

Civil Society Organisations and Fishing Communities in Maceió: Resistance, Knowledge, and Socio-environmental Justice in the Mundaú Lagoon

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1. INTRODUCTION

Artisanal fishing in Brazil plays a fundamental role both economically and socially, especially for fishing communities in coastal and riverside regions. This practice represents one of the main sources of livelihood, accounting for approximately 45% of national fish production, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA, 2022). Beyond its economic relevance, artisanal fishing is intrinsically linked to the cultural traditions of these communities, shaping their ways of life and preserving knowledge passed down through generations.

The context of fishing communities is marked by structural complexity involving multiple socioeconomic and environmental factors, which shape their forms of existence, organisation, and sustainability (Silva et al., 2021). Artisanal fishing constitutes not only a subsistence economic activity for millions of people worldwide but also a symbolic-cultural pillar in countless localities. It is a practice imbued with deep meanings, contributing to the construction of local knowledge and supporting processes of territorial development.

Within this scenario, the role of women in fishing activities stands out, although it is often rendered invisible in official narratives. Women comprise a significant portion of this workforce, preserving the cultural traditions associated with artisanal fishing, transmitting knowledge across generations, and maintaining ancestral practices, thus consolidating themselves as true "guardians of tradition" (Ribeiro & Nascimento, 2020). Nevertheless, they have historically faced processes of marginalisation and exclusion within the sector (Luijk et al., 2021).

Fishing communities, in general, face a range of structural challenges, including: weak management of fishery resources and unsustainable harvesting practices; conflicts arising from the overlap between artisanal and industrial fishing (Silva & Santos, 2018); low political representation, which limits their participation in decision-making processes that directly affect their ways of life (Rodrigues et al., 2019); the impacts of environmental degradation (Soares & Almeida, 2017); and the lack of specific public policies aimed at this population (Conceição & Oliveira, 2025).

In this context of vulnerability and institutional gaps, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) emerge as key actors in mediating conflicts, defending rights, and promoting the socio-territorial sustainability of these communities. By working closely with the daily realities of traditional populations, these organisations develop actions ranging from strengthening cultural identity to political engagement in decision-making arenas, especially in contexts marked by state neglect.

Given the challenges faced by fishing communities and the importance of coordination between civil society and public authorities in promoting effective policies, this study is guided by the following research question: How do Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in Maceió effectively contribute to mitigating the structural challenges faced by these communities and promoting socio-environmental justice, in light of female invisibility and institutional neglect?

Accordingly, the general objective of this study is: To analyse how Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon, Maceió-AL, contribute to addressing structural challenges such as the invisibility of women's labour and institutional fragility, through social governance and intersectorality, thereby promoting socio-environmental justice and community protagonism.

To achieve this general objective, the study aims to: Map the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon, identifying their organisational structure, target populations, and types of services and referrals provided; understand how these organisations contribute to securing rights and promoting the sociocultural value of fishing communities; and discuss the dynamics of institutional strengthening and network articulation promoted by CSOs in the region, in light of the concepts of social governance and intersectorality.

This research adopts a qualitative approach of an exploratory and descriptive nature. Data were collected through interviews with representatives of CSOs, identified using the non-probabilistic "snowball" sampling technique. Institutional documents and materials produced by the organisations were also considered, enabling data triangulation. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, as described in the methodological section.

Attention to public policies directed at traditional populations, such as fishing communities, is essential for promoting social justice, protecting territories, and valuing popular knowledge (Barros et al., 2020; Andrade et al., 2020). In the case of Maceió's fishing communities, there is a history of institutional neglect, exacerbated by factors such as irregular urban expansion (Santos & Sampaio, 2013). Observing and analysing actions implemented to serve this population is therefore a necessary step towards more integrated, inclusive, and sustainable initiatives that respond to the socio-territorial specificities of these communities (Alnsour, 2015).

The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to strengthening support networks for fishing communities by offering an updated diagnosis of the CSOs operating directly in this territory. From a practical standpoint, the results may guide support actions, strategic partnerships, and the development of public policies more aligned with local realities. Theoretically, the study draws on approaches to social governance and community protagonism, also engaging with the concept of intersectorality. It seeks to contribute to debates on the role of Civil Society Organisations in mediating between the State and vulnerable populations, with an emphasis on the context of traditional fishing communities.

The article is structured in four main sections. The first section presents the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis, addressing key concepts such as artisanal fishing, public policy, and socio-environmental justice. The following section outlines the methodology used for data collection and analysis. The third section brings together the main findings and discussion, highlighting the empirical evidence and its implications. Finally, the concluding section synthesises the study's core elements and proposes avenues for future research and actions aimed at the fishing population.

2. TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES, STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES: THE CONTEXT OF FISHING AND SHELLFISH GATHERING IN BRAZIL

Artisanal fishing and shellfish gathering in Brazil are essential components of the country's coastal and marine socio-economic fabric. These practices are characterised by traditional methods, community-based operations, and significant contributions to local livelihoods and food security. Artisanal fishing, often referred to as small-scale fishing, encompasses a wide range of low-technology, labour-intensive fishing methods, typically carried out by individual fishers or small groups using canoes, small boats, and simple equipment such as handlines, gillnets, and traps (Silva et al., 2013).

Shellfish gathering, or mariscagem, involves the extraction of molluscs and other invertebrates from intertidal and shallow subtidal zones. It is a practice frequently undertaken by women and children in coastal communities (Bantayan, 2022). These activities are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of coastal populations, representing not only a means of subsistence but also a way of life passed down through generations (Ribeiro & Nascimento, 2020).

In Brazil, artisanal fishing and shellfish gathering are particularly prevalent along the country's extensive coastline, from the Amazonian estuaries in the north to the lagoons and coastal areas of the south. Each region presents unique fishing practices, adapted to local ecological conditions and target species (Firmo et al., 2017).

Traditional fishing communities in Brazil face a range of structural and historical challenges that jeopardise the sustainability of their livelihoods, the assurance of rights, and the continuity of artisanal practices. These challenges manifest in various dimensions and have been widely documented by numerous authors, who highlight the persistence of inequalities, invisibility, and precariousness affecting fishers and shellfish gatherers in particular.

A central axis of vulnerability concerns access to public policies and state services. Many studies indicate that even when there are programmes aimed at artisanal fishing—such as PRONAF Pesca, the Seguro-Defeso (closed season insurance), or Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) initiatives—access remains limited, bureaucratic, and often disconnected from local realities (Vasconcelos, 2009; Pereira, 2017; Lima & Callou, 2015). Added to this is the lack of awareness of rights, exacerbated by the low levels of formal education among most workers in the sector (Cruz et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2016). Public policies, when formulated in a centralised manner and without territorial consultation, tend to be ineffective or incompatible with the cultural and economic specificities of these communities (Vasconcelos, 2009; Lima & Callou, 2015).

Another critical issue relates to infrastructure and material working conditions. Artisanal fishing largely operates with outdated equipment, rudimentary vessels, and a lack of facilities for processing and preserving the catch (Reis et al., 2016; Silva, 2010; Kfourri et al., 2017). This directly impacts product quality, reduces market competitiveness, and contributes to the economic devaluation of the activity. Furthermore, these communities face severe deficits in sanitation, housing, transport, and storage, which raise production costs and compromise public health (Cruz et al., 2018; Machado & Piccolo, 2018).

Education and technical training are also identified as structural challenges. Low educational attainment hinders access to social programmes and makes it difficult for individuals to understand and demand their rights. More concerning, however, is the mismatch between urban school curricula and the traditional knowledge of fishing communities, which leads to the devaluation of local knowledge and waning interest among younger generations in continuing fishing activities (Brito et al., 2024; Lima et al., 2015). The absence of specific educational policies for the artisanal fishing context increases the risk of cultural rupture and the disappearance of traditional ways of life (Brito et al., 2024).

From an economic perspective, there is a lack of income alternatives and a reliance on informal arrangements such as *aviamento*—a system in which fishers are subordinated to unequal relationships with middlemen and buyers (Cazella et al., 2010). The scarcity of rural credit and the inefficiency of existing financing schemes perpetuate poverty and economic vulnerability (Cazella et al., 2010; Santos et al., 2016). Moreover, products from artisanal fishing are seldom integrated into formal and institutional markets, whether due to lack of regularisation or the absence of organisational structures (Machado & Piccolo, 2018; Reis et al., 2016).

In addition to these factors, degradation of aquatic ecosystems, pollution, overfishing, and the expansion of industrial activities over traditional territories directly affect fish productivity and the food security of these communities (Machado & Piccolo, 2018; Begot, 2018; Soares et al., 2015). Likewise, the loss of fishing territories to infrastructure, tourism, and energy projects threatens the continuity of artisanal practices (Dias, 2021).

Notably, the social, political, and institutional invisibility of women in artisanal fishing must be emphasised. Despite being the majority in many communities and participating in every stage of the production chain, shellfish gatherers face exclusion from decision-making spaces, devaluation of their labour, and a lack of gender-sensitive public policies (Araujo et al., 2016; Santos, 2016; Dias, 2021). This invisibility undermines not only the individual rights of these women but also the collective sustainability of the fishing activity.

2.2 Knowledge, Networks, and Resistance: The Role of Local Organisations in Strengthening Artisanal Fishing

In addition to the structural challenges faced by fishing communities, it is essential to consider the possible pathways to overcoming these vulnerabilities. In this context, the work of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), as well as the strengthening of solidarity economy initiatives and participatory territorial policies, has proven strategic in

addressing the gaps left by traditional public policies and fostering processes of social and economic emancipation.

CSOs have played a fundamental role in recognising and valuing local knowledge, mediating between communities and public authorities, and developing actions aimed at popular education, political training, and income generation. In many settings, these organisations are the ones providing essential support for access to social rights, such as the formalisation of fishing activities, obtaining the General Fishing Register (Registo Geral da Pesca – RGP), guidance on social security benefits, and referrals to credit or professional training programmes (Araujo et al., 2016; Dias, 2021; Santos et al., 2012). Furthermore, their work has been crucial in making women fishers visible, contributing to their collective organisation and advocacy for gender-sensitive public policies (Santos, 2016; Pereira, 2014).

In a similar vein, the principles of the solidarity economy offer concrete alternatives to the exploitative dynamics of middlemen and economic dependence. Experiences with associations, cooperatives, and self-managed production groups have demonstrated that it is possible to promote fairer and more sustainable economic circuits, in which fishers and shellfish gatherers actively participate in decision-making, add value to their products, and increase their financial autonomy (Cazella et al., 2010; Reis et al., 2016). When grounded in the values of solidarity, self-management, and environmental sustainability, these initiatives also serve as spaces for civic education and the strengthening of the community's social fabric.

Another important aspect lies in the development of participatory territorial policies, which understand the territory not merely as a physical space, but as a site of belonging, culture, and identity. Shared territorial governance, based on qualified listening and participatory diagnosis processes, enables the formulation of public policies that are more attuned to local needs and the protection of common goods (Nascimento, 2013; Lima & Callou, 2015). Moreover, such policies are essential to safeguarding the right to remain in traditional territories, in the face of growing pressure from industrial, tourism, and infrastructure projects.

When working in an articulated manner—CSOs, local collectives, universities, social movements, and public administrators committed to social justice—it becomes possible to promote integration between technical knowledge and popular wisdom, encourage critical leadership training within communities, and foster the protagonism of fishing populations in shaping their own future. These initiatives not only address the voids left by the State, but also create new possibilities for resistance, creativity, and identity affirmation within the territory.

Based on Olson's (1965) theory of collective action, the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon can be understood as a concrete means of overcoming the "free rider" dilemma, which is typical of large and diffuse groups. According to Olson, rational individuals have little incentive to act collectively in pursuit of public goods if they can benefit from them without contributing to their provision.

Moreover, Olson's theory helps explain why these CSOs take on a central role in defending the social and environmental rights of these communities. In contexts of structural vulnerability—such as that of artisanal fishing communities—individual action has limited impact, making collective organisation all the more necessary.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is characterised as a qualitative study, with an exploratory and descriptive nature. The technical procedure used to define the sample of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that carry out activities with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon, located in Maceió-AL, was the **Snowball technique**, also known as “Bola de Neve”. This technique is a non-probability sampling method that uses referral chains and is particularly suitable for research involving hard-to-reach groups—those whose location or contact poses significant challenges (Vinuto, 2014).

According to Dewes (2013), hard-to-reach groups refer to populations whose members are difficult to identify or approach due to various factors, such as social invisibility, involvement in sensitive activities, or reluctance to participate in research. The choice of the Snowball technique is therefore justified by the difficulty in identifying and locating CSOs or collectives working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the study area, as these organisations often lack formal registration or visibility in public databases.

To collect the necessary data, a structured interview guide was developed, containing five specific questions designed to obtain essential information about the organisations. The terminology used in the interview guide—“CSO” or “collective”—was adapted according to each group's legal status.

The interview questions were as follows:

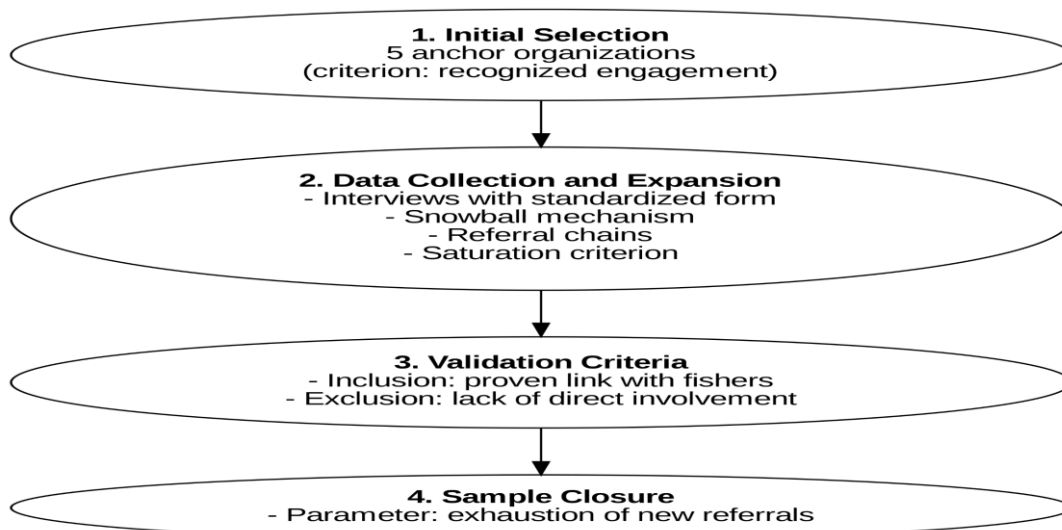
1. What is the name of the organisation, and in which neighbourhood does it operate? (This question aimed to clearly identify the organisation and its geographical area of operation.)
2. What are the main projects and services currently offered? (This was intended to identify specific activities and assess their impact.)
3. What is the organisational structure, and how is the team responsible for implementing the projects composed? (This sought to assess the organisation's operational capacity and the professional profile of its team.)
4. What are the main sources of funding for the CSO? (This aimed to understand financial sustainability and transparency.)
5. What are the main challenges faced in carrying out the activities? (This was intended to identify problems, difficulties, and potential areas for collaboration or support.)

At the end of the guide, an optional question was included asking interviewees to suggest other organisations that could be contacted to take part in the study. This question forms the core of the Snowball technique, allowing for the gradual expansion of the number of organisations interviewed.

The period for administering the interview guide and conducting interviews was from 28 March to 4 April 2025. The inclusion criteria used to select CSOs were: direct engagement with fishers and shellfish gatherers who rely on the Mundaú Lagoon for their livelihood. The length of time an organisation had been active was also considered a secondary criterion, due to the emergence of new groups following the environmental disaster that occurred in Maceió-AL. The absence of legal formalisation was not considered an exclusion criterion. However, groups that did not have a direct link with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the area were excluded from the research.

The mapping process began with five initial organisations, referred to as *seeders* or first informants, selected due to their recognised engagement in the lagoon’s border region. After interviewing these initial groups, the Snowball technique was applied, whereby each organisation recommended new groups to be interviewed, forming successive “waves” or stages of the technique. The mapping process followed four main stages, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1 – Stages of the CSO mapping process using the Snowball technique



Source: This research

The Snowball sampling process was concluded when **theoretical saturation** of the data was reached—that is, when new referrals and interviews no longer yielded substantially new or divergent information, thus allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

The decision to rely on theoretical saturation, rather than a fixed number of interviews, underscores the interpretative nature of the research, which is aimed at identifying patterns of meaning in the strategies of resistance and community mobilisation.

Data collection was conducted remotely, through telephone interviews carried out directly by the researchers. Each interview lasted, on average, 10 minutes. It is important to note that some participants declined to take part in the study, which contributed to a reduction in the final number of organisations mapped.

Following the completion of the interviews, the collected information was systematised and organised in a spreadsheet (Excel). To analyse the open-ended responses provided by

participants, a qualitative approach was employed using **thematic analysis**, which allowed for the clear identification of the main problems faced, key issues, recurring challenges, and opportunities highlighted by the participating organisations.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the main findings from the mapping of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and collectives working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon region, in Maceió-AL, based on the application of the Snowball technique.

4.1 Profile of the Identified Organisations

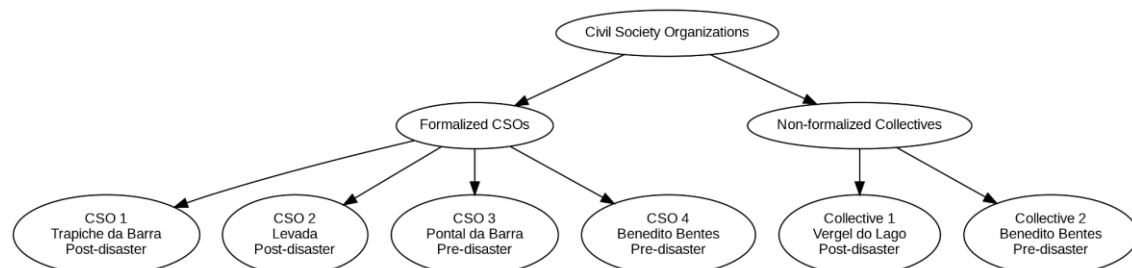
The mapping exercise resulted in the identification of six organisations carrying out activities targeted at fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon. These organisations demonstrate heterogeneous profiles, varying in terms of legal status, length of operation, and internal structure.

Of the six entities identified, two operate as informal collectives, based in the neighbourhoods of Vergel do Lago and Benedito Bentes, while the four formalised organisations are located in the neighbourhoods of Trapiche da Barra, Levada, Pontal da Barra, and Benedito Bentes (Figure 2).

The majority of the mapped groups were established in response to the environmental disaster caused by mining activities in 2018 in the Alagoas capital. Only two organisations—both based in Benedito Bentes—pre-date the disaster, although their formation was also prompted by earlier socio-environmental impacts along the Mundaú Lagoon.

The heterogeneous nature of the organisations, both in terms of formalisation and historical trajectory, highlights the complexity of the local associative fabric and underlines the relevance of these entities' work in supporting the socio-territorial resistance of fishing communities.

Figure 2 – Mapped Organisations and Collectives



Source: Authors (2025)

4.2 Main Areas of Activity

The activities carried out by the mapped Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and collectives reflect the diversity of demands and challenges faced by the fishing

communities in the Mundaú Lagoon region. Based on the accounts collected, four main areas of activity were identified:

a) Socioeconomic support and community strengthening

The organisations provide direct support to shellfish gatherers and fishers, including the distribution of shellfish to families in situations of social vulnerability—particularly those relocated to the Benedito Bentes neighbourhood following floods that affected the lagoon's margins. In addition, the CSOs promote initiatives for social inclusion, support for family development, and expanded access to new opportunities for income generation and professional training.

b) Environmental preservation and territorial defence

A significant portion of the initiatives is focused on preserving the ecosystems of the Mundaú Lagoon, including actions to combat deforestation and environmental degradation. The organisations also address the socio-environmental impacts of mining by organising debates and mobilising for the development of a new Brazilian mining model, grounded in democratic and horizontal principles.

c) Cultural valorisation and protection of traditional knowledge

Strengthening the cultural identity of fishing communities represents another central area of activity. The CSOs seek to preserve traditional fishing and shellfish-gathering practices, recognising them as fundamental elements for the construction of collective memory and for the socio-territorial affirmation of lagoon populations.

d) Promotion of racial and gender equity

Finally, collectives working to combat structural racism and promote spaces of belonging for Black women are particularly noteworthy. Through discussion circles, dialogue, and political engagement, these initiatives aim to reframe historically marginalised social trajectories and increase the representation of Black women in decision-making processes.

4.3 Challenges and Potential Identified by the CSOs

During the interviews, various challenges were reported that hinder the expansion and effectiveness of the activities carried out by the mapped Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and collectives. One of the main obstacles identified concerns the scarcity of financial resources, as most organisations rely on occasional donations and participation in small-scale public calls for funding, which creates instability in maintaining ongoing projects and activities.

Low institutional visibility also stands out as a barrier, as the lack of recognition and support from public authorities hampers the inclusion of CSOs in formal public policy networks, limiting the reach and sustainability of their initiatives. Another recurring challenge relates to internal management, given that many organisations operate mainly with volunteer teams and face a lack of training in strategic areas such as administrative management, financial planning, and fundraising.

Added to this is the fragility observed in the articulation networks among CSOs in the region. Despite the existence of isolated initiatives, there is a lack of a consolidated

collective structure, which hinders the development of more robust joint actions and the strengthening of the local associative fabric.

Despite these limitations, the interviews also highlighted significant potential. Noteworthy are the strong territorial rootedness and community recognition of the CSOs and collectives, as well as the presence of trained and mobilised local leadership.

Furthermore, there is growing willingness to build collaborative networks and establish intersectoral partnerships, which enhances the potential for coordinated action. There is also evidence of increasing engagement with public universities, which has supported the expansion of outreach projects and the provision of technical assistance to the communities served. These elements indicate that, although they face significant structural challenges, the mapped organisations possess solid foundations for strengthening their actions and expanding their socio-political influence in the Mundaú Lagoon region.

4.4 The Organisational Dynamics of Maceió's Fishing Communities

The empirical findings regarding the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with fishers and shellfish gatherers in the Mundaú Lagoon reveal key aspects of the lived realities of these communities and allow for a deeper understanding of the processes that structure their forms of resistance, organisation, and responses to social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. The emergence of these organisations in contexts marked by territorial conflict and environmental disasters highlights community mobilisation dynamics that reaffirm the importance of local bonds, traditional knowledge, and solidarity as collective strategies for persistence and resistance (Nascimento, 2013; Dias, 2021).

The work of the CSOs has proven decisive in reshaping the social fabric of the lagoon, especially following the environmental disaster caused by mining activities in 2018. Many of the mapped organisations were either founded or strengthened in response to this episode, demonstrating how critical events can act as catalysts for the development of support networks and social mobilisation. This finding echoes Dias (2021), who notes the role of socio-environmental conflicts in activating collective resistance in traditional fishing territories.

Actions aimed at territorial defence and environmental preservation emerge as one of the structural pillars of CSO engagement. Mobilisation against the degradation of the lagoon's ecosystems and criticism of the current model of mineral exploitation are linked to the construction of alternatives based on environmental justice, participatory governance, and sustainability (Machado & Piccolo, 2018; Soares et al., 2015). This dimension reflects a broader conception of territory—not only as physical space but as a place of belonging, identity, and collective memory (Lima & Callou, 2015; Nascimento, 2013).

In terms of cultural valorisation, the data point to concrete efforts by CSOs to preserve and affirm traditional knowledge and practices associated with fishing and shellfish gathering. These actions strengthen community identity, serve as tools for intergenerational transmission, and act as forms of symbolic resistance to external pressures (Ribeiro & Nascimento, 2020; Bantayan, 2022). The appreciation of traditional

knowledge thus emerges as an essential axis for the socio-territorial and cultural strengthening of lagoon communities.

Despite the strengths identified, CSOs face significant challenges. Financial scarcity, low institutional visibility, and internal management difficulties undermine the continuity of their actions and highlight the fragility of organisational infrastructure, aligning with the observations of Santos et al. (2016) and Cruz et al. (2018) regarding structural precarity and reliance on sporadic funding to sustain local initiatives.

The role of these organisations in the fields of racial and gender equity represents important progress in addressing structural inequalities historically embedded in fishing communities. Initiatives aimed at promoting the leadership of Black women and confronting structural racism have become strategic dimensions of collective action (Santos, 2016; Araujo et al., 2016). These practices expand opportunities for political participation and contribute to the construction of new meanings of belonging and representation within communities, strengthening the struggle for intersectional social justice.

In this regard, community agendas have broadened to explicitly incorporate the intersections of territory, gender, race, and class—an aspect still rarely addressed in the traditional literature on artisanal fishing. This movement reinforces Pereira's (2014) argument for the importance of recognising and supporting the collective action of women fishers as a strategy for political transformation.

At the same time, the findings reveal a disconnect between institutional requirements for formalisation and the communities' own organisational modes. Difficulties such as access to resources, bureaucratic hurdles for engaging with public policies, and lack of technical training reiterate criticisms by Lima & Callou (2015) and Brito et al. (2024) concerning the absence of educational and capacity-building policies tailored to the realities of artisanal fishing communities.

The heterogeneity of the mapped organisations—in terms of both longevity and degree of formalisation—reflects the diversity of lagoon-based associativism. This challenges homogeneous analytical models and demands more context-sensitive approaches (Cazella et al., 2010). Such diversity reveals multiple pathways for confronting vulnerabilities and underscores the need for flexible public policies adapted to specific territorial and cultural contexts (Nascimento, 2013).

Despite the vulnerabilities noted, the data highlight important potentialities. The social recognition of CSOs by the communities, the territorial embeddedness of their practices, and the presence of mobilised leadership form a solid foundation for institutional strengthening (Araujo et al., 2016). The increasing proximity to public universities, the development of extension projects, and a willingness to engage in cross-sector partnerships are signs of an expanding collaborative dynamic (Dias, 2021; Santos et al., 2012).

The presence of initiatives aimed at popular education, vocational training, and income generation suggests a deliberate effort to overcome the economic dependence associated with informal fishing structures such as the *aviamento* system (Cazella et al., 2010). These initiatives represent concrete alternatives rooted in solidarity economy principles, based

on self-management and the valorisation of collective labour (Reis et al., 2016). They also serve as spaces for political education and the strengthening of community social capital.

A strong symbolic connection to territory is a cross-cutting element in the actions of the mapped CSOs. The defence of traditional spaces and the preservation of collective memory lie at the heart of their organisational strategies, forming the foundation of struggles for recognition and justice (Lima & Callou, 2015; Dias, 2021). This active territoriality, grounded in emotional and historical ties, is essential for formulating public policies that are sensitive to the realities of traditional populations.

Finally, the findings indicate that the fishing communities of the Mundaú Lagoon not only resist adversity but also actively construct alternative ways of living, based on solidarity, autonomy, and the preservation of their modes of existence. CSOs, by mediating knowledge, organising demands, and articulating struggles, become fundamental instruments in the affirmation of collective projects rooted in territory. This perspective—integrating resistance and creation—broadens the understanding of fishing communities, repositioning them as active and essential agents in the pursuit of environmental justice, social inclusion, and the right to the city (Silva et al., 2013; Firmo et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, despite resource constraints, the actions of the CSOs identified in this study reveal the creation of coordination and incentive mechanisms that render collective action possible and effective. Networked organisation, the valorisation of traditional knowledge, and engagement with universities function as selective incentives and strategies for building collective identity, thereby strengthening community engagement.

In this regard, CSOs act as catalysts for diffuse and fragmented interests, transforming them into concrete political agendas. Their activities help overcome the individualistic logic that limits collective action, fostering the strengthening of social ties and the emergence of local leadership—particularly among shellfish-gathering women, who have traditionally been marginalised. Thus, CSOs contribute not only to the provision of public goods but also to the development of social capital that is essential for socio-environmental justice and the sustainability of fishing communities, as highlighted by Olson's (1965) theory.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the importance and diversity of the work carried out by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the fishing communities of the Mundaú Lagoon, in Maceió-AL. Through the application of the snowball sampling technique, it was possible to map six organisations which, despite facing structural limitations and scarce financial resources, play a strategic role in promoting socio-environmental justice, valuing traditional knowledge, and defending fishing territories.

The findings reveal that these CSOs operate across multiple domains, such as socio-economic support, environmental preservation, cultural valorisation, and the promotion of gender and racial equity, responding directly to the needs of local communities. In

addition to addressing the gaps left by traditional public policies, these organisations contribute to strengthening resistance and fostering community autonomy in a context of historical vulnerability and inequality.

The evidence gathered suggests the need for greater institutional recognition of these organisations, with a view to developing more participatory, territorially grounded, and cross-sectoral public policies. From a practical perspective, the mapping exercise may inform actions to support networking, foster partnerships with universities and public institutions, and attract social investment.

As a future proposition, it is recommended that this research be expanded to other lagoon and coastal regions, alongside a deeper engagement with the communities served, in order to assess the concrete impacts of CSO initiatives on social well-being, environmental conservation, and territorial equity.

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