



## LAGOONS FOR WHOM? A STUDY ON SOME FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY URBANIZATION IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF OSÓRIO (RS)

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**Abstract:** *This article is based on an in-progress research project that seeks to analyze the urban, socio-environmental, and economic implications of the expansion of gated horizontal condominiums around the lagoons in the municipality of Osório (RS), Brazil. The study starts from the problematization of urban growth in environmentally sensitive areas, marked by the commodification of nature and real estate appreciation at the expense of common goods. Grounded in the works of authors such as Milton Santos, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey, the research proposes a critical reflection on the impacts of urban space production on territorial configuration. It draws on key concepts such as landscape, the urban, and the commodification of nature, aiming to understand the processes that transform fragile ecosystems into market assets. The growth of gated communities in Osório, which intensified after 2010, reveals an exclusionary development model, based on discourses of progress but disconnected from social and environmental realities. Although these developments attract investment, they deepen urban fragmentation, socio-spatial exclusion, and environmental degradation, affecting traditional land uses and local ways of life. This study contributes to the debate on territorial justice, the right to the city, and alternative forms of urbanization that are more equitable and environmentally responsible, reaffirming the importance of public policies that reconcile urban development with environmental protection and social inclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Gated communities; lagoons; commodification of nature; landscape; urbanization.*

### 1 Introduction

The advance of urbanization has caused significant transformations in various areas of the Northern Coast of Rio Grande do Sul, especially in sensitive areas such as coastal zones and the margins of water bodies. This phenomenon, often driven by economic interests, generates real estate speculation and has manifested itself more intensely in recent years in the municipality of Osório (RS), where the construction of gated horizontal condominiums near the lagoons has altered land use and the landscape. Urbanization, in this context, is not limited to the physical expansion of the city, but involves the appropriation of nature as a commodifiable resource.

The production of space in the contemporary capitalist context and the appropriation of nature reveal the intensification of its commodification, through the transformation of natural elements into real estate assets inserted into the dynamics of capital appreciation. Henrique (2006) states that the appropriation of nature occurs within the scope of the production of a new urban space; similarly, this author highlights how in large cities, especially in high-end real estate developments, nature is appropriated and artificially produced, being converted into an instrument of market appreciation and leaving its marks on the landscape. This process results in a "second nature," which, according to Lefebvre, "retains some features of the first, more acquired and produced as such" (Lefebvre, 1983 [1980], p.41).

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Urbanization in environmentally sensitive areas has been the subject of growing attention in scientific literature, especially in recent decades, given the advance of real estate developments over coastal areas, lagoons, and other wetlands. The complexity of this process requires a multidisciplinary approach, involving concepts from geography, urbanism, and sociology. The production of contemporary urban space, marked by the intensification of market dynamics, is directly related to the commodification of nature, the privatization of common goods, and the reorganization of forms of territorial appropriation.

In Brazil's case, authors such as Maricato (2015), Santos (2006), and Harvey (2013) have contributed to the critical understanding of urban transformations, demonstrating that urban space is constituted as a product of the contradictions of capitalism. The city, in its multiple scales, is configured as a locus of conflicts between public and private interests, and between conservation and speculation. As Maricato (2015, p. 79) states, "the city is a disputed space, where market interests often override the common good". This logic is especially visible in the processes of condominiumization in areas of environmental value.

In the municipality of Osório (RS), urban transformations, particularly through the construction of horizontal condominiums, intensified from the 2010s onwards. At that time, the number of gated horizontal residential developments installed near the lagoons doubled, demonstrating a trend of expansion for this type of venture where landscape and commodified nature are converted into real estate assets. This form of urbanization has been widely promoted and encouraged by discourses that associate urban development with economic growth, without, however, considering the socio-environmental implications and the contradictions produced by this model.

The growth of this type of development often occurs despite sustainable urban planning. Local urban planning legislation, although formally aimed at environmental protection and rational territory management, reveals possible normative loopholes, selective flexibilizations, and omissions that favor the private appropriation of common goods. At the same time, selective urbanization produces territorial exclusion, fragmentation of the urban fabric, pressure on public services, loss of biodiversity, and concrete threats to the integrity of lagoon ecosystems.

This situation raises some concerns. The conversion of environmentally fragile areas into urbanized spaces aimed at those who can buy these properties, which are primarily members of higher-income social strata, poses fundamental questions: what are the social and environmental implications of this expansion? Which segments of society benefit, and which are excluded from this process? Can urbanization promoted in this manner truly be considered a positive model of development, or is it contributing to the (re)production of inequalities?

In light of this problem, the present article aims to reflect on the urban, socio-



environmental, and economic implications of the expansion of gated horizontal condominiums around the lagoons in the municipality of Osório (RS). The goal is to understand how this process affects the organization and production of urban space and local socioeconomic dynamics. The investigation brings together five fundamental theoretical axes: the concept of landscape, the urban as a totality, the production of space, the commodification of nature, and state capacity. These concepts are mobilized to critically interpret the effects of contemporary urbanization on Osório's lagoon shores.

This article is organized into five main sections. Following this introduction, the second section (Conceptual Path) sets out the theoretical framework, drawing together the production of space, the urban, landscape, the commodification of nature, and state capacity. The third section examines the expansion of gated horizontal condominiums in Osório over the last decade. The fourth section discusses the social and environmental transformations that this expansion produces around the lagoons. Finally, the concluding section revisits the study's main contributions.

By documenting and critically interpreting the effects of urbanization on the Osório lagoons, the study intends to contribute to the academic and political debate on the ways of producing, regulating, and inhabiting urban spaces in times of environmental crisis and social inequality. Urbanization cannot be dissociated from the conflicts that run through it, nor from the ethical and political choices that guide its configuration. Therefore, more than describing a phenomenon, the study proposes to shed light on its consequences and on the possibilities of more just and sustainable alternatives.

## 2 Conceptual Path

Understanding the expansion of gated communities requires an approach that considers space as the result of social, economic, political, and environmental relations. From this perspective, Lefebvre (2000; 2001) is a fundamental reference in understanding space not as a neutral support for social relations, but as a product and means of production and reproduction of society. For the author, "space is a social product, but also a means of production and reproduction of social relations" (Lefebvre, 2001, p. 29). Space thus brings together material and symbolic dimensions, articulating historical, social, and cultural processes. Under capitalism, its production is traversed by the tension between use value and exchange value, since space, besides being a condition for the reproduction of life, becomes an object of appropriation, commercialization, and appreciation.

This production involves different agents and interests, among which are owners of the means of production, landowners, real estate developers, the State, and excluded social groups. Corrêa (1989) highlights that:



Urban space is produced by a set of social agents that act upon space, producing and consuming it at the same time. These are the owners of the means of production [...] the landowners; the real estate developers; the State and excluded social groups (Corrêa, 1989, p. 11).

Spatial configuration thus results from the actions of agents with different economic, political, and institutional capacities, whose practices contribute to defining uses, forms of occupation, and processes of territorial appreciation. The production of space must therefore be understood as a process marked by disputes and power relations, in which different interests participate in defining spatial forms.

The relationship between the production of space and nature broadens this discussion. For Pereira (2023), Lefebvrian theory contains "a concept of nature that is fundamental for understanding the politics of space and that, therefore, enables the apprehension of a politicization of nature and ecology" (Pereira, 2023, p. 1). From this perspective, nature does not appear as a dimension exterior to society, but as part of the relations that constitute space. Pereira (2023) also highlights the existence of a "dialectic between appropriated nature and nature in itself, which are in constant interrelation, forming a dialectical (that is, conflictive) unit " (Pereira, 2023, p. 4). Spatial production thus involves the appropriation, transformation, and resignification of nature, a process that, under capitalism, is related to the forms of spatial appreciation.

Henrique (2006) contributes to this understanding by demonstrating that the appropriation of nature occurs within the scope of the production of a new urban space, in which natural attributes are incorporated into strategies of territorial appreciation. In this process, nature is modified and integrated into built forms, configuring what Lefebvre calls "second nature", which "retains some features of the first, but acquired and produced as such" (Lefebvre, 1983 [1980], p. 41). Nature, therefore, begins to participate in the social production of space, both in its material and symbolic dimensions, being incorporated into practices of occupation, consumption, and territorial appreciation.

Harvey (2013; 2014) relates this dynamic to the very logic of capitalist accumulation. Urbanization constitutes one of the ways through which surplus capital finds investment possibilities, making land and space important fields of appreciation. For the author, "urbanization has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon, since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and from someone, while the control over their distribution usually remains in the hands of a few" (Harvey, 2014, p. 11).

The production of urban space thus involves disputes over the appropriation and distribution of benefits resulting from territorial appreciation. This perspective also underpins the discussion on the right to the city, understood not only as access to existing urban resources, but as the possibility of participating in the transformation of space. For Harvey:



The right to the city is not simply a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change the city [...] a right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban environment (Harvey, 2014, p. 24).

The discussion on the production of space is thus articulated with the concept of the urban, understood as a process that is not limited to spaces formally recognized as cities. Lefebvre (2008) differentiates the city from the urban by understanding the latter as a social form that needs a material base for its realization. The urban expresses processes of concentration, simultaneity, gathering, and interaction that spread throughout the territory.

Milton Santos reinforces this distinction by stating that "there are two things that are being confused gratuitously and happily, that is, the city and the urban. The urban is often abstract, the general, the external. The city is the particular, the concrete, the internal" (Santos, 2013, p. 66). Urbanization can, therefore, be analyzed as a comprehensive territorial process, whose logics reach areas that go beyond the city limits and articulate urban, rural, tourist, and environmentally valued spaces.

The space produced by these relations has a fragmented and conflictive character. Corrêa (1989, p. 145) defines urban space as "fragmented and articulated, a social reflection and condition, a symbolic field, and a field of struggle." This definition shows that space is not a passive scenario for social relations, but participates in their reproduction and transformation. Urbanization involves, therefore, simultaneous processes of articulation and fragmentation, in which different uses and forms of territorial appropriation coexist and enter into dispute. In Harvey (2014), this dimension is related to the tension between use value and exchange value, while in Lefebvre (2001) it refers to the contradictions produced by the transformation of space into a commodity.

Landscape constitutes a privileged dimension for observing the materialization of these processes. For Santos (2006, p. 66), the landscape corresponds to the "set of forms that, at a given moment, express the inheritances representing successive localized relations between man and nature". It gathers natural and artificial objects produced in different historical moments and, therefore, expresses overlapping temporalities. Santos (2006, p. 69) also defines it as "frozen history, but it participates in living history", highlighting that inherited forms remain present and participate in actions carried out in space. The landscape, therefore, constitutes a material and visible dimension of the historically established relations between society and nature.

Suertegaray (2001) expands this understanding by considering landscape an operational concept capable of integrating different dimensions of geographical space. For the author, it "constitutes for geography a concept that enables a unified analysis of space" (Suertegaray, 2001). The landscape can be analyzed as the materialization of the social conditions of existence, simultaneously in time and space, incorporating natural elements transformed by human action. In



this sense, society and nature do not constitute separate dimensions, but elements of a dialectical process in which "society builds and rebuilds landscape forms, while at the same time forms condition actions" (Suertegaray, 2001). The landscape is, therefore, simultaneously the result of social practices and a condition for new practices.

This relationship between landscape, nature, and society allows us to move towards analyzing its appropriation by the market. Henrique (2009) demonstrates that, in the context of the capitalist production of space, nature can be incorporated as an attribute of real estate appreciation, being transformed into a representation of quality of life, exclusivity, and distinction. In this process, "all nature frozen in common sense as landscape, tends to be transformed into postcards and fetishes" (Henrique, 2009, p. 18). The landscape thus begins to be presented as an image and commodity, while natural attributes are incorporated into processes of spatial appreciation. The author also highlights that developments can transform nature into a "commodity-thing", whose value becomes defined by the ideologies associated with its appearance and content (Henrique, 2009, p. 108).

The commodification of nature constitutes, in this sense, a dimension of the capitalist production of space itself. Lefebvre (2006, p. 5) observes that "produced, yet 'subdivided' space and time are exchanged, sold, and bought, as 'things' and objects!". Nature incorporated into the produced space thus begins to participate in relations of property, commercialization, and appreciation. Harvey (2013) relates this process to the circulation of capital and the appropriation of natural and locational advantages. For the author, "the more surplus capital there is [...] the greater the probability that land will be absorbed into the structure of capital circulation in general" (Harvey, 2013, p. 509). Land and its attributes thus become susceptible to incorporation into appreciation circuits.

Carlos (2007) adds that attributes such as environmental quality and the availability of green spaces can acquire a character of rarity due to the capitalist production of space itself. The author draws attention to the need to overcome an "exacerbated naturalism" that reduces the environmental issue to nature preservation, disregarding the social relations that participate in its production. In this sense, the scarcity of certain environmental attributes can be understood as a "rarity produced by a growth model of the capitalist economy" (Carlos, 2007, p. 109). Nature, when incorporated into real estate appreciation, can assume functions of socio-spatial distinction and differentiation.

Baumgartner (2021; 2022) deepens this discussion by addressing inequality in access to natural attributes. Despite the collective character and importance of nature for urban life, the author observes that "the right to nature in the city is still configured as a utopian element", given the appropriation of natural areas by real estate agents for the construction of developments aimed



at higher-income populations (Baumgartner, 2022, p. 2). Nature and landscape thus begin to integrate processes of spatial and social differentiation, articulating environmental, economic, and territorial dimensions.

Understanding these processes also requires considering the role of the State in the production and regulation of space. State action influences the institutional, normative, and territorial conditions under which different agents produce and dispute the territory. Evans (1993) proposes overcoming both the conception of the State as an absolute agent of development and the perspective that reduces it to a bureaucratic obstacle or source of rent-seeking. For the author, "the answer does not lie in dismantling the State, but rather in its reconstruction" (Evans, 1993, p. 109), highlighting the importance of institutions and their capacity to formulate and implement policies.

In this debate, Evans (1993) develops the concept of "embedded autonomy", which articulates a bureaucracy capable of maintaining autonomy from private interests while simultaneously establishing institutionalized links with society and economic agents. According to the author, it is about "an autonomy embedded in a concrete set of social ties that binds the State to society and provides institutionalized channels for the continuous negotiation and renegotiation of goals and policies" (Evans, 1993, p. 136). In contrast, individualized relations between public and private agents can configure the so-called "bureaucratic rings", characterized by unstable and personalistic ties.

The theory of state capacities thus allows incorporating the institutional dimension into spatial analysis, considering the effective conditions for formulation, implementation, coordination, and oversight of public policies. In the context of urban and environmental planning, this perspective involves observing normative instruments, administrative structures, oversight and licensing mechanisms, and the forms of articulation among the State, society, and economic agents. State capacity thus becomes an analytical dimension of the relations among the production of space, territorial regulation, and the actions of different agents.

The articulation of these theoretical perspectives allows approaching space as a social product and a field of dispute, considering the expansion of the urban, the transformation of the landscape, the appropriation and commodification of nature, and the institutional conditions of State action. The production of space, the urban, landscape, commodification of nature, and state capacity thus constitute complementary analytical categories for examining the relations among society, nature, the market, and public authorities in contemporary processes of territorial transformation.

### **3 Urbanization in Osório in the Last Decade: When Gated Horizontal Condominiums Gained the Spotlight**



The expansion in the number of gated horizontal condominiums in the Municipality of Osório points to an urbanization trend on the Northern Coast of Rio Grande do Sul directly linked to the real estate appreciation of areas with natural attractions, particularly around the lagoons, in this case, whose landscapes become highly coveted real estate assets. According to Moura et al. (2015), urbanization has expanded the use of natural resources on the Northern Coast of RS, compromising their quality.

The urban morphology and land use resulting from this expansion alter the landscape, converting formerly rural areas into urban zones where private residential enclaves are built. It should be noted that, according to Veiga:

Urban and rural are territorial ideas, that is, of spaces appropriated by the human species. The most rural territories are those in which ecosystems are less artificialized; the most urban ones, on the other hand, correspond to the maximum ecosystemic artificialization. Between these extremes, there is an infinity of intermediate and ambivalent situations, which are no longer reducible to the simple rural/urban dichotomy (Veiga, 2003, p. 2).

As constructions are allocated in these spaces, the demands for urban infrastructure, such as water and sewage networks, roads, and other public services, increase, often without proper planning to meet the population's demands.

The article seeks to analyze how the urbanization process with this bias contributes to the development of the municipality. This is because there are advocates for this type of real estate production, as exemplified by Marco Alba, Secretary of Housing of Xangri-lá (RS), a municipality neighboring Osório, who, in a report on the State Government's website, states that "The construction of new condominiums generates jobs, development, and benefits for the municipality, in addition to boosting the city's appeal as a tourist destination." It is worth considering the extent to which the potential negative effects, such as socio-spatial segregation and the pressure on natural resources and urban services, are evaluated.

The reality observed in Osório, therefore, is not isolated; it is inserted in a broader context, driven by the commodification of nature and the exclusionary logic of capital. The consolidation of an urbanization model guided by private interests, associated with discourses of patrimonial and aesthetic appreciation of the landscape, promotes a process of "exclusionary beautification", in which nature is aestheticized for elite consumption, while collective uses of the territory are invisibilized or displaced.

Given this context, we seek to answer: What are the implications resulting from the construction of these real estate products in the city of Osório?

#### **4 Where Are the Lagoons That Used to Be Seen Around Here?: Nature and Social Transformations Inside and Outside the Walls**



According to IBGE (2022), Osório has an estimated population of 47,396 inhabitants, with a territorial area of 663.87 km<sup>2</sup>. The municipality has a Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) of 0.733, considered high, and its economy is mainly structured around wind energy, commerce, services, tourism, and the real estate market. In recent years, the construction sector, especially through horizontal condominiums, has played a significant role in local urban dynamics. According to the State Construction Industry Union (Sinduscon-RS):

The coastal region already holds the position of the second-largest real estate market in Rio Grande do Sul, with a General Sales Value (VGV) that exceeds R\$ 6 billion in 2024. This progress is driven by the growing search for properties for leisure and housing (GaúchaZH, 2025).

In the last decade, land use in the municipality of Osório (RS) has undergone increasingly accelerated changes, converting rural and natural areas into urbanized spaces where gated horizontal condominiums have been built. Of the 17 existing condominiums, 7 were established over a 35-year period, while 10 new condominiums emerged in just the last 10 years—representing an increase of more than 100% in this type of development in a timeframe one-third shorter than the previous period.

These developments represent an occupation model that contrasts with previous forms of spatial use, generating environmental implications, pressure on urban infrastructure, and alterations in the landscape. The empirical field, therefore, proves to be fertile ground for a critical analysis of the ongoing urbanization regarding land use and occupation.

According to Brazilian Federal Law 6,766/1979, a land subdivision (loteamento) is defined as the division of a tract of land into lots for construction, with the opening of new circulation routes or public spaces, or the modification of existing ones. In other words, it is the subdivision of a plot of land into smaller parts that can be sold individually and require infrastructure, such as streets and public spaces. On the other hand, the lot-based condominium (condomínio de lotes) is a hybrid system, combining characteristics of a land subdivision with those of a building condominium (Law 4,591/1964). Here, too, the tract of land is subdivided into lots with the opening of new routes, as in a land subdivision; however, the streets are private, and there is no transfer of areas to public ownership. It is on this latter category that this reflection focuses.

Table 1, presented below, shows the existing condominiums and those launched during the aforementioned period.

Table 1 – Condominium by autonomous lots

| Number | Development Name | Approval Decree              | Tract Size             |
|--------|------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1      | Interlagos       | 35/1974                      | 545,400 m <sup>2</sup> |
| 2      | Campos de Dentro | Municipal Law No. 1,468/1975 | 61,349m <sup>2</sup>   |
| 3      | Lagoa do Passo   | 123/1999                     | 46,000m <sup>2</sup>   |



|    |                                    |                       |                           |
|----|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 4  | Residencial Parque da Lagoa        | 132/2002              | 91,684.55 m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 5  | Atlântico Villas Club              | Law 3,707/2005        | 242,900 m <sup>2</sup>    |
| 6  | Morada da Lagoa                    | 216/2006              | 110,316.53m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 7  | Belville                           | 191/2009              | 154,060.79m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 8  | Green Sails                        | 214/2015              | 158,761.24m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 9  | Aquaville                          | 214/2019              | 156,869.77m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 10 | Reserva do Albatroz                | 184/2020 and 106/2021 | 81,968.05m <sup>2</sup>   |
| 11 | Marina del Faro                    | 24/2021               | 199,956.66m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 12 | Lagoon Marina Club                 | 72/2021               | 151,452.16m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 13 | Duo Nautic Life Club               | 22/2023               | 460,019.14m <sup>2</sup>  |
| 14 | Residencial Nau - Marina e Moradas | 111/2023              | 396,764.00 m <sup>2</sup> |
| 15 | Península Norte                    | Decree 225/2024       | 149,892.74 m <sup>2</sup> |
| 16 | Vivendas da Marina                 | Decree 157/2025       | 406,327.79 m <sup>2</sup> |
| 17 | Cyano Private Resort               | Decree 13/2026        | 136.907.24 m <sup>2</sup> |

Source: Osório Municipal Government

Reflecting on the rising number of condominiums in the municipality of Osório is necessary given the quantity of developments with these characteristics, as demonstrated in Table 1. This leads us to investigate how urban space is being produced and which social relations are being produced (created or destroyed) through this configuration.

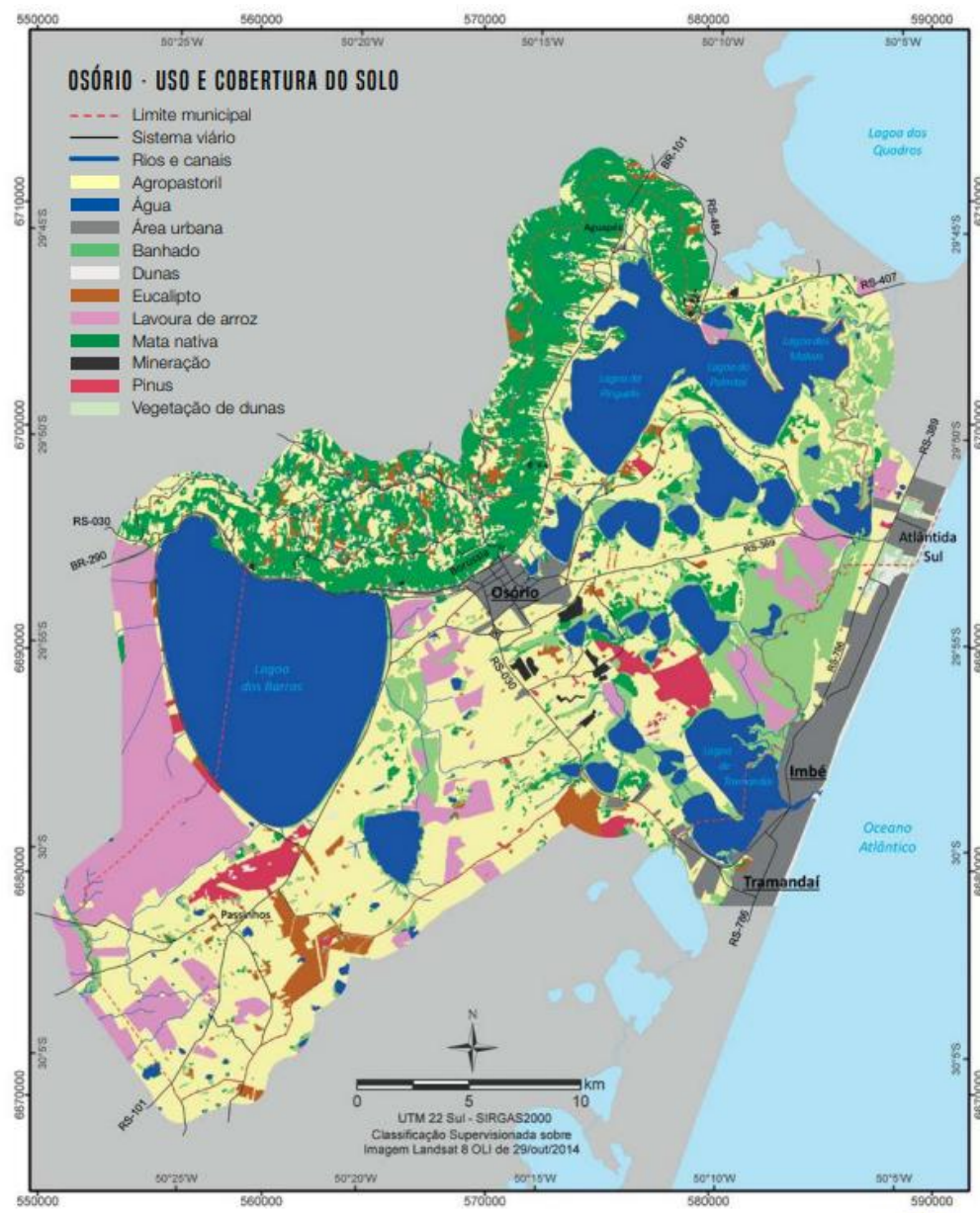
According to Moura et al. (2015), the transformation of land use around the lagoons into residential condominiums results in the replacement of native vegetation with housing, and is treated by private enterprise as a practice that harms the environmental dynamics of these sites and reduces biological diversity.

According to McDonnell and Pickett (1990), habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, and the reduction of water bodies are direct consequences of unplanned urban growth. Therefore, the advance of urban growth near lagoon areas can be identified as a disruptive agent that affects local water quality, as well as the natural balance of the ecosystems present in these sensitive environments, potentially causing irreversible consequences. In the city of Osório, the situation is concerning.

On the one hand, the conversion of rural land into urban land generates real estate appreciation and attracts real estate investment; on the other hand, it produces perverse effects such as the loss of territorial identity, as areas formerly dedicated to family farming or artisanal fishing on the lagoons (Figure 1) are replaced by developments alien to the traditional culture that erase established ways of life. They also expand the fragmentation of the urban fabric (Figure 2),

as condominiums act like bubbles that interrupt the continuity of the urban grid, hindering socio-spatial integration.

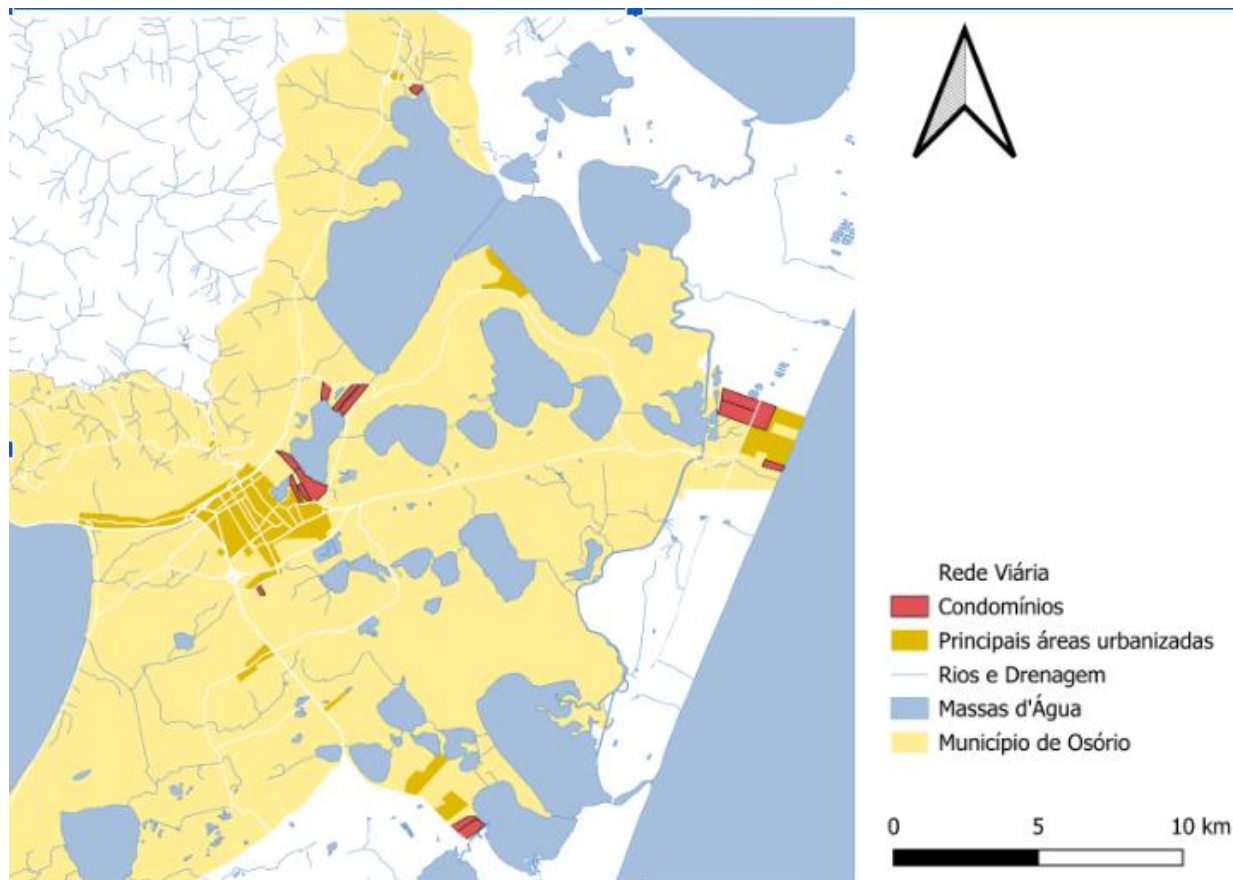
Figure 1: Land use and land cover in the municipality of Osório



Legend translated from the original Portuguese (top to bottom): Municipal boundary; Road network; Rivers and canals; Cropland and pasture; Water; Urban area; Wetland; Dunes; Eucalyptus; Rice paddies; Native Forest; Mining; Pine; Dune vegetation.

Source: Schäfer, 2015, p. 190

Figure 2: Fragmentation – Gated horizontal condominiums in the municipality of Osório/RS in 2025.



*Legend translated from the original Portuguese (top to bottom): Road network; Condominiums; Main urbanized areas; Rivers and drainage; Water bodies; Municipality of Osório.*

Source: Osório Municipal Government

Based on the idea that the view of a beautiful landscape can be the key to living well, the real estate market utilizes the images of the lagoons as a product, commodifying nature, as shown in advertisements for various launched developments circulating on social media (Figure 3), in local real estate ads, and even on television channels.

Figure 3: Promotional images of condominiums on the Northern Coast



The promotional images are reproduced in the original Portuguese. Ad 1: "Development with a stunning marina and a private waterfront, where nature invites you to leisure and delight. Lots of up to 730 m<sup>2</sup>, with the option of waterfront, navigable lots." Ad 2: "Exclusive marina: designed to meet all your needs, the Nau marina provides quality facilities with mooring. The only development that offers: exclusive nautical amenities; a privileged location, a paradise among lagoons; stunning spaces with sophisticated architecture and landscaping; an exceptional lifestyle with extraordinary leisure areas." Ad 3: "A paradise on the lagoon shore."

Source: Social media profiles of the developments.

### According to Henrique:

In this way, the market, consumerism, and natural marketing have become a habit or a lifestyle, becoming the focus of capitalist relations in all spheres of life, from the factory to housing. A lifestyle 'in harmony with nature' is sold, rapidly embedding itself, reaching easily circulated products and massively penetrating other sectors, such as real estate developments, which, due to their fixed spatial character, become true material symbols of these current features, replacing those of the past: the church, the town hall, the courthouse, the school, etc. (Henrique, 2006, p. 119).

On the Northern Coast of Rio Grande do Sul, researchers such as Baldraia et al. (2022) have documented the dizzying growth of gated communities, especially in the municipality of Xangri-lá. These studies point out that such developments, aimed at high-income populations, are frequently established in areas close to water bodies and native vegetation, promoting irreversible changes in local ecosystems. According to Baldraia et al., "the processes of condominium expansion along lagoon shores advance over permanent preservation areas backed by legal flexibilizations" (Baldraia et al., 2022, p. 34). Furthermore, they highlight the existence of gaps in public policies regarding territorial planning and environmental oversight, which contribute to weakening urban regulation instruments.

The literature also highlights the role of images and discourses conveyed by real estate advertising, which promote the idea of a life in harmony with nature while simultaneously excluding traditional and collective uses of these landscapes. As Henrique highlights, "nature is



converted into a visual spectacle and symbolic asset for the market, emptied of its social and environmental value" (Henrique, 2005, p. 56).

This aesthetic of commodified nature becomes one of the main attractions and symbolic elements of these developments, contributing to socio-spatial exclusion and territorial selectivity. In other words, access to nature is transformed into a market privilege, to the detriment of the collective right to the landscape and natural resources.

This pattern of occupation has profoundly altered socio-spatial and environmental dynamics, generating urban fragmentation, population seasonality, and pressures on public services. Barata-Salgueiro highlights that:

Condominiums represent a new type of real estate product, since the transaction involves a package that includes security, services, and other amenities, a status symbol, the right neighbors, beyond mere housing (Barata-Salgueiro, 2023, p. 120).

While Levy points out that these developments "reiterate the spatial location of poverty and wealth, accentuating the socio-spatial segregation of the urban environment" (Levy, 2010, p. 100).

What does this urbanization model ultimately reveal about the choices being made, by both the private sector and public authorities, for the future of Osório? More than a simple response to land use and occupation or a housing model, the proliferation of gated horizontal condominiums exposes a logic of space production based on exclusion, deprivation of the landscape, and the commodification of nature. It reveals a city that, by prioritizing market interests and selective forms of territorial appropriation, risks compromising its natural heritage, socio-cultural identity, and socio-environmental justice. This process invites us to rethink the directions of urban planning, asking not only for whom the city is built, but also: where are the lagoons that used to be seen around here, and who will still be able to see them?

## 5 Final Considerations

As stated, this article is part of a research project that takes the expansion of gated horizontal condominiums in the areas surrounding the lagoons of Osório (RS) as its empirical object to reflect upon the contemporary process of urbanization. For now, we have identified a set of contradictions and challenges that permeate the production of urban space in contexts of land appreciation and environmental fragility. The study of this urbanization process, far from being neutral or merely technical, is rooted in political, economic, and symbolic choices that likely favor certain social groups while excluding others from the enjoyment of common goods.



The appropriation of the landscape, the conversion of environmentally fragile areas into market assets, and the socio-spatial fragmentation resulting from the condominium logic reveal the existence of an urban development model centered on the commodification of nature. Although this model may promote localized economic growth and generate benefits restricted to certain sectors, it can compromise environmental sustainability, territorial justice, and the collective right to the city.

Empirical evidence points to the need for a profound revision of land use and occupation policies in the municipality, as well as the way urban development is conceived and legitimized in coastal territories. Real estate appreciation, when detached from environmental and social criteria, tends to widen inequalities, degrade ecosystems, and generate growing conflicts between public and private interests, as established in the theoretical review.

Thus, the importance of thinking of alternatives to the urbanization model is reaffirmed, based on principles of equity, democratic participation, and respect for the environmental and cultural diversity of territories. It is necessary to strengthen urban planning and environmental management instruments, as well as spaces for listening and deliberation for the populations affected by the aforementioned developments.

This article seeks to contribute to the debate on the contemporary urban, offering a critical and well-founded interpretation of urbanization in Osório, based on consistent theoretical contributions and carefully analyzed empirical evidence. It is hoped that future results will inform reflections, public policies, and actions that promote a more just, inclusive, and environmentally balanced urban future.

## 6 References

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