

# Shrunk Hinterland and Swollen Seaboard: Regional Planning and Population Dynamic in Southern Brazil

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## **Abstract**

The population dynamics in Brazil is strongly related to the increases in poverty, social exclusion and to a lack of a planning framework in a regional scale. In spite of its balanced net of cities, in Santa Catarina State the west high plains show a significant decrease of population in small and medium cities at the end of the last century and, at the same time, the swelling of coastal cities. The State Government concerned to this issue, launched in 2003 a new decentralized administrative network, aiming to ease the development of the high plains region and avoid migration towards the seaboard. Last Census (2010) showed the plan failed. This paper's aim is to analyze the effectiveness of the regional planning actions to avoid the migratory flow from the interior to the coastal cities in State of Santa Catarina, Brazil.

## **Introduction**

The State of Santa Catarina doesn't have metropolises, but it has the best level of income share in the country and count on with several well defined regional industrial and agro-industrial clusters (Siebert, 2008). The arrival of the neoliberals' economical policies in 1980 starts a migration flow from the interior plateau to the coast. The proximity of the ports and the improvement of the tourist infrastructure in the coastal area, besides to the lack of jobs in the hinterland, have also impelled this migratory flow (Bastos, 2011).

By 2000, this process of concentration of income and population in the seaboard was perceived as a barrier for development and for the regional

socioeconomic balance. Thereby, in 2003, the State Government establishes a new structure for an administrative decentralization whose objective was to strengthen the local policies, promoting an endogenous development. In spite of the establishment of several regional offices and programs in the last ten years, the migration process toward the seaboard continued and the population shrinkage already reaches medium cities like Lages (157 thousand inhabitants, 11st GDP of the state) (IBGE, 2011).

In spite of the fact that many scholars have been working on studies aimed to frame the problem of the population mobility, the recent data from the 2010 Census that shows the populational shrinkage in Lages, make the scientific community aware of the weight of the problem. For this reason, the study of Lages and surroundings is paradigmatic in this context to evaluate the effectiveness of the regional planning in Santa Catarina. Distant 200 kilometers from the coast, the Lages' region had its economy sustained by the wood extraction and Pinus reforestation for several decades. The monoculture, lack of positions in the industry and commerce are usually pointed as causes of the demographic decrease of 16,75% (IBGE, 2011) in the last decade that nor the administrative decentralization, nor the proposed regional planning were able to revert.

As the region is not economical stagnated we have looked for the possible causes of the failure of the government actions related to the regional endogenous development proposals.

## **Analysis**

### **Economy and Migration**

The increases in poverty and social exclusion that have resulted from urbanization in Brazil - and, more broadly, in Latin America - are key points to understand the population mobility that has led to the shrinkage of small towns and even some medium cities in Brazil. Actually, the concept of "urban shrinkage" in Brazil is complex and has to be linked to other issues as housing and jobs shortage and real estate market expansion rather than only urban environment decay.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a very intensive urbanization occurred, mainly due to a change in Brazilian economic base from agriculture to industry (as happened in several LA countries). Huge urban growth due the national economic policies (Import Substitution Industrialization-ISI) in the 1970's, further enlarged the industrial parks in the big southeastern cities (as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) and attracted additional millions of people from rural areas (by 1980, almost 43 million rural people had moved to cities) (Santos, 1996). As a consequence, at the middle of the century the city's periphery swelled and concentrated a huge number of poor people, previously spread in rural areas (Brito 2005; Maricato 2001).

The process of the liberalization of the Brazilian economy in the 1980's and the adoption of Foreign direct investment (FDI) economic policies certainly impacted some regions in the country with less-skilled population in a process that some authors have named "reverse polarization" (Rodrigues-Pose and Tomaney, 1999). In Brazil, FDI favored a relative dispersion of economic activity from the

metropolises outward into the hinterland and a migratory flow of capital and jobs toward south eastern states.

Notwithstanding, in Santa Catarina State such process did not occur with the same magnitude due its particular process of colonization that kept a balanced spatial distribution of the population. The successful pattern of development of the State is credited to the diversification of productive activities that embrace several successful local productive arrangements. Also, a significant agreement between social actors, good educational opportunities has pioneering in Brazil the creation of business incubators and technologic parks (Turnes, 2008).

### **Santa Catarina State**

The landscape of Santa Catarina State, in southern Brazil, is characterized by two different regions: the coastal plain zone at East and high plains at West, separated by the mountain range called “Serra do Mar”. This configuration helped to set up the development patterns for social and economic occupation of the territory. At West, huge proprieties for cattle rising and cook pines (*Araucariaceae*) extraction, later replaced by pinus wood (*pinus elliottii*) cultivation, boosted the development of cities like Lages (156,000 inhabitants in 2012) and Caçador (71,000 inhabitants in 2012).

At the Atlantic coastal zone (including major rivers basins and valleys) skilled European immigration at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century favored industrialization and the ports helped the development of commerce. Somehow the coastal zone was also privileged with a mode of occupation conditioned by its fragmented physical and natural factors, allowing a balanced urban network, characterized by a rural small lots structure and by an absence of a strong regional pole. (Siebert, 2001). By 1950, the development of the road system in the state increased the connection between West and East, including in the State economic flows areas that previously were excluded, and also facilitated the population flows.

In spite of the increase of inter-municipal flows, the lack of roads infrastructure and the geo-economics fragmentation kept the Santa Catarina coastal cities isolated from the more dynamics centers of the country until the middle of the century. Between 1960 and 1970, the creation of a Federal University in the State Capital, Florianópolis and the roads improvements along the coast, changed the economic State trends, pushing cities development by the reinforcement of the tertiary economic sector (Pereira, 2003).

With the new road infrastructure, the tourist flow to the seaboard that have started slowly at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century increased, causing strong changes in cities morphology and impacting in the cultural and behavior local patterns. The development of the “tourism economy” is followed by decay on the small scale agriculture and by an expressive migration toward the seaboard, where the hope for a regular job was likely better. A significant parcel of the migrants was absorbed by the civil construction industry in cities that have been showing an accelerate growth since 1970. On the Santa Catarina’s seaboard, in spite of its socioeconomic

heterogeneity and good social index, a lack of basic infrastructure and urban planning characterize most of the cities (Pereira, 2003).

The cities development allowed by the tourism sector has act as a magnet for jobs. In the 1990 decade, many cities in the seaboard duplicated their population and reduced the poverty slower than the State medium. Data from IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) points out that among the ten faster growing cities in Santa Catarina between 1991 and 2000, eight are on the coast and also are on the coast the four where were observed the faster expansion (IBGE, 2004).

Notwithstanding, other factor have contributed to the faster development of the coastal areas in the State. The set up of industrial poles<sup>1</sup> closed to the coast also was crucial to the development of the Atlantic border (Seabra, 2011). In a deeper study Seabra (2011) found out that the distance to the coast is inversely proportional to the demographic expansion and the growth of the per capita income.

At the same time, the State hinterland at West show a significantly de-growth, mainly in cities where the economic base is the small agriculture business. Several crises in farming and cattle sector help to create a background favorable to pushing the population to the Atlantic coast cities (Turnes, 2008).

### **Administrative Structure**

The power centralization is a major factor in the socio-political formation in Brazil. This administrative model, inherited from Portugal was reinforced by the military regime (1964-84), with serious consequences for the relationship between local, state and federal governments (Kraus, 1991). However, in the 50's, new territorial policies make municipalities and regions feel the need to combine efforts to meet their needs of planning and development.

In this context, by 1960 a municipal association process began in the State of Santa Catarina. With the State Constitution of 1989, the Santa Catarina Municipal Associations find their legal basis, consolidating the cooperation process started decades before. Today, all municipalities in the state are associated in 21 municipal associations, which have their activities coordinated by Fecam (Federation of Associations of Municipalities of Santa Catarina), based in the capital Florianópolis.

Conceptually, the Associations of Municipalities are organizations that aim to promote regional development through the intermunicipal planning and cooperation. In Santa Catarina, these associations are composed of micro-regions structured and bounded according to common political interests. The key aims of these associations are to join the municipalities associated in a permanent forum for discussions about common issues and provide specialized technical services (Moraes, 2005).

Besides the associations of municipalities it is observed in the 90's a struggle to increase the participation of different actors in development processes. Several

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<sup>1</sup> It refers to the textile complex in the Itajaí Valley, the metal-mechanic pole in Joinville and the coal industry in the Southeast.

initiatives in order to create links between civil society and local government were launched. Among these initiatives, we can highlight the formation of networks for development, as the Regional Development Boards, Hydrographic Basin Board and the Departments of Regional Development (SDRs) (Filippim and Rossetto, 2008).

In 2004, the new State Governor Luiz Henrique da Silveira (2003-2006) included in his government plan guidelines to promote an administrative decentralization in order to rebalance the State cities ´net and reinforce the local policies. In this context was created the Project My Place (Meu Lugar) that among its main aims are: formulation of 30 regional development plans focused in the social participation and identity reinforcement; formulation of programs for human resources capacitation in order to promote development and an implantation of a monitoring system to follow the regional and State development (Santos et alli, 2008).

To achieve its aims, the State Government strategy was the creation of 30 Department for Regional Developmente (SDR) establishing a new administrative structure for Santa Catarina State. The SDRs were created with the goal of representing the State Government within each respective region, coordinating government actions, promoting decentralization and regional integration of public administration, and coordination of development activities in their territory (Filippim and Rossetto, 2008).

Thus, at least three forms of joint development by are present in Santa Catarina nowadays: the Associations of Municipalities, boards/agencies and SDRs. They coexist and sometimes conflicted as they have very similar goals and act in the same territory. However, rather than integrated they are juxtaposed.

### **Lages Region - Amures**

The study of the city of Lages and surroundings is important to the understanding of whether and how much the political and administrative structure is able to develop the region. Lages is the headquarter of a region with 18 municipalities, pooled in an association named Amures (Associação dos Municípios da Região Serrana) (Figures 01 and 02).



Figure 01: Santa Catarina State in Brazil and AMURES region in Santa Catarina State.  
Source: Instituto Eivaldo Lodi de Santa Catarina.



Figure 02: The AMURES Region and Lages City.  
Source: Instituto Euvaldo Lodi de Santa Catarina

Most Amures municipalities have extensive agricultural base characterized by large estates. From the 18 municipalities, 11 are among the 21 with lower Human Development Index (HDI) of Santa Catarina and have low investment in the productive sector and a large population concentration in urban areas. In relation to economic, political, social, educational and health differs from other regions of the State by high rates of illiteracy, unemployment, housing shortage and rural exodus. The Amures region is considered the poorest and most backward in Santa Catarina (Peixer in Filippim and Rossetto, 2008).

Lages emerges in the seventeenth century as a strategic point in the hinterland of Santa Catarina, right in the colonial arterial route for trade cattle and horses with the rest of the country. Livestock takes the lead role in the first economic cycle of the city and defines the structure of landholding in the region. Since 1850, the presence of skilled European immigrants facilitates industrialization and trade of Araucaria (*araucaria angustifolia*) timber, abundant in the region. Soon timber replaced livestock, giving the region a new rural and urban setting, with swelling of the headquarter city by migrants from rural areas seeking employment in the timber industry (Bastos, 2011).

From the first decades of the twentieth century, the exploitation of Araucaria allows the structuration of the entire urban complex and the economic and political structure. During this period, the region got a huge population growth, receiving a number of migrants from all social classes in search of personal opportunities.

In the Lages region, the timber industry was and remains until today basically the major source of income and investments. A shy diversification made for the pulp and paper industry has occurred in the years 1950 and 1960 did not change the economic perspectives. With the depletion of Araucaria timber, all Amures, region has entered a long period of economic regression just in years when the State economy grew more. Only in the 1990' s, with the trade of reforested Pinus (Figure 03), the timber industry was again heated (Goularti Filho, 2007).

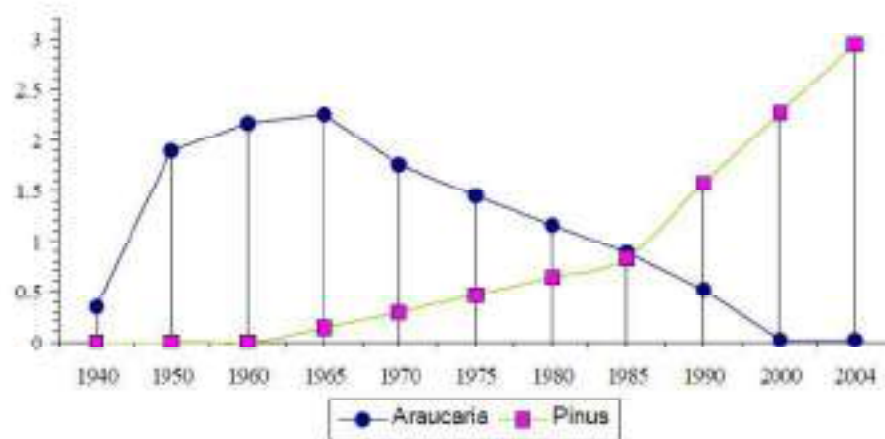


Figure 03 - *Pinus elliottii* versus *araucaria angustifolia* production (millions of m<sup>3</sup>)

Source: Sindicato das Indústrias de Serrarias, Carpintarias e Tanoarias de Lages (Sindimadeira), 2005, *apud* Hildebrando, 2009.

It is important to highlight that at the peak of the so-called Timber economic cycle circa 1950-60 - the region, and especially the city of Lages, became economically and politically strong enough to hold the title of chief state's economy (Goularti *apud* Hildebrand, 2009). Although the *araucária* depletion was blamed to the economic crisis, still in the early 1980s Lages had a prominent position in the state, occupying the third position among Santa Catarina counties, revealing that the social crisis and demographic decrease should be due to the process of income concentration and social inequality of Brazilian capitalism or due the administration inability to set up "Local Productive Arrangements".

The nearby city Caçador (180 km north bound) should be taken as a counter example. It has a similar economic history related to the timber and was able to overcome the economic decay by economic diversification and investments setting up several other Local Productive Arrangements within the industrial timber sector, in agro industrial fruit complex and plastic material industry (Goularti Filho, 2007).

## Final Discussion

In the contemporary world, the presence of multiple and complex economic activities generate the need for a set of political practices within a context of polarization and alliances between adjacent territorial units, which seek to aggregate and forming a unit - the region - which seeks to strengthen this union politically (Freestone, 2000).

This union, however, is not enough to unleash a process of "regionalization". So, the processes of "regionalization" we see today in Santa Catarina State appear from an attempt for leverage the political processes, many times without an understanding of how the different layers of different systems act - physical,

environmental, economic, social, cultural etc. ., as well how these systems are interconnected, what their interfaces and how these vital elements and especially how the community can manage the local systems.

In Brazil, as a rule, committees, associations or government institutes which intend to invest in regional planning, end up guided by political, technical and reflect a little off that real economic development and quality of life and environmental the territory. To reverse this common sense it is necessary to understand the key components in the constitution of a territory and think on the possible policies, planning and management within a given context. If on one hand the Brazilian public policies advanced significantly in recent years in relation to citizen`s participation in the process of social construction of urban territory, on the other hand has not yet materialized, in most of the country, effective plans for regional planning. (Moraes, 2005)

Despite the administrative dynamic of Santa Catarina State that intends to create a coherent structure to the regional development, the Municipalities Associations are still the most recognized agency when discussing regional policies in Santa Catarina. In spite of this, many authors (Kraus, 1991; Filippim and Rossetto, 2008) agree that the Municipal Associations do not perform adequately the role predicted in its statutes as planning, community discussions forums and services offer.

As a "discussion forum", the Municipal Associations work more as a space for exchange of information and experiences among the Mayors than as a mediator between the Administration and other social actors (Kraus, 1991). Also the financial applications despise the chances that could be offered by the Associations and the use of traditional channels through direct relationships with congressmen and senators always occur, characterizing what Kraus calls "favors`policy" which ends be replayed in the relationship between community and municipal power, obscuring the possibilities of increasing power to the organizing society (Moraes, 2005).

Kraus (1991) also shows that there are several obstacles to implement a structure for "micro-regional planning". Besides the lack of interest of the each associations (involved in different social actors as trade associations, unions, environmentalists, etc..), there are trends to act in the associated municipalities only as a service provider, bridging the gap of municipal technical frameworks.

Also the creation of the SDRs by the State Government is much criticized. As mentioned above, the SDRs are not integrated, but juxtapose to the other agencies. The passage of a proposed regional organization for development co-ordinated by civil society (forums / agencies) to another, coordinated by the government sphere (SDR) ends up to disorganize the local representations that refers its organization in different political edges. In fact, the SDRs disrupt the autonomy of the local organizations and have a strong negative effect on the local interactions and their claims (Filippim and Rossetto, 2008; Santos et alli, 2008).

The challenge for Lages` region is to set up integrate public policies and territorial actions that show more attention to the structural potentialities of the area and to promote an economic diversification and "Local Productive Arrangements" in

order to overcome the lack of pragmatic character, pointed (Goularti Filho, 2007) as a possible causes of the continued flow of people toward the seaboard. Turnes (2008) also give us a clue highlighting the need for a new model of development for rural regions, based on familiar agriculture, cooperatives, and strategies for generation of employment to young people.

The idea that a "Santa Catarina model of development", based on endogenous development and on a balanced network of cities with a homogeneous population distribution could promote a better quality of life, lasted for a long time. Notwithstanding, today this idea has been demystified (Santos et alli, 2008). The uneven growth of the coastal cities of Santa Catarina in relation to those of the interior and the impossibility of an integrated management due to the mismatch of the different regional administrations have been blocking opportunities for regions as Amures in the hinterland high plains of the State.

What can be seen through an analysis of the Amures region context is that even with the reduction in population and economic participation in the context of Santa Catarina, the region still has a potential industrial-economic dynamism. The use of this potential cannot be supported by Government administrative structure, but should be the result of a joint action between the public sector (municipal authorities and representative bodies of local government), the private sector and the organized society in developing programs and measures to attract new investments.

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