there were several economic and socio-territorial transformations in RN (AZEVEDO, 2013). In this context, some Serido cities (Caicó, Serra Negra do Norte, for example) have specialized in the manufacture of clothing accessories - caps (LINS, 2011) and household textile artifacts (Caicó, Jardim de Piranhas) (AZEVEDO, 2017).

In the 2000s, especially after 2010, outsourced sewing services emerged in those municipalities that stood out in the past for the production of cotton and were unable to specialize in the production of caps or household artifacts. These are places that have a large army of labour reserves, and therefore greater possibility of taking advantage of the work of outsourced sewing.

Outsourced sewing services contributed to creating in Seridó an internal division of labour focused on the textile and clothing sector (figure 08), in which each municipality has a significant portion of its population employed in the production of caps and clothing, in sewing, or the making of clothing artifacts for domestic use.

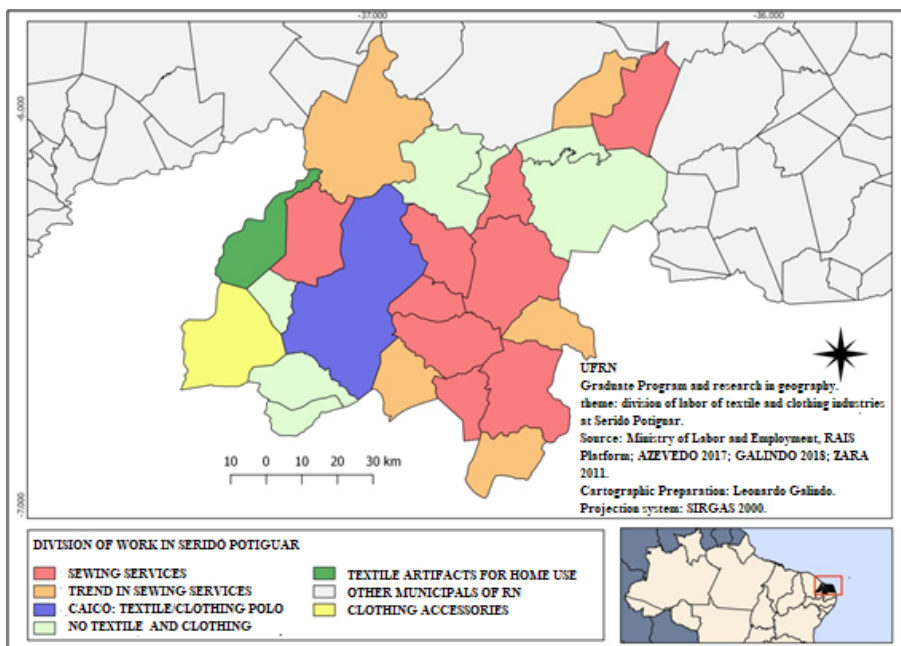


Figure 08: Division of labour in the textile and clothing industries in Seridó Potiguar.
 Source: RAIS, 2016; AZEVEDO, 2017; GALINDO, 2018; ZARA, 2011. Cartographic elaboration of the author.

Caicó presents itself as a key municipality for having relations with the three branches of textile and clothing production. It is the one with the largest amount of labour employed in the manufacture of caps (RAIS, 2016), has a significant number of workers in the production of household artifacts, and although it does not register as having sewing services for large industries, it provides machines for at least 26 small outsourced units of production from 7 neighboring municipalities. Before, the machinery trade only served the hats sector (GALINDO, 2018).

Depending on the size of the population of the municipality, each specialized in only one branch of the industry. Jardim de Piranhas and Serra Negra do Norte are dedicated respectively to the production of textile articles for home use and clothing accessories.

In 8 municipalities, there is productive specialization involving provision of sewing services for large factories. São José do Seridó has more than 55% of the population with formal employment dedicated to this activity. The number is also significant in Jardim do Seridó (32.7%); Santana do Seridó (31.47%); Cerro Corá (30.4%); São Vicente (24.2%); Acari (20.97%); Cruzeta (18.3%) and San Fernando (17.33%) (RAIS, 2016).

Already 5 municipalities in Seridó have a tendency to specialize in providing sewing services: Bodó, Jucurutu, Ecuador, Carnaúba dos Dantas, Ouro Branco. These are

places where small outsourced units of production already operate, but the amount of labour employed is not significant in proportion to the total population compared to the previous group.

Another group of municipalities (Florânia, Lagoa Nova, Ipueira, Currais Novos, Timbaúba dos Batistas and Tenente Laurentino Cruz) have no productive specialization in any of the three branches mentioned. It does not mean that these activities do not exist in their territories. They indicate only that the textile and clothing branches are of residual importance considering the amount of formal jobs they offer.

Regarding workers, we interviewed 32 employees, of whom 5 worked with a formal contract prior to their current job. Previous work experience in informal jobs involved: nanny, maid, farmer, with monthly income not exceeding half the minimum wage. In this context small outsourced units of production involved in sewing work in Seridó can draw on a large reserve army of labour, since to obtain formal employment, the majority of the population would have to migrate.

Considering figure 08, the number of small outsourced units of production is likely to grow in places grouped as a “trend in sewing services”. In São Vicente, for example, today with a large presence of small outsourced units of production, activity only began to grow after the number of small outsourced units of production reached critical mass in São José do Seridó, when a family that controls 8 small outsourced units of production decided to expand their activities by creating 3 more companies that outsource sewing. As activity grows in places with a reserve army of labour, municipalities classified as “without textiles and clothing” may benefit from an eventual expansion of the sector in the event of a reduction of labour available from neighboring cities.

This new division of labour highlights the use of territory as a resource (SANTOS, SILVEIRA, 2004) by companies that control the production of clothing in RN. The reserve army and know-how related to textile production by the companies that previously sold sewing machines in Caicó are resources that the big industries need to increase their profits.

Final considerations

The corporate use of the territory by the clothing industry reconfigured the territorial division of labour in RN. Changes in the production process, with emphasis on outsourcing of sewing and the organizational solidarity of various agents, have created conditions for Serido municipalities to specialize in providing services to large industries that continue to dominate the production process in Rio Grande do Norte, especially in Natal and Parnamirim.

The growth of small outsourced units of production reinforces the region's role as a producer of textile and clothing goods by creating an internal division of labour, with municipalities specializing in the making of clothing accessories, others in household textiles and others in sewing services. . In the latter case, the development of the activity

benefits the municipalities, with an increase in the number of formal jobs on offer, tax collection and rebates in the upper and lower circuits of the regional economy.

The use of territory in the expansion of small outsourced units of production involved in sewing is presented by the agents involved as a panacea to solve all regional problems, especially with regard to employment opportunities and economic development, a position that needs to be carefully considered and viewed, given the conditions and, above all, the strong dependence on large economic groups. We emphasize that this activity depends precisely on the presence of a reserve army of labour that has no other options for formal employment. The corporate use of the territory by this productive circuit exists because the places are poor and have people willing to work for low wages. And Seridó Potiguar was already developing other activities related to the textile and clothing sector, with local know-how that facilitates the development of small outsourced units of production.

Thus the activity of small outsourced units of production involved in sewing is completely subordinated to the interests of large companies. Those who see territory as a resource can reconfigure their productive processes, creating new divisions of labour by finding places that are more profitable. In this context, the use of territory is corporate, but it is not the only possibility offered by places. There are other options that can reduce the dependence on the large companies that control the processes, such as associations and cooperatives, (among others). At least in the short term, one can strengthen organic solidarity by involving Seridó agents who could organize themselves with the goal of mastering more stages of the garment production process and increasing their number of clients.

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Leonardo da Silva Galindo

Master and degree in Geography from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. He is currently a geography teacher for the public school system of the state of Rio Grande do Norte.

UFRN, Campus Universitário Lagoa Nova - CCHLA - Av. Salgado Filho. Lagoa Nova.
Cep: 59072-970 - Natal, RN - Brasil - Caixa-postal: 1524.E-mail:
leonardogalindo.ufrn@gmail.com

Francisco Fransualdo de Azevedo

PhD in Geography from the Federal University of Uberlândia. He is currently Professor of the Department of Geography of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte and Permanent Professor of the Graduate Programs in Geography and Tourism.

UFRN, Campus Universitário Lagoa Nova - CCHLA - Av. Salgado Filho. Lagoa Nova.
Cep: 59072-970 - Natal, RN - Brasil - Caixa-postal: 1524.E-mail: ffazevedo@gmail.com

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