

Geo-History Notes for the Study of Production of the Beachy Space in Brazilian Northeastern

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Keywords

Beach space
Northeastern coast
Coastal urbanization

Abstract

The present work aims to present some geohistorical notes about the production of beach space in Northeast Brazil, based on bibliographic research. The Brazilian beach space results from different social practices, some of which emerged through the absorption of behaviors and lifestyles arising from modern westerns. The social appropriation of beaches on the coast of the Northeast took place in the mid-19th century, when local elites turned to the sea, in the context of the incorporation of the so-called "modern maritime practices" (therapeutic baths, vacations, etc.), colonizing an environment previously intended only for "traditional maritime practices" (fishing, defense, and port activity). The transformation and consumption of these spaces were based on the establishment of second homes and infrastructure aimed at the development of tourist activity. In the first part of this article, we characterize the environment and socially on the Northeastern coast, in order to demonstrate the predominance of the beach environment and its social and economic value. Then we seek to discuss the production of beach space in the Northeast, pointing out the geohistorical factors linked to its valorization. Finally, we briefly present the process of production of beach space in a large northeastern city, Recife, highlighting the historical process of appropriation and valorization of its beaches.

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INTRODUCTION

This article results from the development of two research projects. First of them was developed in a Brazilian research network, its objective was to analyze the relationship between tourist activities, public policies, and its reflexes in the social production of the Brazilian beachy spaces. The second of them seeks to accomplish the rescue of the social memories linked to the beaches of Recife, in the hope of understanding the beachy space production and analyzing the urban planning and management actions during the 20th century.

According to Santos (2019; 2021), the preference for the term “beachy space” results from an effort to improve terminology, based on teaching practices and interdisciplinary research, in dialogue with students and professors in the areas of History, Social Sciences and Geography.

Although we know that geographic space is just one, because its production is more and more standard, we must recognize that it presents itself in different ways, because it depends on the natural and technical conditions of each location. Indeed, the adjectives have an important function to help us to understand the differential way where in that homogeneous production materializes around the surface. To characterize the space as urban, rural, coastal, countryside and so on is a way to discern differences in a whole.

We've been warning that there's in Portuguese of Brazil terminology differences between “beach”, “seaside”, “coast” and “waterfront”, and its differences sometimes are forgotten by many Brazilian researchers, including geographers (SANTOS, 2021). Clear and reasoned terminologies and conceptual definitions are extremely important, if not we incur the risk of the generalization of the processes that should be seen as specific. The most widespread understanding of the meaning of “coast”, for example, leads many to call this term what is just beachy. In Portuguese, coast is a bigger profile of the territory, it means all the emerged land, encompassing all the different geographical features, from the beaches, cliffs, reefs and delta, to gulfs and fjords. When they simply talk about a coastal space, they omit specificities that could be enhanced to understand the differences.

According to the dictionary Houaiss et al. (2015), the term beach means “strip of land of sand or gravel” located in the contact zone with the sea or the ocean. Guerra (1993) defines a beach as a “deposit of sand accumulated by the

agents of the fluvial and marine transport”, that is specific parts of the seaside, where that deposits occur Muehe (2012) claims that the beach result from the accumulation of marine sediments and, for that reason, its morphology and dynamic depending on the wave action and the tide. The “beachy prisms” are constituted for the submerged area called “shoreface” and the emerging area called “foreshore”. When we use the term beachy, we talk about something that belongs to the beach, that is situated around the beach.

The beach is the most common coastal environment, it has easier access to humans and, therefore, it has more presence in human imaginaries. According to Corbin (1989), the modern and western world passed by a deep change in the social meaning of the beach, and it proves the importance of this environment to the consolidation of social values and behaviors. In Brazil, the beaches became an object for appropriation, valorization and consumption at the beginning of the 18th century. It was in these environments, or having a vector in them, that a seaside urbanization was developed, being accompanied by second residence constructions and, after that, by the establishment of touristic activities. All of these constitute a historical process of space production that is socially unequal and environmentally degrading. The valorization and the demand for the beachy environment have been intensifying ever since obligate us to consider its centrality. And for these reasons, we prefer the term “beachy space” instead of coastal space or any other to designate our research objective.

This article is divided into three parts. First, we characterize environmentally and socially the Brazilian coast, to demonstrate the predominance of the beachy environment and its economic value. After that, we seek to discuss the production of the beachy space in Northeastern, pointing out its geohistorical factors linked to its valorization. Finally, we present the process of the production of beachy space in a Northeastern big city called Recife, highlighting the historical process of the appropriation and valorization of its beaches.

THE NORTHEASTERN COAST

The Brazilian coast is one of the most extensive in the world, having about 7.491km. In this long-distance area, there are several geographical features where it can find different environments, most of whom are constructed

during the last geological ages of the earth, the Holocene and the Pleistocene (Quaternary).

According to Tessler and Goya (2005), the natural coastal processes of conditioning of the Brazilian coast are the geological heritage; the features constructed during the Quaternary; and the current sedimentary dynamics.

The Brazilian coast delineation results from the separation of the supercontinent Gondwana, which originated from the Atlantic Ocean and the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The lineament and fault that conditioned the separation define the directions of South American and African lines. First of them is called "Brasiliana" and the second, "Caraíba". The separation of these two continents' blocs have been in the same time that occurred sedimentary retrogradations and progradations of the coastline, for the reason that current geomorphological process (TESSLER; GOYA, 2005; MUEHE, 2006).

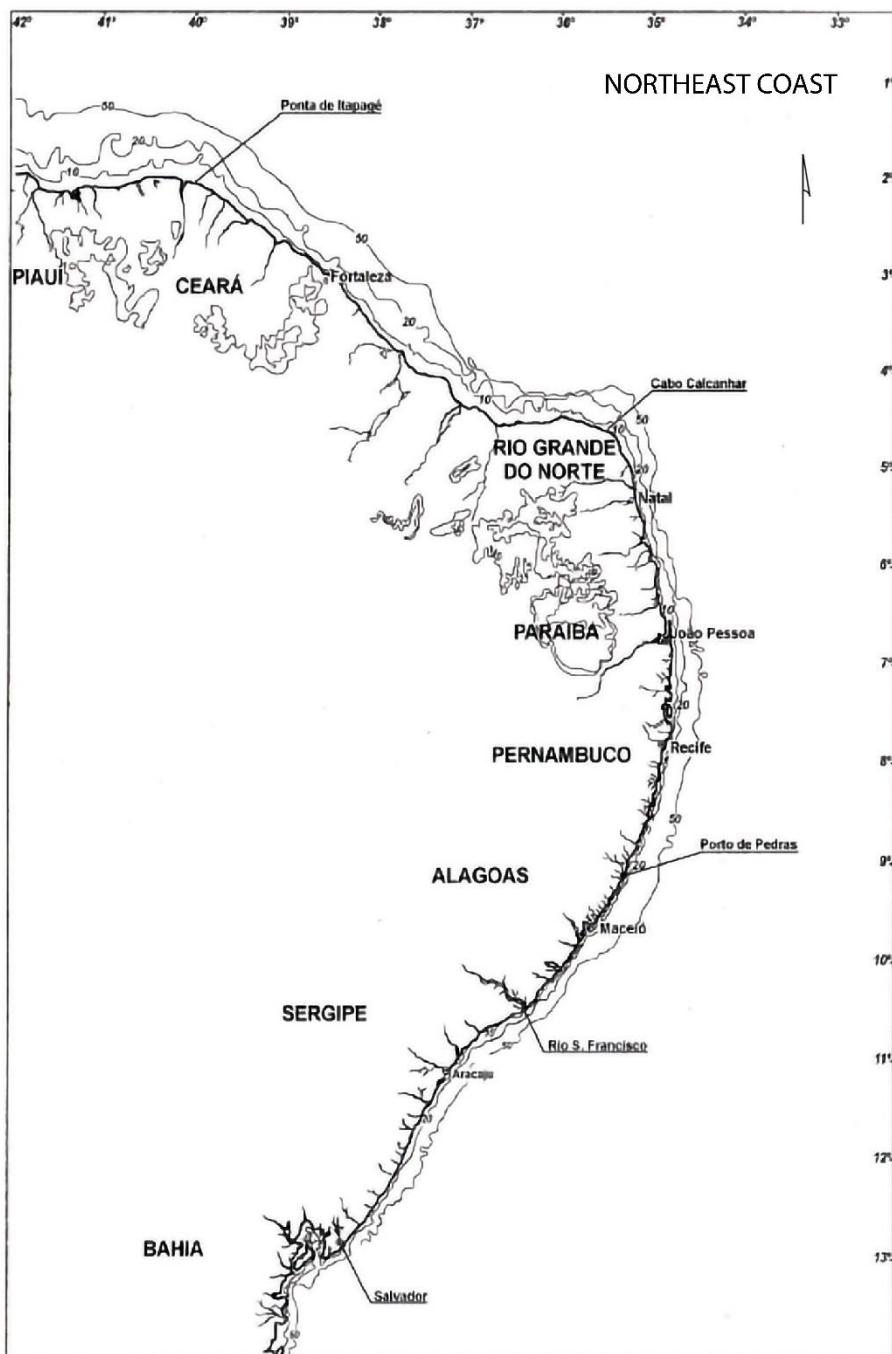
During the Quaternary occurred fluctuations of the relative level of the oceans in regressive and transgressive cycles that were modeling the Brazilian coast. In addition, the wave weather and the tidal regime, the main natural coastal processes of the medium and short term, acted promoting erosion, transport and accumulation of sediments in different locations. Thus, the coast was constituted in strong relation with the oceanic dynamics, composing different landscapes and natural environments (MUEHE, 2006). As we want to say, one of the main of them is the beach.

The necessity of comprehension of this landscaped diversity has obligated the researchers to suggest regionalization, like the one proposed by Muehe (2006). According to this author, there are five different coast regions in

Brazil, constituted of distinct "macro compartments", each of them has its environmental specificities. In our research project, we consider the Northeastern region (Fig. 1) that are constituted by five macro compartments, namely: North semiarid coast; South semiarid coast; Coast of the North Tablelands; Coast of Central Tablelands; Coast of the South Tablelands. All this region extends from the Bay of São Marcos, in Maranhão, until the Bay of Todos os Santos, in Bahia (MUEHE, 2006). One of its main characters is the presence of a sedimentary continental layer called "Grupo Barreiras", that covers a long part of the coast, being one of the main sources of the coastal sediments. In the same way, the rivers of this region act as an important source of sediments, contributing to the different coastal features and environments. The two main morphological features of this region are the cliffs and the beaches, being the last the more important in the reason of the social uses.

According to Muehe (2012), despite the presence of rivers, one of the main environmental vulnerabilities of this region is the sedimentary deficiency, which promotes much more erosion action instead of the construct action of the waves. In the State of Pernambuco, more than 30% of the beaches are in an advanced erosive state, because of the deficit of sedimentary supply and human occupation. Most of the areas still preserved have been disputed for the construction of second homes and infrastructures for touristic activities. The construction of buildings and urban infrastructures on the beach environment have contributed to the intensification of the erosive problems (ARAÚJO et al., 2007).

Figure 1 – Northeastern coast



Source: Muehe (2006)

It should be added that the coastal region of Northeastern precisely developed some of the first episodes of colonial Portuguese occupation, being the local where Brazilian territorial history started. The sugary company that existed during the 16th century, despite its later decay, kept the structure that gave it sustentation. And, in spite of the subsequent economic cycles, this activity continued and still today exists. Thus, we're talking about a region very unequal, that has the worst Human Development Index and the most part of

structural problems in Brazil.

THE PRODUCTION OF BEACHY SPACE IN THE NORTHEASTERN

The effort to understand the process of the production of beachy space in Brazil obligates us to start from the territorial history of this country. When we talk about territorial history, we don't talk just about the geopolitical landmarks through which the boundary of the

nation was being historically delimited, but the process whereby the space was economically, culturally, and politically appropriated by the Brazilian people, building afterwards a cohesive territory of the sovereignty of the State. From this perspective, it's important to consider as an initial set of transformations those related to the Portuguese colonial appropriation. According to any historiography of Brazil, that transformation occurred to use the locational qualities of its ocean coast, thereby would allow the domination of the South Atlantic and the necessary support to the Portuguese ships in the Cape route (MORAES, 2007). Thus, the coast (including the beaches) entered into Brazilian territorial history as a place for the construction of trading posts and the coastal patrol, where developed the first experiences of native domestication (Ibidem).

The Portuguese kingdom just started the occupation and colonization of the Brazilian coast when realized the necessity of effective domination of the coastal space against the incursions of other nations. The coast became the long geographical extension over which emerged punctual settlement nuclei, that afterward became villages and cities, that led to a hinterland of domination and wealth, shipped to the metropolis by the ocean. Moraes (2007, p. 32) called this territorial structure a "drainage basin", in the reason that it was based on a net of circulation that demanded a main urban point that corresponded to the maritime ports.

Most parts of this long geographical space weren't occupied, kept isolated for a long time, being sometimes space for the installation of little communities of runaway slaves, natives, or simply fishers with their traditional lifestyles. Some of these communities preserve themselves in total isolation until the current days, and they have just been threatened by great private projects and public investments in tourist activities development. Therefore, during most part of Brazilian territorial history, the coast was local to the development which Dantas (2009) called "traditional maritime practices", that is, the military activities of coast defense, the port activities, and fishing.

But the 20th century brought great changes in modern western societies. It was a period of big economic and technical transformations, some of which resulted from the capitalist industrialization process. The social turbulence started at the beginning of the century, with the continental blockade and Napoleon's advance on the Iberian Peninsula. It was when the Portuguese court refugees in Brazil, kept on from 1808 until 1821. With it came new ideas and

social values, some of which were mimicked by the local elites (SANTOS, 2021).

The coastal cities always were centers of the Atlantic circulation of social values and conventions. Thus, as in the European world, these cities saw to emerge a lot of liking and social habits that change the sociability forms. Most of these changes came to give rise to valorization and consumption processes through the creation of new urban equipment and services. The "invention of the beach" in Brazil resulted from the incorporation of the one that might have been the main novelty in this period, the "sea bath". It also motivated the emergence of new spatial forms destined to bath usufruct of the sea and the beach (SANTOS, 2020b).

During its stay in Rio de Janeiro, the real family was one of the pioneers in the introductions of the sea bath, following medical prescriptions of the "Real Câmara". The arrival of medical-hygienist thinking in the middle of the 18th century, through the creation of several medical organizations, gives the necessary scientific certifications to these recommendations, following discoveries and treatments elaborated in Europe (SANTOS, 2021).

This kind of bath spread out initially as a prophylactic treatment, once these cities were recurrently taken by epidemics. The medical knowledge itself of this period recommended this treatment in publications that get great popularity. The famous "Dictionary of Popular Medicine", published in 1842 and 1843, and written by the academic Pedro Luiz Napoleão Chernoviz suggest these baths for several types of medical treatment. With great circulation in Brazil and Portugal, Chernoviz (1843, p. 75) claimed in this work that the salt water "[...] is recommended for paralysis, even those that follow apoplexy, dardros, muscular contractions, chronic rheumatism, and many illnesses characterized by general weakness".

According to his conception, salty baths represented an effective treatment for a lot of illnesses. Because of that cold salty bath was recommended with the exercise practices. The author claimed that...

Sea baths can be applied in the treatment of various diseases that are characterized by weakness; it is particularly suitable for scrophulous diseases, "white flowers", and different nervous disorders. It's therefore conceivable the effect that cold baths must produce, in water overloaded with exciting principles, accompanied by the salutary exercise that is done by

swimming, or by the capsizes produced by the continuous movement of the waves ([CHERNOVIZ, 1843, p. 289](#)).

To the therapeutic benefits, fashion and beauty treatments were added as a factor to the highest demand for the beach. From then on, this environment came to be seen in a way more and more positively, and its natural wealth became qualities that valued it socially and economically, promoting recreational use. According to the Araújo ([2013, p. 6](#))

[...] the predominantly therapeutic and hygienic uses of the coastal space, as well as the forms of sociability that corresponded to them, lost strength, without, however, ever being abandoned. They provided land for the exploration of sports, leisure and recreational activities, for hours of rest and rest and for short shows made of personal exhibitions. These practices engendered new forms of social coexistence and perception of the social environment on the beaches. The primacy of thalassotherapy gave way to the supremacy of what finally received the name of leisure, but which, at the time, was still not commonly designated as such.

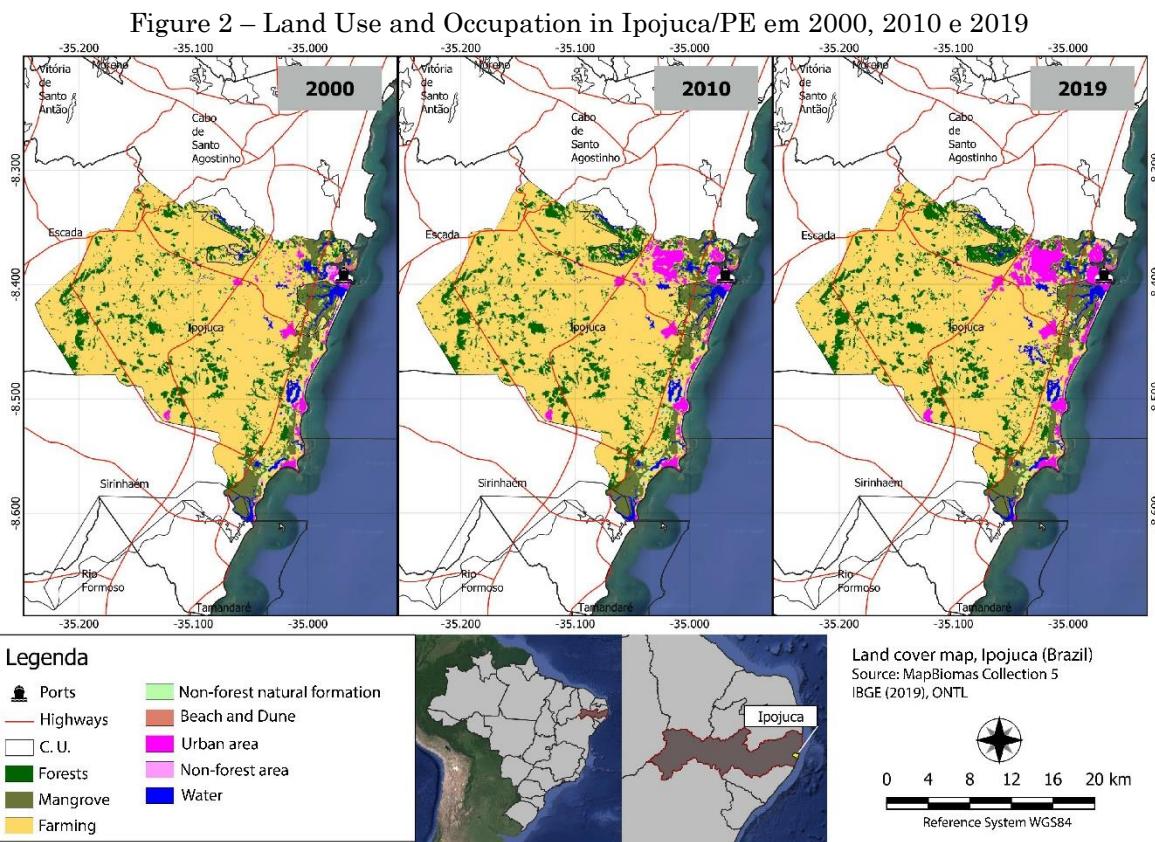
At the beginning of the 20th century, the consolidation of the habits of recreational baths occurred. Little by little the beaches were being endowed with equipment and services not just the bath uses but also for definitive homes, such as tram lines, bath homes, and markets. The users kept on for more time on the beach and in free air yet ([ARAÚJO, 2007a](#)). It watched, then, not just the known coastal occupation process, but a production of beachy space *strictu sensu*.

According to Dantas ([2009](#)), with the valorization of the beaches and the sea, the cities ceased to be "coastal-countryside" and became "coastal-maritime". In other words, they

ceased to simply lead an urban net that turned around into the territory and became a vector to the valorizations of the coast. From then departed infrastructure paralleled the beaches, allowing the occupation in areas of high landscaped and economic value. In these locations were established, first, the vacationers. Then, with the gradual improvement of accesses, the local governments started to make efforts to construct infrastructures for tourism and the leisure of beaches and sea, articulating with companies and international organisms in processes of obtaining e control of resources.

At the end of the 20th century, an indisputable mark of the growth of the tourist sector and the valorization of the environment of the beaches was the Programa de Desenvolvimento do Turismo no Nordeste – PRODETUR (it was a federal agency responsible for the implementation of touristic policies and public investments in Northeast coast). Congregating a lot of resources and integrating different actors, this program promotes, during the 90s, several investments in infrastructure and urban improvements, seeking to dynamize the tourist sector. Divided into two steps, the PRODETUR act in different coastal locations from 1995 until 2007. The first step was characterized by investments in buildings and infrastructure of transport and basic sanitation. The second step sought to make the municipality's administration strong, promote some more strategic infrastructure, and instigate the private sector with public-private partnerships.

The continuous endowment of infrastructures and the contribution of tourist investments still have prompted these areas to great urban growth. In municipalities like Ipojuca, in the State of Pernambuco, the expansion of the urban area in the last 20 years turn evident the relationship between the infrastructure of access, hosting and urban population growth.



Source: The authors (2022).

The municipality of Ipojuca has one of the beaches of most visitation on the Northeastern coast, called “Porto de Galinhas”. This location, as in other beaches around it (Cape, Muro Alto, Maracaípe, Serrambi) concentrates most part of the hosting and services turned to tourism of the sun and sea of the State of Pernambuco. In these locations also emerged the called “Touristic-Real estate Enterprise”, which results from an association between second homes and resorts ([ARAÚJO, 2011](#)).

[Araújo \(2011\)](#) claimed that with the financial liberalization that had occurred in the 90s, there was a growth in real estate and tourist investments, the reason for circuits of transfer of the financial capital to the sector of productions of the built environment. That is, because of what Harvey (1978) called the “second circuit of capital”. These circuits materialize themselves through an association between the international and national capitals. In the hosting sector, international flags began to operate hotels and local resorts, many times without the property of infrastructures, for the reason of franchise agreements.

Other times, these investments are associated with the national capital to facilitate

the confrontation of local bureaucracies in the obtaining of lands and buildings. This symbiosis between the real estate sector and tourism has dynamized the current main spatial transformations in the Northeastern coast.

The Baiano Coast, in the Northeastern, with its different tourist poles, has the most stock of lands with that type of enterprise, some of them have already operated, and others are constructing, being the beaches of Forte, Trancoso and Itacaré the pioneers and of the most concentration ([ARAÚJO; VARGAS, 2013](#)). In Ceará, also in the Northeastern, the western coast was the first to receive representative amounts of public investments of the PRODETUR, still in the 90s. Then, it was invested resources in the East coast and in the Extreme West, enlarging the area of the actuation of economic agents of the tourist sector. Recently, it has realized a highlight in the public investment and the most contribution of private capital in tourism in strategic locations, such as the Costa do Sol Poente, which corresponds to West and Extreme West ([CASTRO; PEREIRA, 2019](#)).

PRODUCTION OF BEACHY SPACE IN A NORTHEASTERN CITY

With the aim to illustrate the way in which the beachy space is produced in Northeastern, we showed next the case of Recife, a city of Northeastern that was an object of our research. With a current population of 1.661.017 inhabitants, according to estimates of 2021 by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (federal authority responsible for producing most of the country's population statistics), Recife is one of the largest coast Brazilian cities, the capital of State Pernambuco and metropolitan center (it has 3.743.854 inhabitants in the metropolitan region).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the beaches of Recife still were calm and uninhabited, despite their frequent growth year by year. Araújo (2007a) claims that in the first half of the 19th century, when the demand by the sea started, Recife didn't have suitable beach baths nor recreational activities, and Olinda, a close city, received most part of the bather. The beaches of Recife were located close

to the center and to the port, being all of them very polluted.

There were, however, other beaches much farther, in the south of the municipal territory, all of them of difficult access. The area where the neighborhoods of Pina and Boa Viagem are located today, formerly called Barreta or Candelária, has routes that were used in the trips to the South of the State, such as the railway linked Recife to the São Francisco River. Although essentials, these routes have never been factors for the expressive settlements. All of the oceanic South sectors was a largely rural area, with a lot of rivers, waterways and mangroves, where some cultures were developed, like coconut plantations.

In the two first decades of the 20th century, several owners and entrepreneurs, many of which owners of lands near these beaches, pressured the government to create access from the city center. Among different proposals, the construction of the Beira-mar Avenue was the one that materialized (Figure 3), which came from the Pina to the Boa Viagem Church.

Figure 3 – The Beira-mar Avenue, in 1940s



Source: Costa (n.d.).

Anything was more determinant of the production of the beachy space of Recife than the constructions of this Avenue, because it was a part of the ambitious set of infrastructure constructions made by the municipal

administration, in the effort of modernization and urban expansions. One of the more notable results of these efforts was the urban sprawl towards the municipal south, over the oceanic sector (Figure 4) (MOREIRA; SARAIVA, 2018).

Figure 4 – Aerial view of the neighborhood of Pina with the Ligaçao Avenue and the Pina Church, 1940s



Source: Vista (n.d.).

After constructed, the Beira-mar Avenue became one more vector for the occupation of the beaches, because it didn't take long for the proliferation of second homes and definitive

residences. In the 1930s and 1940s, they had already taken place on almost all the coastline (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Beira-mar Avenue and its palaces, 1940s



Source: Berzin (n.d.).

The decades of 1930 and 40 also were marked by the emergence of planned neighborhoods and the occupation of farther lands, as well as the construction of important streets and avenues, prompting the population growth of this part of the city. The construction of the new airport in

the neighborhood of Imbiribeira and Ibura integrates more and more the South zone with the rest of the city. Since of the 1950s, the second homes along the beaches of Boa Viagem and Pina were quickly substituted for the modern buildings, with a crescent number of floors. The

hotel offers have grown hugely, supplanting the offer of the central area (SILVA, 2007). From then, the paradisaic environment was becoming a residential neighborhood more and more consolidated, with a great offer of service, creating an urban centrality. Araújo (2007a, p. 515) resumes these transformations when she says that...

[...] over just one century, four were the landscapes that sprouted in the soil of Pina and Boa Viagem. Sites of coconut trees, fish farms and swamps; fishermen's huts and bungalows; mansions; and, finally, the vertical buildings, four different ways of occupying their territories, in which the last one eliminates almost all traces of what preceded it in time and space.

The way that happened, production of beachy space in Recife, therefore, became a concentrated and verticalized model of occupation, much more linked to the speculative strategy of real estate. The growth of the built area also makes urban infrastructure problems emerge. From then, all of the oceanic sector became a vector to the metropolitan growth that was following the beach, propagating to other municipalities and resulting in a unique urban extended and coastal area.

Santos (2020b) claims that in the Brazilian urban realities, the beaches sometimes have been vectors of the process of metropolitan growth, pointing out the ways of this expansion. This beachy urbanization tends to grow from the more consolidated area to the less occupied area of the metropolitan territory, according to Dantas and Pereira (2010) in a work about the main Northeastern metropolises. It's especially noticeable in Recife, where two growth vectors were noticed, both starting from the metropolitan center in opposite directions, North and South (SANTOS, 2020b).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Northeastern coast has a big diversity of natural landscapes, but the most important is the beaches, for the reason of their attractivity and their social uses. The Northeastern beaches were socially appropriated since the 19th century, when a set of social and modern values and practices were mimicked by the local elites. Since then, they have been a place for the establishment of infrastructures that contribute

to their seaside urbanization. But afterward, in the 20th century, they also began to attract second homes and infrastructure aimed at tourist development.

The beachy space, therefore, results from a process of appropriation, valorization and market consumption of places. This space has a set of specificities that distinguish it from the others in the territory. The main of them maybe have been its relative rarity, which contributes to its economic evaluation (MORAES, 2007). But what singularizes the beachy space is its ambiguity. It's a space at the same time pleasant, socially necessary and tendentially segregated. Therefore, the challenge for public management is becoming more and more accessible and democratic.

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- VISTA aérea do bairro do Pina com a Avenida Ligação e a Igreja matriz do Pina ao fundo, década de 1940. [n.d.]. Museu da Cidade do Recife. 1 photography.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Otávio Augusto Alves dos Santos conceived the study, collected the information, analyzed the data and wrote the text.



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