



# Tourism, Conservation, and Contestation in Florianópolis, Brazil

## TOPIC

The case study explores: (1) the historical policy and planning practices that supported the natural amenity-led growth model; (2) land preservation as revenue in tourist economies and the capitalization of non-commodified land; and, (3) the strategic actors responsible for initiating and monitoring land-preservation programs and how the current affordable housing deficit impacts conservation areas.

## TIMEFRAME

Late 1970s – mid 1980s

The case study reviews the primary urban planning and growth strategies used by the city of Florianópolis between the late 1970s and the present. Tourism was consolidating as the primary economic activity of the island by the 1970s, but developers shifted strategy in the mid-1980s and began to invest in large high-end resorts to cater to a wealthier international clientele. During this period, coastal land areas with access to popular beaches became sites of conflict: because many of these areas are federally protected preservation areas, some of them were still occupied by traditional fishing communities.

## LEARNING GOALS

- Evaluate cross-sectoral challenges that emerge as a result of multiple conflicting demands for land use and divergent growth agendas among stakeholders
- Evaluate the policy and planning opinions of multiple stakeholders to determine the potential for both positive and negative outcomes associated with various land uses and growth models
- Formulate strategies for designing urban-level policies that offer co-benefits, such as low-carbon growth and the preservation of natural amenities, while also considering budgetary constraints that are common in low- and middle-income countries
- Formulate strategies using available data for analyzing the impact and outcomes of urban-level policies and programs

## PRIMARY AUDIENCE

This case study is well suited for undergraduate policy or urban studies students, graduate urban planning and policy students, or executive education students in sustainability policy and management.

## PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE

None.



## DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The tropical Atlantic Forest is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world, with more than 20,000 plant species and 2,200 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish (Silva 1980; WWF 2016). With only 15 percent of the forest's original one million square kilometers still in its natural state, urban growth, logging, and expansion of agricultural land continue to threaten that ecosystem (Fundação SOS Mata Atlântica 2011). Florianópolis, nestled among fragments of the Atlantic Forest in the south of Brazil, is a city rich with history, culture, and natural beauty—and it remains under threat, too.

In the 1950s, the Municipal Council of Florianópolis recognized the importance of the island's natural beauty in the growing tourism industry. Embracing modernization, the city contracted designers including Lúcio Costa and Oscar Neimeyer and naturalist landscape architect Roberto Marx to develop a new urban vision (Pereira 2003). New land-use legislation banned factories and protected the city from some of the more damaging effects of industrialization (Lopes 2015). Without industry on the island, the city sought to boost its local economy by adopting an administrative plan for tourism; it established the Secretariat of Tourism, Culture and Sports in 1981 (Konzen 2013).

By the 1980s, Brazil was burdened by heavy international debt and high unemployment. Pro-growth politics dominated the course of development as the country prioritized economic growth and transitioned from a military dictatorship to a republic. The national environmental movement, which had gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to address both deforestation in the Amazon and urban environmental degradation that resulted from rapid industrialization (Hochstetler & Keck 2007). As the natural landscape became noticeably impacted by urban growth, a diverse amalgam of associations and organizations interested in social change and the environment took root in Florianópolis (Peñañiel 2005). The dense thickets of swampy mangroves serving as the local dumpsite became the first stage for local activists to begin fighting for improvements in environmental health and enforcement of land preservation. Local protests targeted the tourism industry and demanded participants in it be held accountable for degrading cultural heritage sites and the island's natural beauty.

## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

Resort developers, motivated both to protect the island's natural amenities and to exploit them for financial gain, were critical players in the island's economy. Having cultivated strong relationships with the political elite, many of the city's developers became highly influential in determining the course of urban development (Lopes 2015). Environmental advocates and



neighborhood associations, emphasizing equitable growth and social inclusion in addition to environmental preservation, often vilified developers for their outsized influence and disregard for socio-economic equality and environmental impact. Many of these dynamics persist today.

Seeking to create a development agenda that met the objectives of these divergent parties, the Urban Planning Institute of Florianópolis embarked on international study tours in the early 1980s (Rizzo 2013). Influenced in part by Britain’s New Town Movement, which itself grew from the Garden City Movement, Florianópolis made the protection of natural amenities a planning priority.<sup>1</sup> The City Council, the Mayor’s Office, and the Urban Planning Institute explored various strategies that would allow developers to continue building tourist amenities while also protecting the island’s natural and cultural heritage. Possible strategies included:

1. Allocating additional resources and building institutional capacity to monitor and enforce the protection of land preserved under federal and state laws;
2. Passing municipal laws and regulations to increase the area of land under preservation and creating institutional capacity to ensure municipal land would not be degraded;
3. Engaging non-state actors in participatory planning and budgeting, as well as the monitoring and enforcement of parkland; and,
4. Promoting the development of dense urban nodes throughout the island, connected by water-based transportation, to distribute growth and lessen encroachment on preserved land in the city center.

## SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

To enhance and expand local capacity for protecting and managing land on the island, the local government adopted Options 1 through 3. Although certain key nonprofit organizations support Option 4 (discussed further below), the city has not been successful in consolidating popular support for multi-nodal development.

With more than half of the island protected by federal and state environmental protection laws, the city government enforced the protection of preservation areas and halted encroachment of both informal housing and new tourist resorts and amenities (Option 1). The three primary types of federal land preservation in Brazil are: Permanent Preservation Areas (APP), Preservation Areas with Limited Use (APL), and Conservation Units. APP applied to 42 percent

<sup>1</sup> With his 1898 book *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Social Reform*, Ebenezer Howard inspired the Garden City Movement, which aimed to preserve nature in England’s rapidly growing industrial cities. Calling for the preservation of agricultural belts alongside industry, residential areas, and cultural institutions, Howard generated significant support for the maintenance of green space in urban and suburban areas. Greenbelts continue to feature prominently in urban planning around the world.

of Florianópolis in the 1990s. All types of preservation areas can include jurisdictional waters and their adjacent natural characteristics—including beaches, dunes, estuary systems, and some types of privately owned land. Federal Law No. 11.428 on the use and protection of the Atlantic Forest also requires municipalities such as Florianópolis to protect remnants of the Atlantic Forest, primarily through a Municipal Plan for Conservation and Restoration.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 established the right to an ecologically balanced environment and places the responsibility of environmental preservation on all levels of the government. The Constitution also provides the legal basis for prosecuting environmental crimes and established a basis for environmental regulations by specifying environmental protection as a principal component of the Brazilian economy. Another constitutional provision calls for protection of the coastal zone as an area of national heritage. With some resort developers destroying mangroves to build restaurants and hotels, the city was able to take legal action and enforce rehabilitation of federally protected land. The existence of these strong federal laws enabled the municipal government to focus on enforcement and monitoring of federally preserved areas.

In addition to improving enforcement of federally protected land, city leadership created municipal preserves beginning in the early 1980s (Option 2). In 1979, the City Council had passed a law establishing a decentralized structure that gave greater managerial autonomy to municipal departments, including the Urban Planning Institute. At this time, the newly established Urban Planning Institute was under the leadership of Francisco de Assis Cordeiro, an economist from the University of São Paulo who fully understood the dangers of unchecked urban growth and actively engaged in preservation projects (de Assis 2000).<sup>2</sup> The Lagoa do Peri Municipal Park, created in 1981 during Cordeiro's tenure, is among the earliest models of a municipal park that serves the combined objectives of leisure, environmental education, and environmental preservation. Nine out of fifteen conservation units in Florianópolis were created by municipal law.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the creation of new conservation units, the government of Florianópolis initiated a new Master Plan for Seaside Towns in 1985 to better manage development of prized coastal areas. Although this plan was comprehensive in its attention to coastal preservation, it was insufficient to control illegal encroachment. The continued need for greater regulation and monitoring of natural assets led to the creation of the Municipal Environment Foundation of Florianópolis (FLORAM) and the Tourist Development Plan, which cemented the place of natural amenities in the island's economy and provided institutional capacity that ensured permitting would be conducted in accordance with federal, state, and local environmental laws and regulations.

<sup>2</sup> Francisco de Assis Cordeiro, who was elected Mayor after serving as the Director of the Urban Planning Institute, made numerous public speeches that supported both the institutionalization of urban planning in Florianópolis and the preservation of ecological assets.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Law 9985 of 2000 established Brazil's National System of Conservation Units and defines a conservation unit as a protected territorial space and its environmental resources. These conservation units are a different classification than the federal preservation areas (APP and APL).

In the 1980s, the city also adopted the strategy of engaging non-state actors in land-use planning, as local officials were eager to create a modern, progressive city (Option 3). The local government worked with local community groups such as the Free Ecological Movement (MEL), which was successful in working with the city to close the mangrove landfill and in creating the Galheta Municipal Park. These positive collaborations allowed for a new paradigm of cooperation between the local government and civil society; many of MEL's members went on to work in city agencies or state institutions (Silva 2007).

The Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) also played an important role in the environmental movement. The UFSC Center for Cultural Studies and Citizenship (CECCA), established in 1990, was one of the most active ecological activist groups in the city (de Assis 2000). Additionally, professors from UFSC began working with the city government in 1992 through a collaborative forum called the Studies and Research in Social Work and Popular Organization (NESSOP). The success of this forum in providing space for the entrance of social equality into city decision-making threatened the business elite's dominance and led to leaders of the tourism industry's founding of a parallel nongovernmental organization to promote pro-tourist development, FloripAmanhã.

The motivation to boost the local economy by leveraging the natural environment for tourism led to a brief alignment of interests between local elites and environmentally oriented neighborhood associations and environmental groups. Each of these parties wanted to preserve local environmental assets, if for different reasons. The alignment was short-lived, however, and the inevitable struggle between neighborhood associations and pro-growth developers trying to attract luxury tourists became more apparent in the 1990s.

Not all possible strategies were adopted. Edison Andrino of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) was elected Mayor of Florianópolis in 1985, the first elected mayor since 1964. Andrino, seeking to include community associations in the administration of the city, initiated participatory budgeting and began the process of revising the Master Plan in 1986; unfortunately, neither the local government nor community organizations were sufficiently organized to make the strategy effective at that time. With Esperidiao Amin from the center-right Progressive Party (PP) returning to City Hall for a second term in 1989, participatory budgeting was suspended and not adopted again until the City Statute federally mandated participatory planning in 2001.

Additionally, although the Urban Planning Institute promoted a master plan for the development of dense clusters of housing and businesses scattered throughout the island (Option 4), there

was strong local opposition to this form of development among several community associations. Many locals opposed investment in their areas in an effort to discourage dense development in favor of maintaining minimal public services and limited commerce. Although the 1986 Master Plan called for the development of marine transportation, facilities for encouraging water sports, and other job-creating industries tied to the historical importance of the sea, these strategies have also not been adopted—and the construction of new roadways continues.

## RESULTS

In 2010, approximately 60 percent of the city of Florianópolis was urbanized. Of the undeveloped land, 27 percent remains in legally protected environmental areas (Bridges 2017). Compared to other Brazilian cities in the Atlantic Forest, Florianópolis experiences less deforestation and has even seen modest regrowth in fallow pastures (Baptista 2008). After investing in paved roads throughout the 1970s and 80s, the city's beaches became popular for second homes and other tourist amenities. This rise in demand for coastal real estate marked the beginning of increasing inequality, and the booming tourism industry of the late 1980s and 1990s attracted migrants eager to work in the service industry during the high season but who were left with few employment opportunities the remainder of the year. Informal settlements began to grow in the city center and quickly swelled to accommodate high-season laborers who could not afford housing in the local market and who had only intermittent periods of employment.

The rise in tourism as the primary economic activity of the city led to an increase in real-estate developers' investing in hotels, resorts, and related amenities. The new institutional capacity for environmental permitting was unfortunately undermined by corruption as developers found illegal means to gain permits despite the potential for environmental degradation, and several corruption cases involving FLORAM are still pending in regional courts (SC 2016). Land continues to be highly contested. A new Master Plan, proposed in the mid-1990s, was withdrawn following public outcry that it was developed without incorporating community opinion and that did not uphold directives of the 1985 Master Plan for Seaside Towns. To address these concerns, public meetings were held with 22 concerned communities, which were given a period of thirty days to suggest modifications. Although a new Master Plan was eventually approved in 1997, NGOs and community associations were able to stop the City Council from drafting supporting bills.

Another Master Plan was approved in 2012, but it was also highly contentious. Many residents felt it favored real-estate developers and elite interests and was not prepared in accordance with the City Statute, the 2001 federal law requiring participatory planning. Just three months after the new plan's approval in 2014, a federal judge revoked it, stating that the lack of district hearings and public audiences violated federal law (IPUF 2016). The public also largely opposed the planning department's unifying vision that the city should develop decentralized nodes throughout the island.

Despite these controversies, the 2014 Master Plan was in some ways environmentally progressive, with clear goals to have the largest percentage of protected land of any state capital in Brazil and to preserve the cultural landscape and quality of life of the city. In consultation with the Inter-American Development Bank, the city also prepared a Sustainability Action Plan, which led to the near-term prioritization of sanitation management, improvements in land-use planning and urban mobility, and technological innovation in public administration. The Plan has been successful in creating baseline data, setting sustainability targets, and promoting investment in the water and sanitation sector, but the large funding gap for other sectors has been an impediment to full implementation.

Although FloripAmanhã had its roots in the tourism industry, the group has developed and championed numerous effective environmental plans and projects in partnership with the city government since its founding. One example is the multi-stakeholder collaboration that led to the development of the Floripa 2030 plan, which began in 2008. This project outlined a strategic direction for sustainable development in the metropolitan region and brought together 148 participants from 84 local public and private institutions. In 2010, it was awarded the Von Martius Sustainability Award in Humanity by the Brazil-Germany Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

On behalf of the Municipal Council for Tourism, FloripAmanhã also oversaw the 2007 application process for several beaches in Florianópolis to be certified as Blue Flag Beaches, an international recognition for beaches or marinas that meet a set of stringent standards for water quality and environmental management. However, the increase in tourism led to a deterioration in the cleanliness of the one beach that was certified; it experienced an increase in unauthorized busking, and poorer water quality resulted as the area strained to accommodate swelling numbers of tourists.

Projecto Orla was introduced in 2012 to protect coastal areas by promoting integrated management strategies. The initiative, still ongoing, aims to better manage and control competing interests along the shores of the island by bringing together over 30 representatives from federal, state, and local level government bodies, as well as representatives from local universities, to identify and establish ways to engage civil society in coastal management..

## ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The sustained preservation of land in the Florianópolis area is largely the result of (1) strong federal laws supporting permanent preservation; (2) the alignment of interests between city officials, community associations, and real estate developers for a brief period in the 1980s; and, (3) and the persistence of community associations that support land preservation.

Environmental organizations and neighborhood associations fought to maintain the city's environmental assets both for ecological reasons and to preserve quality of life on the island. Resort developers played a dual role: they both encroached on land and worked to preserve the natural environment as a tourist amenity. Predatory occupation by developers and informal housing settlements generated manmade structures in areas of permanent preservation; capital-rich real-estate developers found legal and illegal means by which to gain construction permits while poor residents built without permits.

Social movements engaging in land-reclamation strategies, such as squatters' rights, experienced a period of strong support in the mid-1990s. Growth in the tourist industry resulted in a need for low-cost housing for the service-sector workers who migrated to the island in search of work during the high season. The steep slopes ringing the city center have become increasingly populated with informal housing, and the housing deficit persists today. Given the large percentage of municipal land restricted from residential occupation, the city has been unable to comprehensively monitor conservation units and thus prevent the construction of illegal housing within them. As a result, large capital investments are needed to regularize informal housing in conservation areas.

Steadily rising real-estate values throughout the island have locked in a pattern of development that concentrates favelas and forces encroachment on preservation areas. The socioeconomic polarization is becoming more apparent as the gap between the cost of land in affluent neighborhoods and the cost in low-income neighborhoods widens. The tension between these parties has further strained the ability of the local government to design policies and programs that meet the demands of both, as demonstrated in its inability to adopt a new Master Plan for two decades.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In the case of Florianópolis, the combined efforts of the environmental movement and the tourism industry led to greater legal and institutional support for the preservation of land. Neighborhood associations and government bodies found ways to work towards common goals, and these positive collaborations allowed for new forms of cooperation between the local government and civil society to manage collective problems. Despite a difference in the underlying values of the various parties, the city was able to identify a development strategy that leveraged points in which all parties had shared interests. By focusing on shared goals, policies and programs were designed that offered co-benefits and met multiple development priorities.

The case of Florianópolis also highlights the importance of leadership in achieving environmental goals, as seen in the actions of the head of the Urban Planning Institute in the early 1980s. The dynamic interactions between the various strategic actors in Florianópolis tell a story of preservation success—as well as the unintended consequences of rising real estate costs on affordable housing and the importance of transparency and balances of power in urban planning. The history of Florianópolis proves that collaboration supports progress toward goals, while contestation impedes action. Though the fight over the Master Plan has stopped unwanted development in some parts of the island, it has also perpetuated an inability to optimally protect the city’s environmental assets. As in the past, overcoming this stalemate will require all parties to work together to identify shared goals and develop strategic plans that offer co-benefits and a shared vision of the island’s future.

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