

# SEDIMENT TRANSPORT POTENTIAL OF CONTRIBUTING BASINS OF TERRA RONCA'S KARST SYSTEM

POTENCIAL DE TRANSFERÊNCIA DE SEDIMENTOS DAS BACIAS

CONTRIBUINTES DO SISTEMA CÁRSTICO TERRA RONCA

POTENTIEL DE TRANSFERT DES SEDIMENTS DE LES BASSINS  
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## Abstract

The potential of sediment transfer (PTS) index estimates the capacity of the drainage network to transport its sedimentary load. This paper calculates and compares the PTS of the basins of 2nd, 3rd e 4th hierarchical order, which channels drain into and provides sediments to the caves of the State Park Terra Ronca (PETeR), in the northeast of Goiás. It has been identified 438 basins of 2nd order with low PTS value out of a total of 863; 83 basins of 3rd order with moderate value out of 194, and 16 basins of 4th order out of 37. The basins of the study area showed moderate to low capacity to supply sedimentary load to caves of the PETeR.

Keywords: Morphometric parameters, drainage network, fluvial geomorphology.

## Resumo

O Índice de Potencial de Transferência de Sedimentos (PTS) estima a capacidade da rede de drenagem transportar sua carga sedimentar. Este trabalho calcula e compara o PTS de bacias de 2ª, 3ª e 4ª ordem hierárquica, cujos canais drenam e proveem sedimentos para dentro das cavernas do Parque Estadual Terra Ronca (PETeR), no nordeste de Goiás. Identificou-se 438 bacias de 2ª ordem com baixo valor de PTS em um total de 863 bacias, 83 bacias de 3ª ordem de valor médio em um total de 194 bacias, e 16 bacias de 4ª ordem com valor médio em um total de 37 bacias de hierárquica. As bacias hidrográficas da área têm capacidade moderada a baixa de lançar sedimentos nas cavernas do PETeR.

Palavras-chave: Parâmetros Morfométricos, Rede de drenagem, Geomorfologia fluvial.

## Résumé

L'indice du Potentiel de Transfert des Sédiments (PTS) estime la capacité de transport sédimentaire dans les bassins versants. Cette étude calcule et compare le PTS des bassins de 2e, 3e et 4e ordre hiérarchique fluvial, dont les fleuves drainent et fournissant des sédiments vers les les grottes du Parque Estadual de Terra Ronca (PETeR), dans le nord-est de Goiás. Le resultats montrent que il y a 438 bassin de 2e ordre à faible valeurs de PTS entre un total de 863 bassins; 83 bassins de 3e ordre des moyennes valeur entre un total de 194 bassins

; et 16 bassins de 4e ordre des moyennes valeur entre un total de 37 bassins. Les bassin versants de la region ont une capacité modérée à faible de fournir des sédiments vers les grottes du PETeR.

Mots-clés: Morphométriques paramètres, bassin versants, géomorphologie fluviale.

## Introduction

Scientific research on river drainage systems plays a major role in fostering understanding on landscape dynamics. According to Christofolletti (1980), the analysis of drainage systems can shed light on several geomorphological issues, given that the most active processes of landscape formation take place in rivers.

River systems transport water and sediments from drainage basins; some of them, as a result of geographical features, have greater capacity for transporting water and sediments than others (Latrubesse et al, 2009). An analysis capable of uncovering hydrological and sedimentary behaviour in drainage basins, particularly over the course of the drained area, may be performed via the application of morphometric parameters (Meliani, 2006). Integrating such parameters may elucidate the environmental diversity associated with morphometric features in drainage basins, e.g. sediment transport capacity (Zancopé; Bayer, 2012).

Research studies which address these topics are crucial for the territorial planning of drainage basins in that they help establish guidelines for the use and occupation of land and water resources. Particularly with regard to water resources planning, understanding sediment transport dynamics via rivers is a crucial step towards mitigating the aggradation of channels and reservoirs. Such studies are often combined with the mapping of aggradation deposits (Zancopé; Goncalves; Bayer, 2015).

This research scenario also includes river channels which flow partly through caves, whose deposits cannot be mapped via remote sensing. This is the case of the karstic relief to the east of Vão do Paranã, in Goiás state, Brazil (Latrubesse et al., 2006), where the Terra Ronca State Park (TRSP) is located. The park houses seven of the thirty largest caves in Brazil (Mateucci et al, 2001).

Water and sediment discharges from Serra Geral de Goiás flow into TRSP's cave systems under intense morphodynamic action (Zancopé; Momoli; Bayer, 2013). They are transported by springs which run from the Serra Geral and cross the park's karst until reaching the sinkholes located inside the caves. Injecting sediments into the park's sinkholes

may lead to caves' partial or total obstruction, as has been demonstrated by Laureano, Karmann, and Granger (2013), depending on the sediment volume being transported upstream by the drainage system. Therefore, finding out which drainage basins are most capable of injecting large sediment volumes in TRSP caves becomes a major step towards improving the management of the park as well as of its surrounding buffer zone.

This paper offers an assessment of the sediment transport potential (STP) of drainage basins transporting sediments to Terra Ronca's karst system. The São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus river basins were submitted to the STP index's calculation and analysis due to the fact that they flow across the TRSP, while the park's caves function as a river mouth to the contributing basins as regards STP.

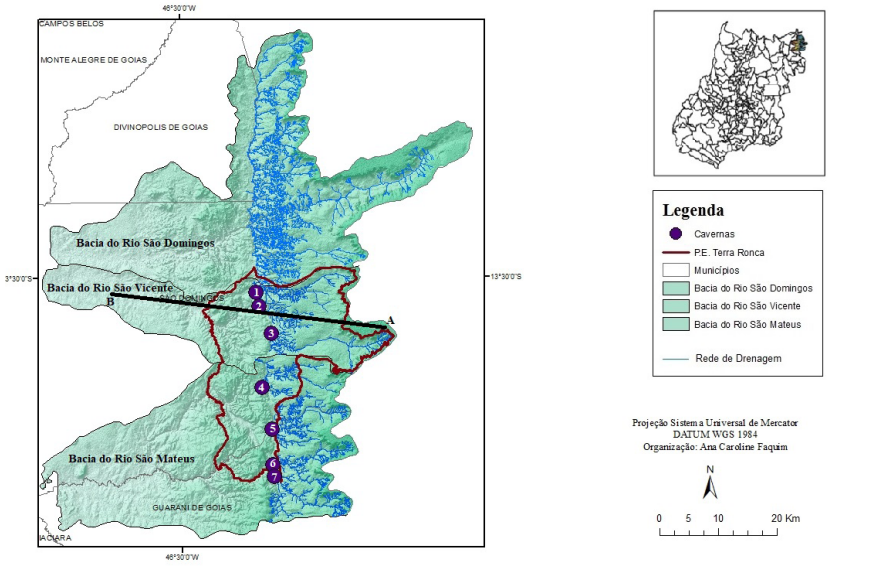
## Materials and method

### *Surveyed area*

The surveyed area is located in the municipality of São Domingos, in northeastern Goiás, and covers the middle and upper drainage basins of the São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus rivers, home to the Terra Ronca State Park (TRSP). This area was chosen because the rivers' middle- and upper-reach sub-basins are located upstream of the karst system, hence potentially depositing sediments in the park's caves.

To the east of the selected area lie the slopes of the Serra Geral de Goiás, at the intersection of Goiás and Bahia states. At the top of the mountain range are Bahia's Western Plateaus [Chapadões do Oeste], supported by sandstones of the Urucuia Group, which consist of aquifers that serve river springs in Goiás (CPRM, 2012). Rivers emerging from streams on the Serra Geral slopes flow westward, forming the tributaries on the right bank of the Paranã river. These rivers' upper reaches flow past flat terraces embedded at the foot of Serra Geral, supported by Tertio-Quaternary sandy detritus coverings until they reach the limestone outcrops of the Bambuí Group (Brasil, 1982). Before reaching the Paranã river and while running through the rocks of the Bambuí Group, these rivers develop subterranean sections, thus favouring the speleogenesis of Terra Ronca's karst system as well as relief forms characterized by the chemical dissolution of rocks; the latter promotes the formation of caves, underground galleries with various speleothems, dolines, mogotes, etc. (Latrubesse; Carvalho, 2006).

Localização da área de estudo



<b>Cenozóico</b>	NQc – Depósitos colúvio-eluviais	Depósitos de areia, depósitos de cascalho, depósitos de argila, laterita.
<b>Mesozóico</b>	K2U – Grupo Uruçuia	Conglomerado, Arenito conglomerático, Pelítico, Arenito.
<b>Proterozóico</b>	NP2lje – Grupo Bambuí – Formação Lagoa do Jacaré – Fáceis Calcário	Calcário, intercalações de siltos e margas.
	NP2lj – Grupo Bambuí – Formação Lagoa do Jacaré	Intercalações cíclicas de siltos e margas com lentes e/ou camadas de calcários pretos.
	NP2sh – Grupo Bambuí – Subgrupo Paraopeba – Formação Serra de Santa Helena	Folhelhos e siltos com intercalações de arenitos finos e calcários.
	NP2sl – Grupo Bambuí – Subgrupo Paraopeba – Formação Sete Lagoas	Pelitos e margas, com intercalações de lentes de calcários e dolomitos com estruturas estromatolíticas.
	NP2bp – Grupo Bambuí – Subgrupo Paraopeba	Calcarenito, arcóseo, dolomito, silito, folhelho, argilito, rocha pelítica ritmítica, margas.
	PP12gr – Complexo Almas – Cavalcante – Unidade Ortognáissica	Granito, tonalito, trondhjemito, Quartzo diorito, Quartzo monzodiorito, granodiorito.

Figure 1. Location of surveyed area. Source: SIEG, 2016 – 2017. 1 – Cave of Angélica creek; 2 – Cave of Bezerra brook; 3 – Cave of São Vicente river; 4 – Cave of São Mateus river; 5 – Cave of Lapa river (Terra Ronca); 6 – Cave of Palmeiras creek; 7 – Cave of São Bernardo river.

## Methodological procedures

The sediment transport potential (STP) index estimates a drainage system's relative capacity for transporting sediments deposited by slopes, riverbanks, or riverbeds. Sub-basins whose drainage system yields a low STP show reduced transport capacity, i.e. are susceptible to depositing sediments in rivers, therefore producing aggradation. On the other hand, sub-basins whose drainage system yields a high STP show greater capacity for discharging their sediment load in rivers flowing downstream.

The STP classification was grounded on the association of morphometric parameters of the drainage system for second-, third-, and fourth-order sub-basins in the area surveyed. According to Christofolletti (1980) and Zancopé & Bayer (2012), the association of morphometric parameters can only be performed among basins of a single hierarchical order. The selection of these orders stemmed from the reduced number of sub-basins under assessment which could cover a larger portion of the surveyed area. The morphometric parameters covered by the analysis are hydrographic density (Dh), drainage density (Dd), extension of surface route (Eps), and river gradient (Gd) for rivers forming the main axes of sub-basins involved. These parameters were calculated following Christofolletti's 1980 study.

To calculate and rank the drainage system's morphometric parameters, channels were vectorized with the use of satellite images. Digital Elevation Models (DEM), produced with SRTM images (30-metre resolution) made available by Nasa, yielded altimetric data. Images were georeferenced in WGS 1984 (UTM coordinate system, zone 23S). The analysis also included interpretation of vertical aerial photographs (scale 1:10.000), made available by Goiás state's Department of Environment and Water Resources.

Once reconstructed, the drainage system was ranked in accordance with Strahler (1952). Data and variables were processed by software ERSI@ArcGis 10.2, which made it possible to determine variables for calculating parameters. Scores of morphometric parameters for each sub-basin were ranked in five categories (very high, high, medium, low, and very low), following the automatic determination set by the Jenks Natural Breaks algorithm in ArcGis.

Parameters were associated in pairs, following three stages (Figure 2): parameters Dh and Dd were combined in stage 1, yielding a partial potential (partial 1); in stage 2, partial potential 1 was combined with Gd, yielding partial potential 2; in stage 3, partial potential 2 was combined with Eps, yielding the final STP.

Etapa 1			Etapa 2			Etapa 3			
Dh	Dd	Parcial 1	Parcial 1	Gd	Parcial 2	Parcial 2	Eps	Potencial de Transferência	
bacia	muito alto	muito alto	muito alto	muito alto	muito alto	muito alto	muito baixo	muito alto	
		alto		alto	alto		baixo	alto	
		medio		medio	medio		medio	medio	
		baixo		alto	alto		alto	alto	
	alto	muito baixo	medio	alto	muito baixo	medio	alto	muito alto	medio
		muito alto	muito alto		muito alto	muito alto		muito alto	
		alto	alto		alto	baixo		alto	
		medio	alto		alto	medio		alto	
	medio	baixo	medio	medio	baixo	medio	medio	alto	medio
		muito baixo	baixo		muito baixo	baixo		muito alto	baixo
		muito alto	alto		muito alto	alto		muito baixo	alto
		alto	alto		alto	baixo		baixo	
baixo	muito baixo	baixo	baixo	muito baixo	baixo	baixo	muito alto	baixo	
	muito alto	alto		muito alto	alto		muito baixo	alto	
	alto	medio		alto	medio		baixo	medio	
	medio	baixo		baixo	baixo		alto	baixo	
muito baixo	baixo	baixo	muito baixo	baixo	baixo	muito baixo	muito alto	baixo	
	muito baixo	muito baixo		muito baixo	muito baixo		muito alto	muito baixo	
	muito alto	medio		muito alto	medio		muito baixo	medio	
	alto	baixo		alto	baixo		baixo	baixo	
	baixo	baixo		baixo	baixo		muito alto	muito baixo	
	muito baixo	muito baixo		muito baixo	muito baixo		muito alto	muito baixo	
	muito alto	medio		muito alto	medio		muito baixo	medio	
	alto	baixo		alto	baixo		baixo	baixo	

Figure 2. Associating stages of the drainage system’s morphometric parameters for each sub-basin of a single hierarchical order.

## Results and discussion

Data collection and the application of methodological procedures made it possible to assess the STP of second-, third-, and fourth-order sub-basins contributing to Terra Ronca's karst system. A total of 863 second-order sub-basins were identified over an area of 294.75 km<sup>2</sup>, as well as 194 third-order sub-basins over an area of 562.54 km<sup>2</sup>, and 37 fourth-order sub-basins over an area of 872.03 km<sup>2</sup>.

### STP of second-order sub-basins

Results show a predominance of sub-basins yielding low STP among second-order sub-basins. Given that the latter are mostly distributed over regions with a mainly flat relief, their Gd values are lower. Therefore, the association between the other morphometric parameters, in accordance with the selected methodology (Figure 2), yields a tendency for low STP.

Table 1 presents the number of sub-basins and their corresponding area for the three drainage basins of the surveyed area as regards STP. Figure 3 shows that the São Domingos river basin has a greater influence on the karst system due to its greater coverage and number of sub-basins.

Table 1. Number of second-order sub-basins and area size (km<sup>2</sup>) with regard to STP

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	Total
Basins	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area
São Domingos	0	6 / 2,95	221 / 62,38	258 / 85,11	65 / 15,69	550 / 116,14
São Vicente	0	1 / 0,43	40 / 14,35	55 / 27,38	13 / 19,11	109 / 61,28
São Mateus	0	1 / 1,47	35 / 34,93	125 / 50,80	43 / 30,11	204 / 117,33
					Total	863 / 267,75

PTS das Bacias dos Rios São Domingos, São Vicente e São Mateus, 2º ordem

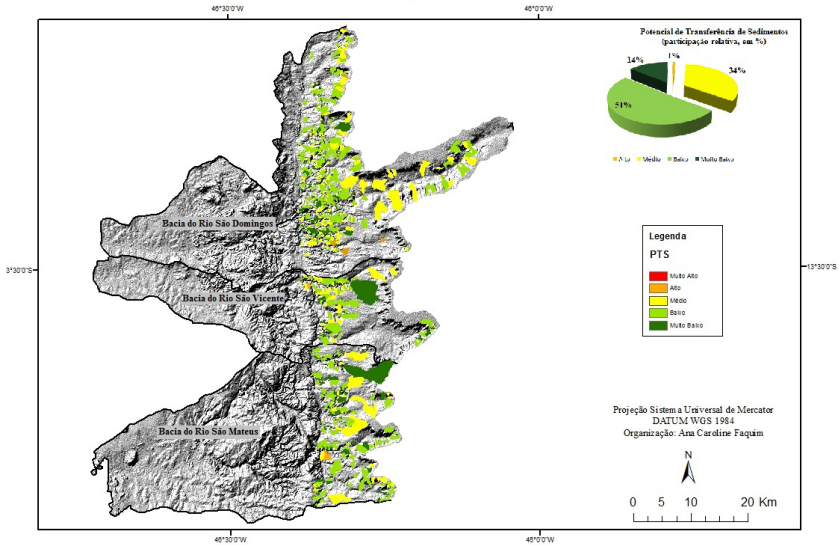


Figure 3. Sediment transport potential (STP) of São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus river basins, second order.

STP of third-order sub-basins

Results show a predominance of third-order sub-basins with medium to high STP. Eight per cent of sub-basins have very high potential, 40% have high potential, 43% have medium potential, 8% have low potential, and only 1% have very low potential.

In terms of area size, sub-basins with low STP are larger than those with high STP. This occurs because the former are located in a mainly flat sector of the surveyed area (Figure 4), between the foot of Serra Geral de Goiás (to the east) and the karst terrain (to the west). Over this flat intermediary portion, sub-basins have larger areas than those with a high STP. On the other hand, the major rivers in sub-basins located over this flat portion have lower gradients and this, together with sub-basins' larger area size, help to reduce STP, given that these variables are used to determine the STP of each sub-basin. Correlations between morphometric variables, position in landscape partitioning, and lithology will be addressed by future research studies.



Table 2 shows the number of third-order sub-basins and their corresponding area for the three drainage basins of the surveyed area as regards STP.

Table 2. Number of third-order sub-basins and area size (km<sup>2</sup>) with regard to STP

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	Total
Basins	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area
São Domingos	13 / 2,47	61 / 40,12	49 / 130,44	8 / 78,90	1 / 12,83	132 / 264,31
São Vicente	0	6 / 5,52	16 / 29,91	3 / 62,12	0	25 / 97,57
São Mateus	2 / 0,82	11 / 6,37	18 / 97,43	5 / 62,96	1 / 32,95	37 / 200,56
					Total	194 / 562,54

The general trend i.e. the greater number of sub-basins with medium or high STP over the entire area surveyed was also verified for each of the three drainage basins under analysis (São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus). Special attention should be given to the São Domingos basin, which yielded more sub-basins with high STP than the other two. This difference probably stems from variables used to determine certain morphometric parameters e.g. sub-basin area size and gradient of major rivers.

The distribution of these variables over the surveyed area influences the location of sub-basins with high STP in the São Domingos and São Vicente basins; the highest frequency was recorded closer to portions with outcrops of the Bambuí Group and of the karst system. Such distribution among high STPs fails to occur in the São Mateus basin.

The gradient of major rivers seems to be an important variable in determining STP in the surveyed area, given that sub-basins with high STP were also registered on the slopes of Serra Geral de Goiás. The correlation between morphometric variables (gradient, basin area, number of channels, etc.) lies outside the scope of this study and therefore will not be addressed at present.

PTS das Bacias dos Rios São Domingos, São Vicente e São Mateus, 3º ordem

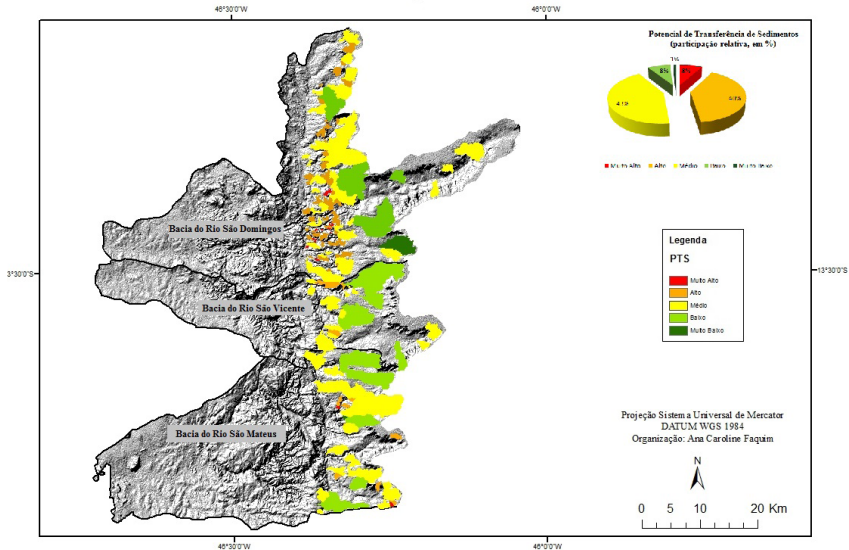


Figure 4. Sediment transport potential (STP) of São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus river basins, third order.

### STP of fourth-order sub-basins

There are 37 fourth-order sub-basins in the São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus rivers, stretching over an area of 872.03 km<sup>2</sup>. Six per cent of sub-basins have a very high STP, 24% have a high STP, 43% have a medium STP, and 27% have a very low STP.

The São Domingos river basin has two sub-basins with a very high STP; this stems from their large area size, type of relief and rock formation, as well as river gradient. Drainage density, which associates the length of all channels with area size, is also a major factor in determining the behaviour of river channels – in this case, a strong capacity to transport sediments beyond the occurrence registered on the slopes of Serra Geral de Goiás.

Table 3 shows the number of sub-basins and their corresponding area for the three drainage basins of the surveyed area as regards STP.

Table 3. Number of fourth-order sub-basins and area size (km<sup>2</sup>) with regard to STP

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	Total
Basins	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area	Number/Area
São Domingos	2 / 235,45	3 / 22,05	10 / 107,30	6 / 86,43	0	21 / 451,24
São Vicente	0	2 / 123,65	3 / 79,49	0	0	5 / 203,14
São Mateus	0	4 / 42,29	3 / 109,49	4 / 73,87	0	11 / 225,65
					Total	37 / 872,03

In general, fourth-order sub-basins have a greater capacity for sediment transport, hence reducing particle deposition.

PTS das Bacias dos Rios São Domingos, São Vicente e São Mateus, 4<sup>o</sup> ordem

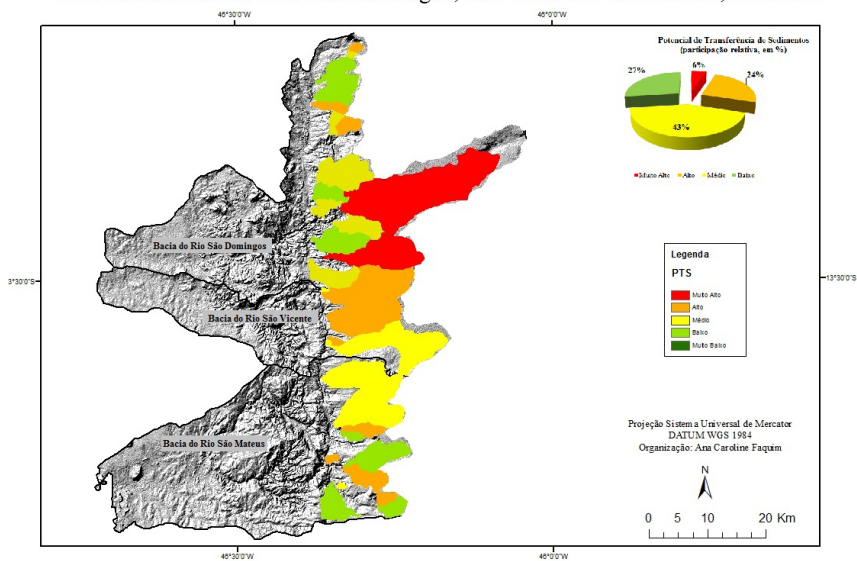


Figure 5. STP of São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus river basins, fourth order.

### Comparison of hierarchical orders

Figure 6 offers a comparison of the hierarchical orders under analysis. The surveyed area revealed 17 sub-basins with very high STP, 95 with high STP, 395 with medium STP, 464 with low STP, and 123 with very low STP.

## PTS das sub-bacias por ordem em cada Bacia Hidrográfica

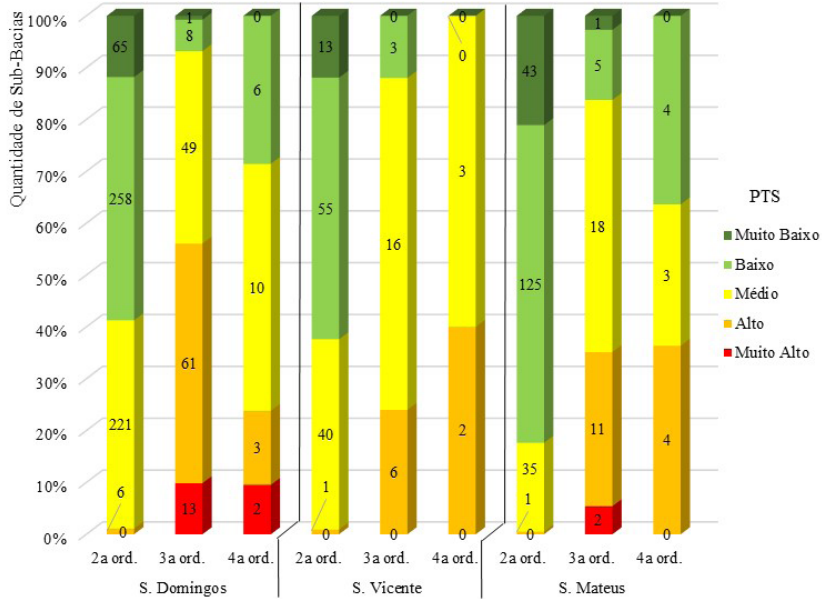


Figure 6. Comparison of STP values of sub-basins of different orders in each of the three drainage basins.

The comparison of STP values among different orders indicates that third-order sub-basins yield higher scores than the others, whereas second-order sub-basins show a tendency for medium scores.

As shown by Figure 6, STP varies from medium to low for all three drainage basins (São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus). However, the São Domingos river basin yields more sub-basins with very high STP than the other two, but its capacity for sediment transport is generally medium to low; a similar trend was observed for the São Mateus river basin.

### STP and caves

Seven caves in the surveyed area were selected for the present study; they consist of sinkholes located in the upper portion of São Mateus, São Vicente, and São Domingos river basins. Three of these caves are

located in the São Vicente basin and four in the São Mateus basin. Figure 7 shows the number of sub-basins (whose drainage system flows into each registered cave) and respective STP values yielded by the analysis.

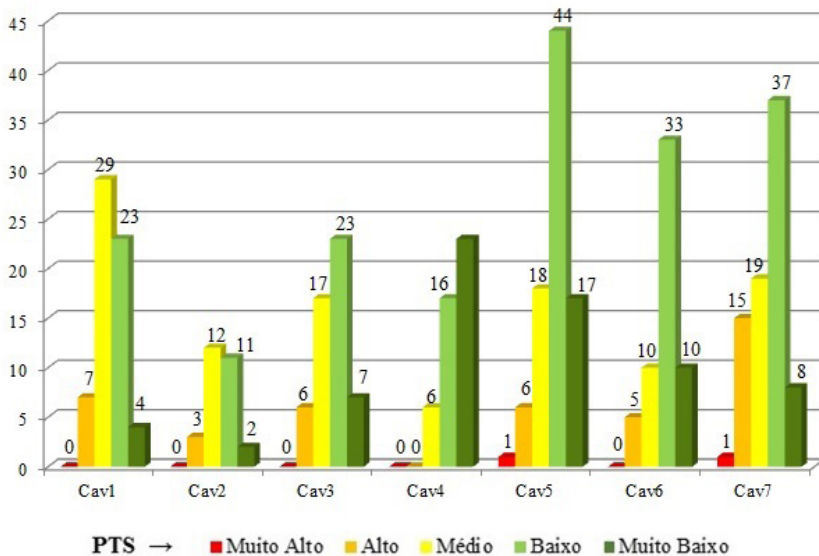


Figure 7. Number of sub-basins (and respective STP values) which flow into TRSP caves. Cav1 – Cave of Angélica creek; Cav2 – Cave of Bezerra brook; Cav3 – Cave of São Vicente river; Cav4 – Cave of São Mateus river; Cav5 – Cave of Lapa river (Terra Ronca); Cav6 – Cave of Palmeiras creek; Cav7 – Cave of São Bernardo river.

The drainage system of São Bernardo river cave (Cav7), part of the drainage basin of the São Mateus river, yielded the highest number of sub-basins with high STP values; it was followed by the Terra Ronca cave (Cav5) from the same river basin (Figure 8). The remaining caves ranked as follows, in descending order of sub-basins with high STP values: Bezerra (Cav2), Angélica (Cav1), Palmeiras (Cav6), and São Mateus (Cav4).

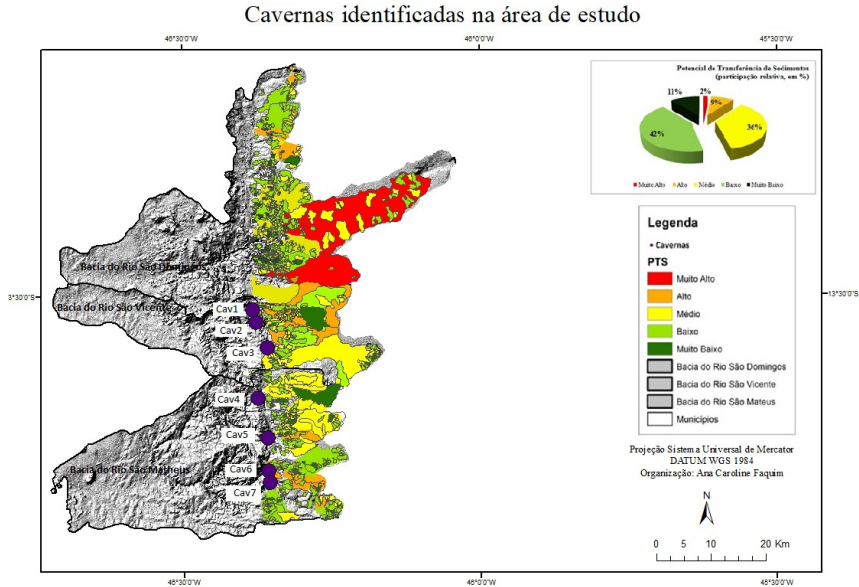


Figure 8. Location of caves found in the surveyed area. Cav1 – Cave of Angélica creek; Cav2 – Cave of Bezerra brook; Cav3 – Cave of São Vicente river; Cav4 – Cave of São Mateus river; Cav5 – Cave of Lapa river (Terra Ronca); Cav6 – Cave of Palmeiras creek; Cav7 – Cave of São Bernardo river.

## Conclusion

The upper portion of the drainage systems of São Domingos, São Vicente, and São Mateus rivers showed a predominantly medium STP, both in terms of relative area and of number of contributing sub-basins. These values suggest that sub-basins’ drainage systems have a moderate capacity for depositing their sediment loads on TRSP caves.

Second-order sub-basins recorded mostly low STP values, which highlights their relative deficiency in sediment transport. Third-order sub-basins, in turn, yielded the highest number of high STP values, particularly the São Domingos basin, located to the north of the surveyed area, followed by the São Mateus basin. Fourth-order sub-basins yielded mostly medium to high STP values, again especially with regard to the São Domingos and São Mateus basins.

These results suggest that second-order sub-basins, despite their proximity to rivers' headwaters on the slopes of Serra Geral de Goiás, lose transport capacity as their drainage system crosses the flat terraces embedded at the foot of the mountain. Hierarchical order, hydrographic density, and river gradient increase as the drainage system flows closer to karst terrain, thus indicating greater relief dissection and increasing STP.

Among the caves selected for this study, the São Bernardo river cave (Cav7) shows greater sediment transport potential, in that it constitutes the river mouth of the drainage system with the highest number of sub-basins with high STP values. Following, in descending order of STP scores, are Terra Ronca (Cav5), Bezerra (Cav2), Angélica (Cav1), Palmeiras (Cav6), and São Mateus (Cav4) caves.

It must be pointed out that the largest part of the São Mateus river basin lies outside the park's integral protection zone as well as houses the São Bernardo (Cav6) cave, which yielded the highest number of sub-basins with high STP. Therefore, special attention should be given to the use, occupation, and agricultural/cattle-raising management of both this basin and the western border of Bahia state's plateaus, located close to the Serra Geral de Goiás.

The results of the present study demonstrate the potential capacity for sediment transport shown by the drainage system in the surveyed area. In addition to the drainage system's properties, effective sediment transport is dependent on natural features of drainage basins (soil, relief, etc.) as well as on land use and occupation (vegetation remnants, management, land situation, etc.). Hence further research is needed concerning the drainage basins in the area surveyed, focusing on an integrated analysis of all factors and variables involved, in addition to monitoring the sediment load deposited in TRSP's karst system.

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