

## Papers

### Leisure, tourism, real estate speculation and territorial conflict between São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros (RN)

Lazer, turismo, especulação imobiliária e conflito territorial entre São Miguel do Gostoso e Touros (RN)

Lazer, turismo, especulación inmobiliaria y conflicto territorial entre São Miguel do Gostoso y Touros (RN)

Wagner Fernandes Costa<sup>1</sup>; Maria Aparecida Pontes da Fonseca<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rio Grande do Norte Federal University (UFRN), Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brasil.

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#### Keywords:

Tourism Investments;  
Real estate Market;  
Territorial Conflict;  
São Miguel do Gostoso.

#### Abstract

This paper analyzes the relationship between the territorial conflict involving the municipalities of Touros and São Miguel do Gostoso (RN) and tourism/real estate investments. Conflict arose when an error in the demarcation of the boundaries between the two municipalities was detected, when São Miguel do Gostoso was emerging as a tourist destination. The increase in such investments throughout the Northeast Region was a result of transfer of European funds for capital appreciation. In this study, data were collected through documentary analysis, systematic observation, semi-structured interviews, and survey of cadastral records. With its land boundaries challenged, the budgetary burden of São Miguel do Gostoso worsened because of a reduction in tax revenue related to population count and use of urban land. On the other hand, the municipality has assumed the responsibility of providing public services to residents and tourists. Investments encouraged urban expansion, mainly in Ponta do Santo Cristo, the area under the greatest dispute and expansion of real estate investments with a significant participation of foreigners. Results suggest that the dispute was triggered by the investments, with the agreement between the municipal authorities being reached upon the maintenance of the lands of Praia da Ponta do Santo Cristo in Touros.

#### Palavras-chave:

Investimentos Turísticos;  
Mercado Imobiliário;  
Conflito Territorial;  
São Miguel do Gostoso.

#### Resumo

O artigo analisa a relação entre o conflito territorial envolvendo os municípios de Touros e São Miguel do Gostoso (RN) e os investimentos turísticos e imobiliários. O conflito ocorreu após a revelação de um equívoco na demarcação das fronteiras entre esses municípios, quando São Miguel do Gostoso despontava como uma destinação turística. O incremento desses investimentos em toda Região Nordeste foi decorrente da transferência de capitais europeus em busca de valorização. A coleta de dados ocorreu através da consulta de documentos, da observação sistemática, entrevistas semiestruturadas e levantamento de dados cartoriais. Com o domínio territorial questionado, São Miguel do Gostoso acumulou ônus orçamentário devido a diminuição de repasses e tributos relacionados à contagem populacional e ao uso do solo urbano. Por outro lado, assumiu o encargo de prestar serviços públicos a residentes e turistas. Os investimentos tornaram-se indutores da expansão urbana,

principalmente, na Ponta do Santo Cristo, área de maior disputa e expansão de investimentos imobiliários com destacada participação de estrangeiros. Assim, os investimentos ocorridos foram decisivos para desencadear o litígio, para o qual, o termo de um acordo entre os gestores foi condicionado à manutenção das terras da Praia da Ponta do Santo Cristo para Touros.

#### Palavras chave:

Inversiones turísticas;  
Mercado inmobiliario;  
Conflicto Territorial;  
San Miguel do Gostoso.

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#### Resumen

El trabajo analiza la relación entre el conflicto territorial involucrando a los municipios de Touros y São Miguel do Gostoso (RN) y las inversiones turísticas e inmobiliarias. El referido conflicto ocurrió después de ocurrir la revelación de un error en la demarcación de las fronteras entre los dos municipios, cuando San Miguel do Gostoso surgía como un destino turístico. El incremento de tales inversiones en toda la Región Nordeste fue consecuencia de la transferencia de capitales europeos en busca de valorización. En este estudio, la recolección de datos ocurrió a través de la consulta de documentos, de la observación sistemática, entrevistas semiestructuradas y levantamiento de datos en la oficina de notarios. Con el dominio territorial cuestionado, se constata que São Miguel do Gostoso pasó a acumular una carga presupuestaria en función de la disminución de transferencias y tributos relacionados con el conteo poblacional y el uso del suelo urbano. Por otro lado, asumió el cargo de prestar servicios públicos a residentes y turistas. Las inversiones se convirtieron en inductores de la expansión urbana, principalmente en Ponta de Santo Cristo, área de mayor disputa y expansión de inversiones inmobiliarias con destacada participación de extranjeros. Se concluye que las inversiones ocurridas fueron decisivas para desencadenar el litigio, para el cual, el término de un acuerdo entre los gestores fue condicionado al mantenimiento de las tierras de la Playa de Ponta do Santo Cristo para Toros.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Entering the global economy requires countries, regions, cities, and territories to create an adequate space for productive activities. After all, the capacity of places to respond to investments varies according to the technical and organizational conditions created for each production (Santos, 2009).

Accordingly, the implementation of the Tourism Development Program (PRODETUR) and the actions foreseen by the Growth Acceleration Program, better known as PAC, reflect the neoliberal agenda assumed by the State in restructuring the Brazilian Northeast with a view to stimulating tourism. In Rio Grande do Norte, these investments resulted in an increase in the flow of domestic and international tourists and in the expansion of tourism from Natal, the state capital.

Joint efforts by the public and private sectors have succeeded in turning coastal municipalities into tourist destinations. These were the cases of Tibau do Sul, a destination which has been growing significantly since the 1990s, and São Miguel do Gostoso, which emerged as a destination in the twentieth-first century. Linked to tourism, real estate investments increased attracting capital from other continents, especially from Europe. It was a process that guaranteed accumulation through consumption of leisure and tourism or, solely, by speculative actions on the periphery of the globalized economy.

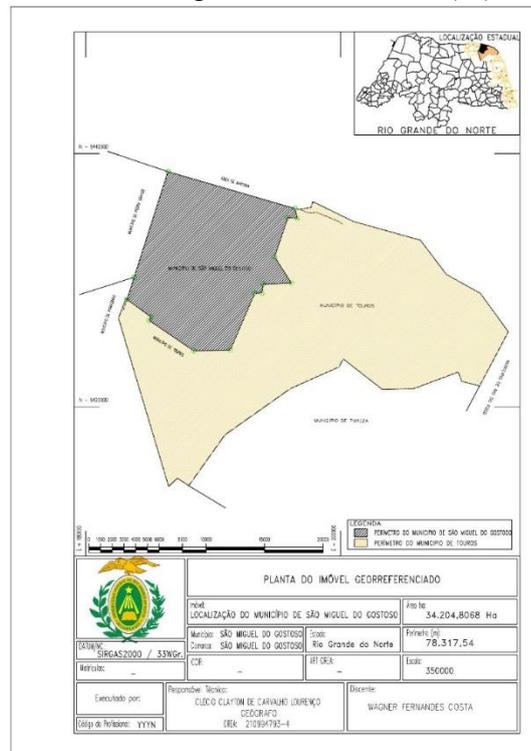
Tourism and real estate sectors are increasingly interconnected either in developed or developing countries (Gonzales & Mantecón, 2014, Fonseca & Janoschka, 2018), due to financial and socio-cultural motivations (Palafox-Muñoz, Dizb-Basto & Kauil-Fernández, 2014; Benson & O'Reilly, 2009), with strong public support to attract foreign investment (Gomes, Pinto & Almeida, 2017).

Real estate has soared based on tourism in the European Mediterranean, especially in the Spanish coast (Mantecón, Huete, & Mazón, 2009; Huete & Mantecón, 2010, 2013) and the trend has spread to the Northeast of Brazil as of 2000, as analyzed by Dantas, Clementino and Ferreira (2010). In Rio Grande do Norte, the analysis of this process by Fonseca (2012) stands out, in addition to other studies at municipal levels (Assis, 2012, Toniolli, 2014, Nunes, 2014, Santos Junior, 2015).

In 2010, the great influx of foreign capital to the real estate sector triggered the dispute between the municipalities of Miguel do Gostoso and Touros—both located in the eastern portion of Rio Grande do Norte

coast (Figure 1)—over the boundaries established at the time of the emancipation of São Miguel do Gostoso from Touros, in 1993. An error in the delimitation—uncovered in the last population census (2010)—became a territorial dispute, marked by attempts to redefine the limits, double taxation, reduction of Federal transfers of resources, and political maneuvers whose negative effects on the management of the territory were felt, mainly, in São Miguel do Gostoso, as identified by Costa (2018).

**Figure 1** – Location of São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros (RN) municipalities.



**Source:** Research data, 2017.

In view of the above, the objective of this article is to analyze the relationship between the territorial dispute involving São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros and the process of expansion of tourism and real estate investments in these municipalities.

This study is developed assuming that transformations occurring on the coast of Rio Grande do Norte are related to the dynamic movement of capital that has in tourism and in real estate conditions for migration between the circuits and territories that guarantee its reproduction (Harvey, 2004). The investments led to land valuation and caught the interest of the state because of tax collection and stimulation the local-regional economy.

To understand the conflict—the focus of this work—the new territorial dynamics related to soaring real estate investments must be observed, primarily targeted to foreign markets, for leisure, tourism, and migration purposes in the region, particularly in São Miguel do Gostoso, a rising tourist destination in Rio Grande do Norte. In addition, clarifying the origin, nature, and consequences of the dispute was a key motivation because of its impact on daily life of local population.

This article is divided into five sections. In the first moment the methodological procedures adopted in the research are explained. Next, the elements that characterize the conflict between the municipalities are presented. After that, the capitalist reproduction mechanisms that link tourism to the real estate sector are discussed. The fourth section presents data on tourism and real estate investments in São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros. Finally, in the last section, the conditions, and implications of an agreement between the municipalities are analyzed.

## 2 METHOD

A comprehensive documentary analysis of laws, technical reports, cartographic records, and formal communications related to emancipation, demarcation, and attempts to revise territorial boundaries. These documents enabled the identification of factors surrounding the territorial discrepancy, as well as actions to solve the problem, arising from the litigation between the municipalities.

Notarial documents provided the basis for analyzing real estate investments. Property records from 2000 onwards were consulted, at a time that international investments were intensifying in the Potiguar [from Rio Grande do Norte] coast, spreading to municipalities north of Natal. Another criterion of sample selection was defined by the presence of foreigners in property transactions, buying or selling real estate. This profile was chosen as one of the main responsible for spatial ordering, through tourism-real estate investments. The sample of 289 transactions revealed the location, characteristics, size, origin, and period of the investments made in the municipalities, elements that characterize real estate production and the process of land valuation in Touros and São Miguel do Gostoso.

As far as field research was concerned, a systematic observation instrument was used to collect data on tourism supply. As such, 190 tourism projects were visited, 162 in São Miguel do Gostoso, and 28 in Touros. The expectation is to have listed the whole population.

To complete the survey, 24 (twenty-four) individual and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample that was gradually selected (Flick, 2004), involving the following actors: emancipation process leaders, public managers (mayors, councilors, and secretaries), tourism and real estate entrepreneurs, community representatives (churches, associations, councils, trade unions, NGOs), politicians and technicians involved in the demarcation process and search for a solution to the dispute. Considering that the population is heterogeneous and scattered across multiple stakeholders, the discourse of such agents summarizes the issues involved in the territorial dispute analyzed.

The data and information collected has allowed inferences about the importance of tourism and real estate activity in the two municipalities and how the various stakeholders perceived such activities in the face of the conflict.

## 3 THE TERRITORY AT STAKE: THE NARRATIVE OF A CONFLICT

In 1993, São Miguel do Gostoso emancipated himself from Touros in a context of demands from organized groups (church, teachers, politicians) of the village. The promulgation of Law 6,452 concluded the emancipatory process, creating the Municipality and demarcating its limits. However, in 2010, the census population count by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) revealed that the municipal territory of São Miguel do Gostoso had not been defined according to the expectations of the emancipatory project. In keeping with the demarcation provided for by law, part of its seat and rural settlements remained included in the territory of Touros. An error that the population was unaware of and that from its disclosure started to create problems in territorial management.

One of the problems was the decrease of federal transfers that are based on population counting effected by IBGE. In 2010, because the census did not assign the population residing in the disputed area to São Miguel do Gostoso, the budgetary burden totaled R\$400,000/month only in the Municipal Participation Fund (FPM). In addition to other losses related to resource allocation according to population size, such as education and public health funds.

The use of the territory has become more complex as the urban expansion has spread, in recent years, to the disputed land. Among the buildings in the area, there were eighteen municipal public agencies that effectively provided services to the local population and were under São Miguel do Gostoso jurisdiction.

Problems with tax collection on services rendered (ISS), urban land use (IPTU), and real estate transfer (ITIV) in the disputed area showed that a significant number of citizens failed to comply with their tax obligations. Among managers there was the understanding that default resulted from the impasse caused by land

dispute, since, until boundaries were clarified—and thus known the holder of the right—taxes were not to be paid to either municipality.

The public management was further challenged by tourism, since the business sector—despite not complying with tax obligations—required public works and investments. It should be added that tourism demand adds a population contingent that increases the need for public services.

Convinced of the need for correcting the territorial limits to balance the revenue of São Miguel do Gostoso, its managers tried to solve the problem. By the end of 2012 there were seven meetings between mayors and professional staff from relevant services to discuss the issue<sup>1</sup>. However, due to refusals by Touros' authorities, an agreement was not reached.

As new municipal administrations inaugurated in 2013, managers' refusal to attend the technical sessions to review the limits deepened the impasse. The administration of Touros also tried to collect taxes on tourism enterprises in the disputed area. Such facts led São Miguel do Gostoso administration to consider that its plea would probably be rejected if it was to depend upon the consent of Touros' administration. Therefore, the solution to the impasse was sought unilaterally with the legislative power of Rio Grande do Norte. This measure proved equally inefficient due to the political influence of Touros in the Legislative Assembly, which prevented the revision of limits from advancing.

#### 4 ORGANIZATION OF THE TERRITORY FROM SPATIO-TEMPORAL CAPITAL RESOLUTION

One contribution of the English geographer David Harvey was the attempt to clarify the dynamics of capital from the concept of “spatial fix”. According to the author, since the 1970s, capitalism's solution to resolve inner crises tendencies is through capital transfers between economic circuits and spaces with higher profitability (Harvey, 1989, 2008). In this period, neoliberal practices have paved the way for the actions of private sector (Harvey, 2004). These are the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underlie the present discussion.

“Spatial fix” (Harvey, 2011), or “spatial resolution” (Valença, 2008), as it is also adopted in Brazil, is a double movement. On the one hand, there is the allocation of capital and labor (although the first is a priority) to produce goods in other territories, called spatial displacement. On the other hand, there is the transfer of capital to activities of medium or long-term returns, through physical and social infrastructures, called temporal displacement. Considering that a combination of the two possibilities is more effective in solving the absorption of capital issue, Harvey (2011, 78) also calls the result of such movements “spatio-temporal fixes”.

In this way, the main circuit of capital reproduction (industrial) loses importance to other economic sectors that take the lead in the process of capital reproduction. Thus, the mechanisms of capital transfer to territories lacking infrastructure acquire importance in maintaining capitalism stable at different levels.

The state, in turn, is a key agent in the dynamics of global capitalism (Harvey, 2008). Therefore, in the consolidation of State-Capital cooperation, public policies were essential to limit spatio-temporal organization occurring in the Brazilian Northeast region, and particularly in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. This fact is in line with the Neoliberal agenda, where it is up to the state to provide the conditions that facilitate capital mobility, overcoming barriers or obstacles that compromise its reproduction.

In this sense, the northeastern coast was structured for tourism with the implementation of the Tourism Development Program (PRODETUR/NE) which, among other actions undertaken by public authorities, played a key role in the expansion of regional tourism (Cruz, 2000; Fonseca, 2005). In the state of Rio Grande do Norte, more than US\$87 (eighty-seven) million have been invested in the two phases of the program, contributing to greater accessibility and circulation of visitors in the Potiguar coast, besides the Metropolitan Region of Natal, as well as to the growth of tourism.

<sup>1</sup>The initial actions were supported by the IBGE and the Secretaria de Estado de Assuntos Fundiários e Apoio a Reforma Agrária do Rio Grande do Norte (SEARA/RN). In general, the revision of limits can be made through an agreement signed by the heads of the municipal executive from a consensus that contemplates the interests of both.

From 2011 to 2014, the investments of Phase Two of the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC-2) had a significant impact on the transportation system of Rio Grande do Norte. It is worth mentioning the value of R\$731.14 (seven hundred and thirty-one) million for the construction of Governador Aluizio Alves International Airport, located in the Municipality of São Gonçalo do Amarante (Comitê Gestor do PAC, 2014). The airport increased cargo and passenger capacity in the state, while at the same time, due to its location, favored the displacement of visitors to the municipalities north of Natal, such as São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros. Accesses, integration, improvements in infrastructure and quality of attractions, among other measures, were therefore essential to make the tourism system of Potiguar more competitive in the global arena.

One result of state intervention on the Potiguar territory was land valuation in municipalities outside the Metropolitan Region by the possibility of receiving private capital in the tourism and real estate segment. Many of these investments were channeled to real estate, foreseeing a promising opportunity for gains from the sale of real estate for an external audience, mainly foreign. These new dynamics affected the Potiguar coast and are relevant in the municipalities of Touros and São Miguel do Gostoso.

The processes of temporal and spatial migration of capital, with active participation of state, have generated contradictory frameworks. Although Harvey establishes his theory in the context of national states, it is possible to draw a parallel with the territorial dispute in analysis, since, in due proportion, the principle remains: the public power (regardless of the corresponding administrative unit) sought the political-territorial framework through which the processes of circulation and reproduction of capital occur, generating, in many cases, inter-state tensions, and leading to imperialist practices and geopolitical conflicts (Harvey, 2004).

In addition to economic motivations, as described above, such tourism-real estate investments are also motivated by sociocultural (values and lifestyles) and technical transformations (means of transportation and communications) that have led to an increase of migration in search of amenity in coastal areas with higher temperatures (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Huete & Mantecón, 2010, 2013).

## **5 TOURISM, LEISURE AND REAL ESTATE PRODUCTION IN SÃO MIGUEL DO GOSTOSO AND TOUROS (RN)**

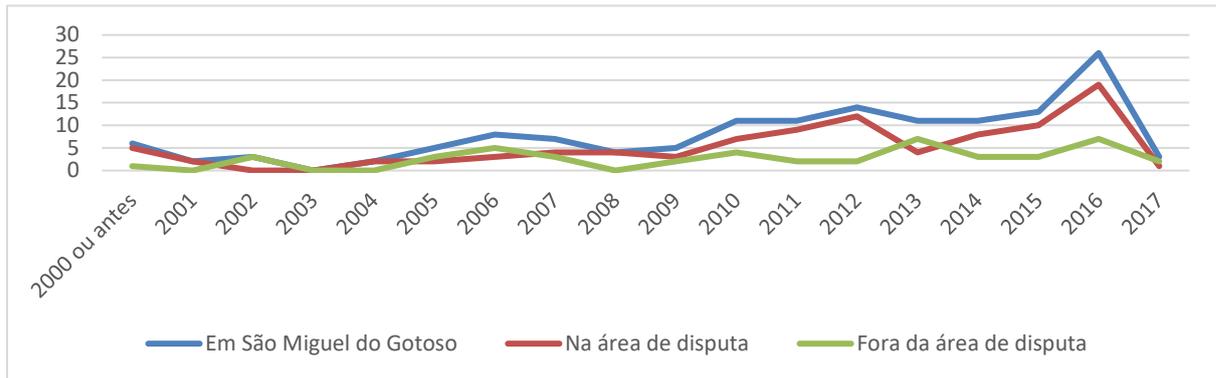
The national state's interest in participating in the international tourism market requires planning to meet the industry's need of structure (Hall, 2001). In fact, territorial units that achieve the best performance are labelled as tourism destination (Valls, 2006). As a result, the growth of investment in tourism infrastructures in new territories becomes an emblematic example of Spatial Organization.

In tourist destinations, space is shaped by real estate investments that aim to profit from a subsequent negotiation due to the low financial rates and high profit margins compared to other sectors, that is, speculative purposes (Gaja i Díaz, 2008, 2013).

The analysis of tourism and real estate investments in the municipalities studied, shows the effort of the various levels of government to implement structural measures to consolidate tourism, causing socio-spatial transformations. At the same time, they lead to the occupation of new coastal areas with participation of international investments in the acquisition of lands and properties for second home development, sometimes associated to tourism enterprises.

### **5.1 Tourism Investment in São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros**

São Miguel do Gostoso can be considered a tourist destination. According to the classification of the Ministry of Tourism, the municipality has category B, which indicates a good position in the tourism competitiveness ranking in the regional context. Tourism has benefited from public investment in infrastructure, as well as private investments in lodging, food, and agencies. The development of water sports and leisure spaces on the beach, with a strong participation of foreigners, stands out. In Figure 2 it is possible to observe the evolution of new tourism businesses in São Miguel do Gostoso, between 2000 and January 2017.

**Figure 2** - Opening of new tourism businesses in São Miguel do Gostoso – 2000-2017

**Source:** Research data, 2017.

Previous studies have confirmed the importance of the contribution of international capital to activities related to local tourism (Taveira, 2015), resulting in the appropriation of the territory by and for such activity. Tourism re-functionalization generated complex changes in the sociocultural dynamics of the municipality (Matias & Carvalho, 2017).

Agreements signed between the municipality and the Ministry of Tourism to raise funds show the articulation of the various levels of state to consolidate an environment conducive to tourism. Of the amounts invested in tourism improvements (R\$3,822,088.73), the bulk (R\$2,756,519.67) has been invested in urban development, primarily on Avenida dos Arrecifes, which is the main artery of the city. The concentration of public investments accentuated urbanization along this street, towards RN 221, which gives access to Touros. Better urban infrastructure also explains the location preference of tourism enterprises for this avenue. Of the 163 tourism companies identified in São Miguel do Gostoso, 65 are located along this road, i.e., 40 per cent of the total.

It is also observed that the beaches of Xepa, Cardeiro and Santo Cristo (this latter neighborhood being the main area disputed in the territorial litigation between São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros) comprise 105 tourism providers, representing 63 per cent of the total (see Figure 2). Thus, the spatial selectivity of such investments indicates the participation of tourism in the organization of the territory, directing urban growth, as well as the constitution of a territorial cohesion (Corrêa, 1997) that went beyond the limits imposed to the municipality of São Miguel do Gostoso.

Unlike São Miguel do Gostoso, in Touros, the public and private sectors were not actively engaged in the development of tourism in the last years and, therefore, it has not been a factor of space transformation or economic growth in the municipality. The weaknesses in urban infrastructure and the meager efforts for structural and institutional actions were acknowledged by public managers and entrepreneurs. As a result, many entrepreneurs use the proximity to São Miguel do Gostoso for their promotional actions, defining themselves as being part of the tourist offer of this municipality.

In 2017, however, the construction of a resort with 514 rooms by the Portuguese hotel chain Vila Gallé, an investment of R\$150 million and expected to create 400 direct jobs, rekindles the interest of Touros' municipal managers in providing the adequate conditions for spatial adjustment to occur. Expectations around this enterprise mobilized the public power to improve access infrastructure, job training programs, and tax exemption, i.e., measures in line with the state responsibility in the neoliberal agenda. On the other hand, the local public power expected that the resort would increase the international tourist flow in the municipality, the creation of jobs, and tax collection.

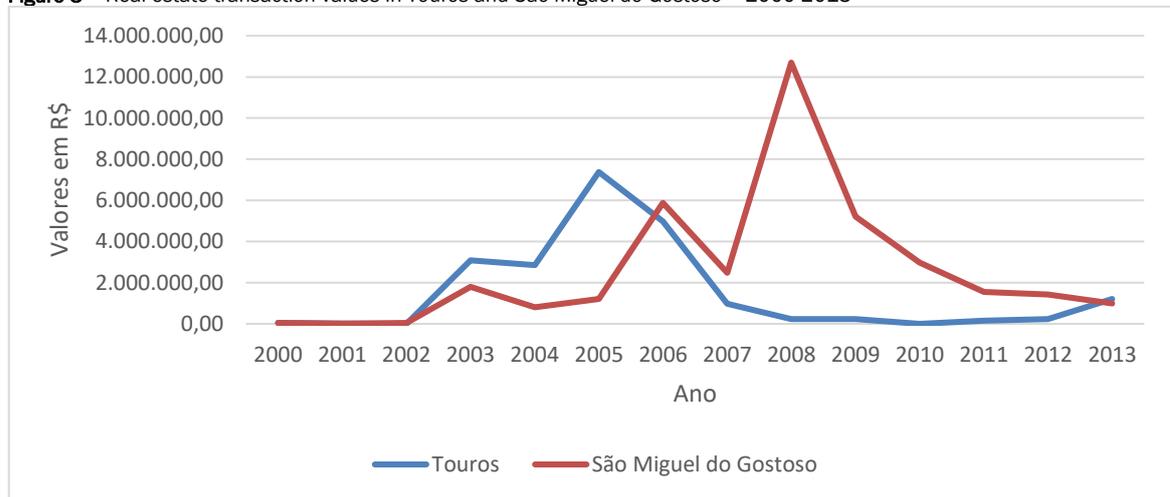
## 5.2 Real Estate Investments in São Miguel do Gostoso and Touros

The number of real estate transactions involving foreigners showed significant growth in São Miguel do Gostoso between 2002 and 2008. In turn, Touros had a shorter growth period of real estate market, between 2002 and 2005. The effects of the 2007-2008 economic crisis were felt in both municipalities, namely the

decline of real estate transactions. Despite this slowdown, the businesses in São Miguel do Gostoso were more evenly distributed over the years, while having higher investment rates in the analyzed period (Figure 3).

The types of real estate present significant differences. While in São Miguel do Gostoso the land market predominated (97 per cent of the transactions), in Touros, the sales of houses and cottages led the market (49 per cent of transactions), followed by lands (46 per cent).

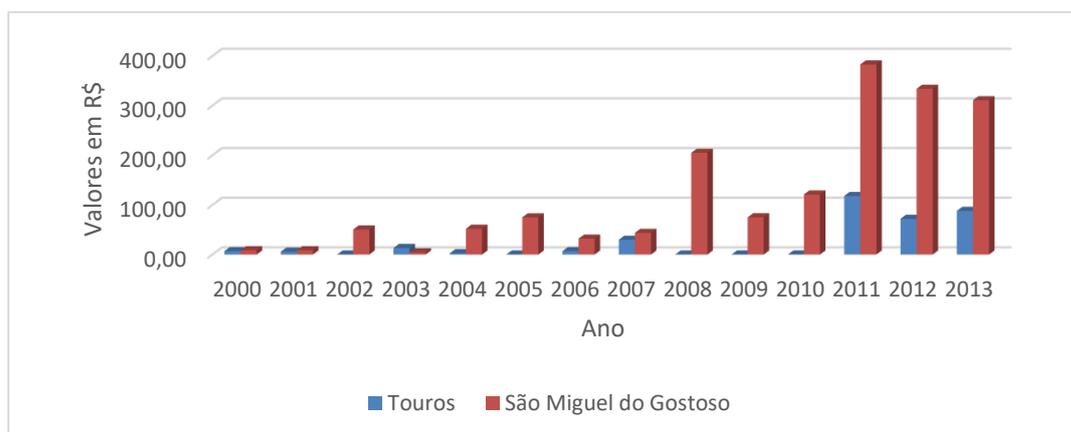
**Figure 3** – Real estate transaction values in Touros and São Miguel do Gostoso – 2000-2013



**Source:** Real Estate Registry office of Touros, 2016.

Considering that there were practically no transactions of built square meters in São Miguel do Gostoso, a comparison was made between the prices of the lands located in the coastal strip. Analyzing the data in Figure 4, since 2003 one observes a gap between the market values in the two municipalities. In 2005 a series of improvements were completed in the municipal seat and from 2010 the first stage of the urban works at Avenida dos Arrecifes began. Public investments added value to the land, with impact on local real estate market. After 2011, price per square meter in São Miguel do Gostoso was three times the price in Touros.

**Figure 4** – Price per square meter in Touros and São Miguel do Gostoso – 2000-2013



**Source:** Real Estate Registry office of Touros, 2016.

In both municipalities, European investors take the lead, among which the Spanish and Portuguese stand out. The analysis of the international demand share in the transactions, especially in São Miguel do Gostoso, reveals that over the course of 13 years foreigners passed from real estate buyers to sellers, especially after

2008. These transactions included foreigners as intermediaries, taking advantage of land price increases (in some cases, 325 per cent increase per year) at the peak of the flow of capital in the municipality.

The urban infrastructure developed by the public sector encouraged the expansion of tourism in São Miguel do Gostoso. Associated with this growth, the real estate market grew with investments that benefited from the availability of land at much lower prices than in Europe. As tourism grew, beach lands prices in the municipality began to rise because of increased demand for new areas of real estate expansion. A joint movement that caused a strong occupation and valuation of the lands located, mainly, in the beaches of Xepa, Cardeiro, and Santo Cristo.

## 6 ACTIONS AND OBJECTS FOR THE SOLUTION OF TERRITORIAL CONFLICT

As a result of the investments described, São Miguel do Gostoso has risen from a village inhabited mainly by fishermen and farmers to one of the most important tourist destinations in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. The sources of research considered that this fact was at the heart of the impasse with the municipality of Touros.

The interest of municipal authorities was, more specifically, urban land that acquires distinct value by concentrating investments. The already implemented projects and new business prospects turned Xepa, Cardeiro and, especially, Santo Cristo beaches into differentiated spaces in the territory of São Miguel do Gostoso.

There are repeated references to the Praia de Ponta do Santo Cristo as a place of concentration of real estate and tourism developments. This area—and its surroundings—has become more valued due to natural amenities and urban infrastructure, elements that affect the price per square meter. Thus, the area has stood out in terms of foreign investments.

Touros recognized that the lands in dispute were the most valued and that the beaches of the Xepa and Cardeiro were wrongly included in the municipality territory due to defective land demarcation. However, the same lenience was not observed in the case of Praia da Ponta do Santo Cristo, and Touros expressed the intention to maintain its jurisdiction.

Seeking to reconcile Touros' interests, the eastern limit of the Municipality was pulled back, in relation to what was defined in the emancipatory movement, where Praia da Ponta do Santo Cristo would be entirely located in São Miguel do Gostoso. With this alteration, part of this beach become part of Touros (Figure 5).

**Figure 5** – Definition of the new eastern limit of São Miguel do Gostoso

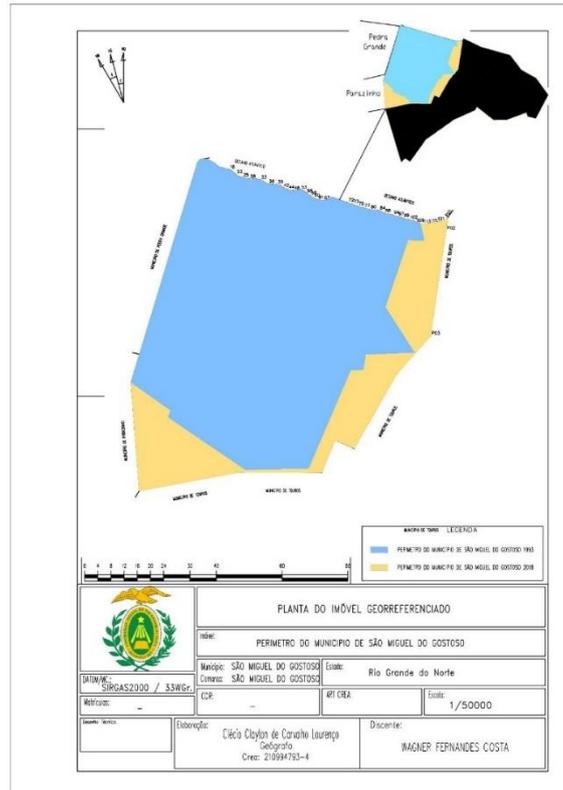


Source: Research data, 2018

After the positive signal from Touros' authorities, an agreement was signed and sent to the competent bodies for a new demarcation process. Thus, on January 2, 2018, Law 10,315/2018 was sanctioned by the Legislative Assembly of Rio Grande do Norte with the new limits of the municipalities (Figure 5).

It is possible to notice that the new territorial borders of São Miguel do Gostoso encompass rural areas that belonged to Touros. Regarding these areas and communities, there was no manifestation of interest on the part of the managers and leaders interviewed, indicating that the concern about the maintenance or gain of territory of both municipalities fell on the urban seat, with special focus on Praia do Santo Cristo and surrounding areas.

**Figure 6** – Limits of São Miguel do Gostoso municipality in 2018.



**Source:** Research data, 2018

It is worth mentioning that the coastal area that was the object of the agreement is being surveyed for the construction of tourism real-estate projects. The location of these developments in the vicinity of São Miguel do Gostoso, located along RN 221 (link between the two municipalities), already gives the businessmen in Touros some comparative advantages. Thus, the solution to the conflict had a direct relationship with the priority location trends of investment and land valuation in recent years.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Public policies implemented in the Northeast allowed for greater integration and organizational cooperation between economic processes at the global and regional-local level, allowing valuation of surplus capital, particularly from Europe. These actions also contributed to the increase of tourism and real estate production with eminently speculative interests that resulted in the increased value of the land, since the capitals were configured as assets incorporated to land, in which they sought to extract various forms of income.

This was the context in which São Miguel do Gostoso, a tourist destination on the rise, started to diverge with its neighboring municipality, Touros, in relation to the territorial limits of rural and urban areas. The issue acquired a connotation of conflict after refusals to correct the error in the demarcation and attempts to collect

taxes by Touros. The discussion revolved around the beaches of Xepa, Cardeiro and, especially, Ponta do Santo Cristo, where a synchronic mechanism of value creation involving tourism entrepreneurs, real estate agents, and the state took place.

It is concluded that the territorial conflict between Touros and São Miguel do Gostoso was related to the increase in tourism and real estate production in the territory of these municipalities over the last two decades. The solution to the impasse reinforces this conclusion, since the condition established for an agreement was that part of Praia da Ponta do Santo Cristo and adjacent areas, claimed by São Miguel do Gostoso in the emancipatory process, remained under the jurisdiction of Touros.

The results show that the geographical transfer of capital provided a new territorial arrangement in the municipalities of this study, with the expansion of tourism activity associated with the real estate sector. In the sun and sea tourist model, the coastal land is a scarce and key resource, and, thus, it is valued as commodities, stirring up disputes between agents and between places.

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## **Information about the authors**

### **Wagner Fernandes Costa**

He holds Bachelor's Degrees in Tourism (2001) and in Geography (2013), from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), specialization in History, Cultural Heritage, and Tourism (2006), from the Potiguar University (UnP), Master's Degree in Tourism (Tourism and Regional Development) in the Graduate Program in Tourism (2018), UFRN. He is a teacher of Basic, Technical and Technological Education at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN) in Tourism and Hospitality in the upper levels (face-to-face teaching) and technical (face-to-face and distance learning teaching).

E-mail: [wagnerfcosta@hotmail.com](mailto:wagnerfcosta@hotmail.com).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8839-351X>

### **Maria Aparecida Pontes da Fonseca**

She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Geography (1986) from the São Paulo State University (UNESP), Master's Degree in Geography (Human Geography) (1994) from the University of São Paulo (USP), PhD in Geography (2004) from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and Post-Doctoral Degree (2016/2017) at the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM). She is a Full Professor at the Department of Geography, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), since 1993. She participates in the Graduation Program in Geography and Graduation Program in Tourism, from the UFRN. She is the leader of the interdisciplinary research group Tourism and Society.

E-mail: [mariapontes@ufrnet.br](mailto:mariapontes@ufrnet.br).

ORCID:<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1863-2332>