



**Mapping of the associations that act as governance instruments for the  
RPPN in the Brazilian states**

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#### **SUMMARY**

This article is about the mapping of Private Natural Heritage Reserves (RPPN) associations, which is a private conservation unit that is intended for environmental protection. The RPPN associations are organizations that bring together members/owners of these units in search of environmental protection cause strengthening by private properties. Through analysis of documents and interviews with people who are directly linked to the beforementioned associations, this study focused on observing the change in the quantity of associations in Brazil in the last two decades, and identifying the main challenges that are faced by those institutions. Scarce bibliography about RPPN associations makes this study original when raising these issues. The result shows that the quantity of associations has varied from seventeen to five in Brazil currently. Among the reasons pointed out that make management and maintenance difficult, the financial factor is found, it means the shortage of resources for daily activities. Paradoxically, the environmental protection cause through these associations of private properties may have political strength that can lead to a change in the current scenario. Understanding the constraints faced by those institutions enhance the environmental protection cause by private properties, what directly contributes to the environmental conservation.

**KEY WORDS:** RPPN. RPPN Associations. Environmental protection by private properties.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The implementation of territorial units that aims the environmental preservation and conservation is a practice used by several countries, whether they are central or peripheral (FERRARI, 2015). In Brazil, Private Natural Heritage Reserve (RPPN) was originally established in 1990, and it underwent legal updates in 1996, and then included in the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC) in 2000 (FERRARI, 2015; WIEDMANN; GUGLIARDI, 2018).

Within the SNUC, there are two groups of conservation units, according to their type of use: integral protection units, which aim to maintain ecosystems free from anthropogenic changes, allowing only the indirect use of their natural attributes; and sustainable use units, which aim to promote the conservation of nature with sustainable use of some of their natural resources, according to the limitations imposed in their management plans. RPPN belongs to the group of sustainable use conservation units.

This RPPN means privately owned conservation units, established through the voluntary action of their owners, who choose to allocate a portion or the entirety of their property for environmental conservation, through a perpetuity commitment that recorded in its registration (FERRARI, 2015). They have responsibilities at environmental bodies regarding the formalization and fulfillment of a management plan, which has to describe the activities that will be carried out within the unit, among those ones allowed by the law, such as scientific research, tourist visitation, recreational or educational activities. (FERRARI, 2015; WIEDMANN; GUGLIARDI, 2018).

The SNUC states that the management of conservation units is the responsibility of a managing body, which can be federal, state, or municipal. However, there is an exception to this rule in the case of RPPN, which is the only type of conservation unit managed by private owners (JERONYMO, 2021a). Because of their nature, RPPNs do not require the creation of a management support unit, such as a council, as is the case with other types of units within the SNUC (JERONYMO et al, 2021a; JERONYMO et al, 2021b). In this context, Borrini-Feyerabend et al (2013) argue that, given the various governance structures found in these units, and due to their private character, legislation serves as a beacon in management and decision-making of the owners.

According to Vieira and Mesquita (2018, p. 107), regarding RPPNs in Brazil - ‘it is one of the largest, most representative, and well-organized private systems for nature conservation in the world.’ Nevertheless, it still lacks a governance mechanism support for these units (JERONYMO et al, 2021a; JERONYMO et al, 2021b; VIEIRA; MESQUITA, 2018).

Institutional strengthening is essential for the success and longevity of these units (NGUINGUIRI, 2003). In this regard, associations are institutions that aim at aggregating information and providing support in the governance of these properties (VIEIRA; MESQUITA, 2018). Research focusing on governance in these conservation units is still scarce. There is limited literature that focuses on governance to RPPNs, those aspects often are left behind to other research on governance in public conservation units or the management of specific RPPNs, without aiming for a broader perspective. The aim of this study is to map the RPPN associations that serve as a tool to support the governance of these units and to identify the challenges faced by these associations in carrying out their activities.

Such demand arises from the scarcity of research on the topic and also to understand the current situation of RPPN associations throughout Brazil. Shedding light on these issues helps to continually promote the discussion about environmental conservation through private properties, as well as the obstacles that can be overcome through a network of institutional support that is aimed at assisting these conservation units.

## **METHOD**

Regarding the research methodology, it is characterized as a mixed-method approach, which, according to Creswell (2010), is based on the nature of the problem and/or the guiding questions that will be the focus of the research, using quantitative data to obtain the results. Thus, this study was developed using the beforementioned approach, as it is typical of such studies to use both non-measurable and measurable data, assigning different weights to each objective proposed in each research (CRESWELL, 2010). In this paper, qualitative data are more relevant than quantitative data. However, the latter is essential as a base to understand the research and to collect information that will be used in the qualitative analysis.

In terms of its purpose, the study is characterized as exploratory and descriptive because it deals with a subject that has little published material (VERGARA, 2007). Furthermore, Vergara (2007) states that descriptive research studies a group or phenomenon which the researcher has no influence, acting only as an observer and interpreter of the phenomenon.

Data collection was carried out through a literature review, examining publications related to the topic, as well as through qualitative interviews (CRESWELL, 2010; YIN, 2016) with individuals linked to the associations. Additionally, data collection was done using the official website of the National Confederation of RPPN (CNRPPN) and the ‘Indicator Panel of the National Confederation of RPPN’ to obtain information about state associations, including those in operation and those no longer in operation. Research was conducted to obtain data as close as possible to the reality, as the CNRPPN currently concentrates the most extensive compiled data of all associations across Brazil, and it also has data compiled from environmental control institutions such as IBAMA, ICMBIO, and state environmental bodies.

The minutes of the CNRPPN were read and used as a source of data to organize the information presented. These records are available on the website of the confederation and they are organized by the management periods of the CNRPPN presidents, from 2003 to the current term, which will end in 2024.

Based on this set of data, tables and figures were prepared to serve as a foundation to search information and to understand the researched phenomenon as stated before: RPPN

associations throughout Brazil, fluctuations in the number of these associations in recent years, and the challenges found in their maintenance.

## RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

According to Vieira and Mesquita (2018), after the inclusion of RPPNs in the SNUC in the early 2000s, there was a growth in the number of associations throughout Brazil, whose peak reached 17 associations, covering all the Brazilian states and the Federal District, and besides CNRPPN, which has a national scope and aims to promote integration among associations across the country.

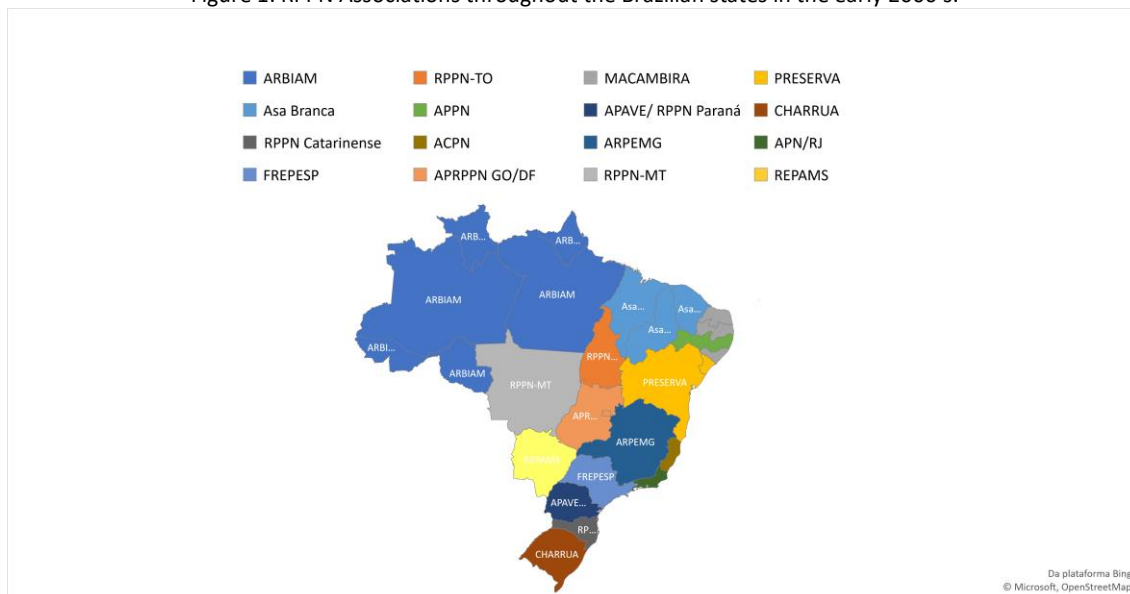
Table 1: RPPN associations throughout the Brazilian states, from 2001 to 2010.

AC	Acre	1	RPPN Owner Association of the Amazon Biome (ARBIAM)
AP	Amapá		
AM	Amazonas		
PA	Pará		
RO	Rondônia		
RR	Roraima		
TO	Tocantins	1	RPPN Owner Association of Tocantins (RPPN-TO)
AL	Alagoas	1	Private Reserve Owner Association of RN, PB and AL (MACAMBIRA)
PB	Paraíba		
RN	Rio Grande do Norte		
BA	Bahia	1	Private Reserve Owner Association of Bahia and Sergipe (PRESERVA)
SE	Sergipe		
CE	Ceará	1	RPPN Owner Association of Ceará, Piauí and Maranhão (Asa Branca)
MA	Maranhão		
PI	Piauí		
PE	Pernambuco	1	Pernambucana RPPN Owner Association (APPN)
PR	Paraná	2	Green Area Protector Association of Curitiba and Metropolitan Region (APAVE)
			Paranaense RPPN Owner Association (RPPN Paraná)
RS	Rio Grande do Sul	1	RPPN Owner Associations of Rio Grande do Sul (CHARRUA)
SC	Santa Catarina	1	RPPN Owner Association of Santa Catarina (RPPN Catarinense)
ES	Espírito Santo	1	Capixaba Association of Natural Heritage (ACPN)
MG	Minas Gerais	1	RPPN Associations and Private Reserves of Minas (ARPEMG)
RJ	Rio de Janeiro	1	Natural Heritage Association (APN/RJ)
SP	São Paulo	1	Federation of Private Ecological Reserves of São Paulo State (FREPESP)
DF	Distrito Federal	1	RPPN Owner Association of GO and DF (APRPPN GO/DF)
GO	Goiás		
MT	Mato Grosso	1	Mato Grossense RPPN Owner Association (RPPN-MT)
MS	Mato Grosso do Sul	1	Mato Grosso do Sul RPPN Owner Associations (REPAMS)

Source: own authorship that is based on the CNRPPN data (Indicators Panel of the RPPN National Confederation).

Some associations covered more than a single state, as the case of the states in the Northern region, where the RPPN Owner Association of the Amazon Biome (ARBIAM) included the states of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, and Roraima. The same was observed in other regions, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: RPPN Associations throughout the Brazilian states in the early 2000's.



Source: own authorship that is based on the CNRPPN data (Indicators Panel of the RPPN National Confederation).

The way each association operates is different from one to the other, as they are private entities that do not have specific legal regulations that govern their activities. However, it is a fact that the existence of RPPN associations promote closeness, integration, and communication among the owners, serving as guidelines for these private conservation units (VIEIRA; MESQUITA, 2018), and it also strengthens the movement to encourage and incentivize new participants. In the following years, the process of consolidating these associations gradually lost momentum, with many associations ceasing their activities across the country.

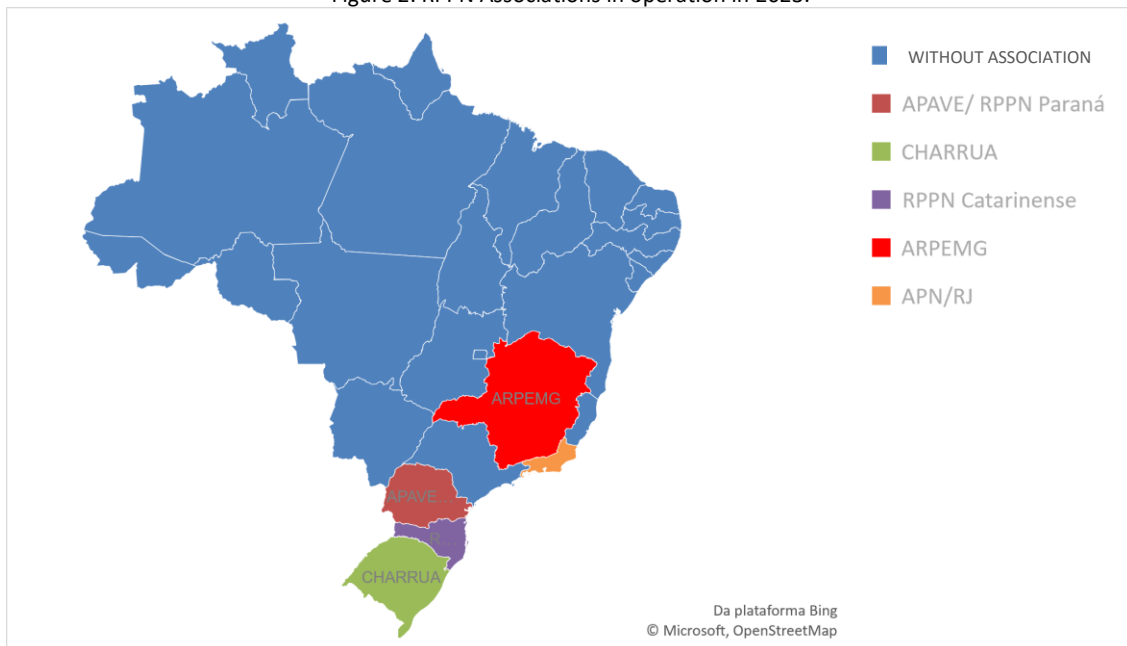
Table 2: RPPN associations in operation in September, 2023.

PR	Paraná	1	Green Area Protector Association of Curitiba and Metropolitan Region (APAVE)
RS	Rio Grande do Sul	1	RPPN Owner Associations do Rio Grande do Sul (CHARRUA)
SC	Santa Catarina	1	RPPN Owner Association de Santa Catarina (RPPN Catarinense)
MG	Minas Gerais	1	RPPN Associations and Private Reserves of Minas (ARPEMG)
RJ	Rio de Janeiro	1	Natural Heritage Association (APN/RJ)

Source: own authorship that is based on the CNRPPN data (Indicators Panel of the RPPN National Confederation).

Only five associations continue their activities in the country, covering five Brazilian states. Currently, the Midwest, North and Northeast regions do not have any association in operation, according to Figure 2. The CNRPPN remains active as the articulator and integrator of those associations.

Figure 2: RPPN Associations in operation in 2023.



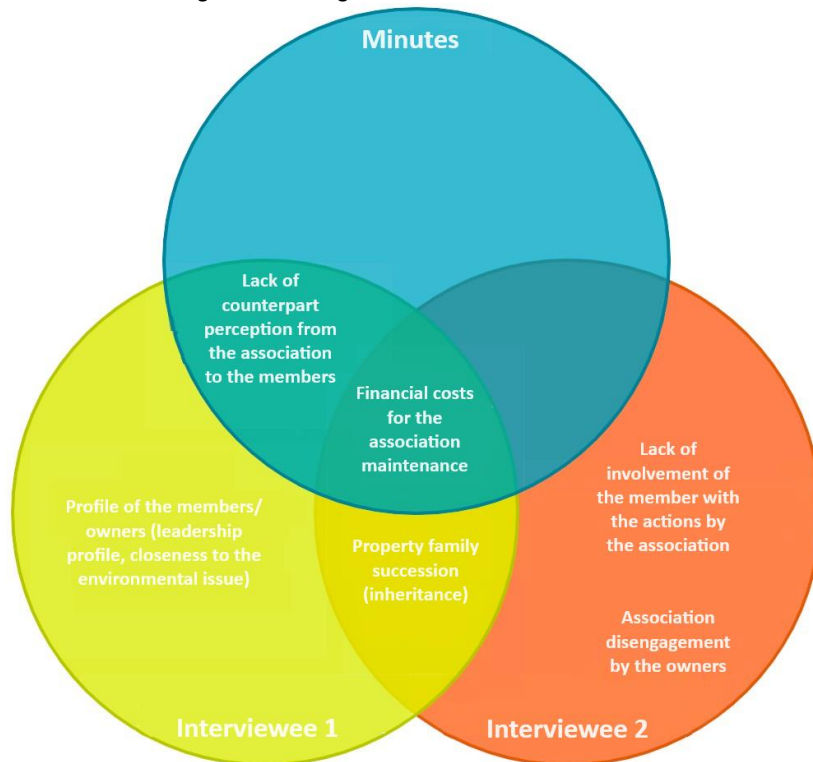
Source: own authorship that is based on the CNRPPN data (Indicators Panel of the RPPN National Confederation)

A survey carried out with the CNRPPN meeting minutes from 2003 until nowadays points out that the main motivating factor for the end of the activities is the high cost of the maintenance charges and the CNPJ registry of the associations. The main source of their revenue is through contributions (regular or occasional ones) from the members. While analyzing the minutes was possible to identify that some associations have difficulties to show to a member/owner of a RPPN the benefits that the existence of an institution which gather those owners can bring for the group or for the environmental protection cause. Also, the lack of other revenue sources threatens this associations due to the shortage of financial means for the daily operations. However, searching for revenue sources becomes more feasible along with the group action through an institutional representation that these associations have.

Another document analyzed was - 'Results of the priority topic survey for the future of the Brazilian RPPN', which is available in the confederation website. This document is a product of the contribution collection done with several members and it was presented to audiences during the '1st RPPN National Forum' that was held Brasília, DF, Brazil on July 29, 2017. In that document, the main topics appointed by the owners are about financial incentive actions to the owners and RPPN associations. Such details in this document endorse the point that was identified in the minutes, attributing the financial issue as one of the factors that lead to not continuity and to the termination of the associations in the country.

To contribute with an answer to the obstacles that lead to a RPPN association termination, two people were interviewed as they know the problems that are faced by the associations in Brazil. Both are RPPN owners and they have played in board of directors of associations in the country for more than twenty years. The interviews happened separately and in different moments, it means, in June and August, 2023, without any information share between the parties. The compiled answers of the interviewees along with the collected information from the minutes can be analyzed in the Figure 3.

Figure 3: Limiting factors for the association maintenance.



Source: own authorship and based on the survey of the CNRPPN minutes and interviews carried out.

The financial cost for the association maintenance was a point in common presented as a problem within the associations. The cost has to be supported by the members who can barely understand the importance of an associative institution for the cause. Therefore, the encouragement of punctual actions that aim cash flow is not always positively accepted by the members.

Another point that was presented and in common by the interviewee 1 and by the CNRPPN minutes was ‘lack of counterpart perception from the association to the members’, indicating there is still some difficulty for those institutions to show to their members the gains which can be reached through the fight for their causes. One example of this issue is the RPPN inclusion with a specific paragraph in the Law # 14.119, which established the National Policy on Payments for Environmental Services (PSA). Through the work done by the associations and the CNRPPN with the National Congress, the insertion of these units as eligible properties to receive. Moreover, through the same group action, it means, by the associations and the CNRPPN with the National Congress, the proceeding of PL 784/2019 is progressing, which is a specific law for the RPPN<sup>1</sup>, what will make possible a specific fund for the management and maintenance of these properties.

The family succession was pointed as another problem by both interviewees. When a RPPN is passed on as inheritance to other family members, who aren’t the original owners who implemented the RPPN creation in their property, there is usually a decrease in the engagement of those new owners regarding the associations. The factors that were pointed out by the

<sup>1</sup> Currently the RPPN are supported by the Law # 9.985/2000, which is about the SNUC and by the Decree 5.746/2006, which regulates the RPPN according to what is set forth in the Law by the SNUC.

interviewees were the identification with the environmental cause and the profile of RPPN supporters (the profiles of the inheritors and the original owners are different).

The profile of the members of the association was pointed out by the first interviewee. Not all of the RPPN owners closely follow the environmental protection issue, even though this can seem paradox. One of the reasons is the situation that was pointed out before. Not all the owners/ members have a relationship with the environmental issues, and in some cases, they just have the ownership of the land. Besides that, the lack of leadership profile also influences the work by the associations. Considering this, a few members get involved with the institutional actions, and there is no rotation among the members in the board of directors. This point was presented by the first interviewee, which meets another factor that was presented by the second interviewee.

The lack of commitment by the members with the actions by the association was a highlighted point by the second interviewee. This fact leads to little participation of new members in the board of directors, overloading the ones who are more active, and then some distancing of the member/ owner from the association which represents the environmental protection cause through private properties. Another factor that was presented by the second interviewee was association disengagement by the owners; a point that was highlighted, but the person could not say the reasons, but the fact itself.

As much in the interviews carried out and as much in the reading of the minutes, it was possible to identify that the problems faced are not homogeneous, it means, each association has its own reality and specificity according to the context in which it is (location, number of members, relationship with environmental bodies, and others). However, this study sought to systematize some factors based on what is available in the minutes and through those ones who experience the challenges faced by these institutions.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The RPPN associations experienced a period of significant growth in the early 2000s, reaching 18 institutions at its peak, with 17 regional associations and one national confederation. In the following decade, this number began to decrease, eventually with only six institutions, comprised of five regional associations and one national confederation, by the year 2023.

The reasons for the termination of an institution are several but they could be systematized in this study according to the main identified problems: financial cost for the association maintenance; family succession of the property through inheritance; a lack of perceived benefits from the association to its members; the profile of the members/owners; a lack of involvement of the members in the activities of the association; and the owner's disinterest in association involvement.

Among these factors, the main issue that was pointed out is the financial one. There is a challenge in acquiring resources to be applied to the maintenance of the association daily activities (administrative expenses), which increasingly hinders the sustainability of these institutions. Due to the absence of other revenue sources aside from the periodic contributions made by the members, the financial resources of these associations are compromised, making management difficult. Paradoxically, through institutions like these associations, the cause of environmental protection through private properties gains strength to the point of including the possibility of creating a fund to support these properties through RPPN Proposed Law that is currently being debated in the National Congress.

The termination of a RPPN association results in no support anymore to the units that have a formal institution that promotes their integration with other owners, what weakens the



already fragile governance structure of these conservation units. The possibility for a RPPN owner to access sources of funding that are currently being regulated, such as Payment for Environmental Services (PSA), is compromised due to the absence of formal institutions that facilitate coordination among the members. Acting as a group through institutions that represent their demands and interests gives more weight to the issue of environmental conservation by private owners within the political arena. Furthermore, it enhances communication among the members and dialogue with others through this joint action.

Understanding the reasons behind the termination of such associations is important to foster actions that aim to strengthen their institutional capacity and to prevent others from closing down, what shall directly contribute to environmental conservation. Facilitating the integration of units that operate independently is crucial for the development of those properties and to address the challenges that the owners may encounter.

The limited bibliography available about the difficulties faced by these associations paves the way for more research on possible reasons so that the private owners' conservation movement gains more strength and establishes itself permanently throughout Brazil.

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