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SYSTEMS AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT: ANALYSIS AND CASE
STUDIES

**FROM QUALITY TO INCLUSION: RETHINKING VALORIZATION
STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL HONEY PRODUCTS IN TERRITORIAL
CONTEXTS OF VULNERABILITY**

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Approaches to the valorization of localized products range from product-oriented instruments to territorially grounded strategies based on biocultural heritage. Their capacity to promote inclusive development, however, varies widely according to institutional environments, governance arrangements and territorial dynamics. Drawing on foundational and contemporary literature in economic sociology and territorial development, this paper conceives localized products not merely as quality-labelled goods but as socio-biocultural constructions embedded in historically rooted institutions and asymmetric power relations.

The study employs a comparative case analysis of three honey valorization initiatives—Mel de Aroeira do Norte de Minas (Brazil), Mau Forest Honey (Kenya), and Mukhuri Honey (Georgia). These cases were selected because they operate in developing and transition economies marked by differentiated governance models, vulnerability profiles and institutional capacities.

Results show that: (1) Product-based strategies, when introduced in unequal markets and territorial contexts marked by high levels of vulnerability, tend to reproduce existing asymmetries. Stringent standards, intermediary dominance and limited institutional support restrict participation and lead to selective inclusion; (2) Territorial approaches, which mobilize multiple localized resources—biocultural heritage, experiential tourism, collective learning—can broaden participation, but only when governance arrangements redistribute power and strengthen local capabilities; (3) Across all cases, without strong institutional capacity and inclusive governance, innovation benefits remain concentrated, limiting the transformative potential of valorization processes for the most vulnerable producers.

By integrating insights from the literature on biocultural asset valorization, markets and inclusion, and inclusive territorial development, the paper argues that overcoming the innovation–scale trade-off requires a systemic approach that combines productive, institutional and socio-territorial dimensions. The contribution proposes an analytical lens—and initial elements of a theory of change—to assess how different valorization strategies interact with territorial contexts to enable or constrain more inclusive rural development pathways.

Palavras-chave: local products; productive inclusion; governance; power asymmetries; territorial development.