

Forest recovery and just sustainability in the Florianópolis city-region

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Abstract: This dissertation examines human-environment interactions in the Florianópolis city-region, Santa Catarina State, Brazil from a just sustainability perspective. I construct an in-depth historical narrative of social and landscape transformations and offer an account of the diverse origins of this expanding metropolis. This historical narrative provides the context for understanding contemporary demographic change, metropolitan land-use, forest-transition dynamics, sociospatial inequalities, legal-institutional reforms, and democratic practice. Employing a multiscale methodological approach, I integrate documentary research, aerial photos, interviews, participant observation, and site visits. I analyze social and ecological data at nested spatial and organizational scales ranging from neighborhoods to national and global arenas. Results suggest that the Florianópolis city-region has experienced a forest transition from a period of net deforestation caused by extractive and agricultural activities to a period of net forest recovery. Forest recovery has resulted from tree planting with exotic species and the 'spontaneous' regeneration of secondary forests. Exotic tree monocultures have been planted since the 1960s. Much of the forest regeneration has occurred since the 1980s during a period characterized by decline in agricultural land use, real estate speculation, and the establishment of conservation units and other types of land-use restrictions. The environmental services and amenities associated with the protected-area network have contributed to the ongoing viability of local tourism development and rising real estate prices in well-located neighborhoods. Middle- and upper-income housing construction has accelerated since the 1990s, converting parcels to residential or commercial subdivisions in suburban and peri-urban landscapes. Low-income, self-provisioned, informal settlements have emerged and expanded on 'marginal,' 'peripheral,' and 'precarious' lands, often in locations legally defined as environmentally protected areas and that lack sanitation services. This process of urban dualization has resulted in socioenvironmental injustices by reinforcing and exacerbating differential access to life opportunities and environmental services as well as differential exposure to environmental hazards. I conclude with a discussion of land quality, uneven development, uneven valuation of ecosystems, participatory democracy, possible future scenarios, policy implications, unresolved issues, and suggestions for future research.