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## Special Issue

# The Sky is no longer the limit”: The Dilemmas of the Real Estate Overvaluation in Balneário Camboriú, Brazil

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### Abstract

This article examines how transformations in coastal occupation reveal the consequences of the dynamics of real estate valuation in the case of Balneário Camboriú (BC), Santa Catarina, Brazil, which is one of the main national centers of real estate valuation. The present study employs a Bourdieusian perspective, particularly the concept of doxa, to investigate how practices and discourses serve to legitimize the commodification of the beachfront. The methodological approach involves conducting a semantic content analysis of the dissemination of podcast episodes featuring real estate agents within the region. They have been identified as a key element to promote specific properties. The research findings denote that this phenomenon is facilitated by discourses surrounding media representation, which serve to perpetuate the notion of exclusive access to beachfront properties. The promotion of enterprises in videos and podcasts emphasizes a lifestyle based on the consumption of high-standard goods and services, consolidating the beach not only as a leisure space, but also as a financial asset. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that profitability and urban safety emerge as the predominant factors for attracting investors, thereby reinforcing the notion of BC as a refuge for particular social groups.

Keywords: Symbolic construction of space; Coastal occupation; Mediatization; Balneário Camboriú.

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## Introduction

Social science studies have explored the occupation of the beachfront in all its complexity. It is addressing aspects ranging from the influence of the real estate market (*cf.* Loloum and Aledo, 2018) and the dynamics of consumption (*cf.* Sartore and Coffey, 2020) to the power relations of elites that intertwine both processes (*cf.* Bruno and Salle, 2018). A historical and cultural process can be observed that reconfigures the beach as a socially desired space for various social groups and, in certain contexts, as economically overvalued. This transformation sheds light on the dynamism of nature appropriation, which is shaped by a variety of political, cultural, and economic factors that involve both material and symbolic dimensions (*cf.* Corbin, 1989; Ritchie, 2021; Low, 2025).

In Brazil, an empirical field has yet to be thoroughly explored among sociologists, despite its potential to deepen the understanding of these beach dynamics. The case of Balneário Camboriú, now commonly referred to as BC, a coastal city in the state of Santa Catarina, offers a promising avenue for research. In recent decades, BC has solidified its position as a preeminent center for real estate valuation in the country. This prominence has led to its nickname “the Brazilian Dubai,” a reference to an urbanization model characterized by the development of skyscrapers. In accordance with this phenomenon, the price per square meter in BC and neighboring cities, such as Itapema and Itajaí, has exhibited an upward trend over the past decades, thereby positioning the region among the most expensive in the country for real estate acquisition.

Since acquiring urban status through administrative autonomy in 1964, BC has been regarded as a seaside resort city. For instance, during the summer season, the seasonal population can exceed one million people, thereby demonstrating the centrality of tourism and the intermittent occupation of properties for occasional use (Nunes, 2025). When considered collectively, these dynamics indicate a reconfiguration of the coastal urban space, wherein real estate market interests and legitimizing discourses assume a pivotal role in sustaining this model of seaside occupation.

The central issue of this paper is to explore how a framework of discourses on seaside occupation is manifested in the dynamics of local real estate valuation. To that end, we employ the Bourdieusian perspective, which provides us with a lens to perceive how practices and hierarchies become naturalized, favoring the consolidation of the urban model that benefits certain social groups at the expense of others.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of multifaceted transformations in the real estate market and to move beyond a superficial analysis that conceives the coastline solely as a space for tourism and leisure. Within this context, a central aspect of this process is the growing number of households for occasional use (HOU), which has increased by 148.61% at the national level over the past 20 years (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022). This phenomenon is indicative of the intensification of the commodification of the seaside and the emergence of what can be described as beach grabbing, a process through which private interests increasingly appropriate coastal areas for exclusive use. Collectively, these dynamics strengthen an occupation model marked by real estate valuation and disparate patterns of urban space utilization.

A methodological operationalization is achieved through an intersection of mediatization and a semantic content analysis of a podcast framework. The term “mediatization” means the emergence of institutionalized media entities that possess the capacity to influence the formation of social life (Krotz, 2009). This process encompasses spectra that affect both individual and collective

*habitus* formation. In accordance with sociological research on the interplay between individual social character and major social structures, including politics, family, education, and industry, Hjarvard (2013) proposes that cultural identity – conceptualized as a system of general dispositions – is predominantly influenced in contemporary society by the propensity to adhere to prevailing trends in taste, fashion, food, socialization practices, and other indicators of consumer style and social status. Individuals place considerable reliance on the media for the purpose of acquiring information and developing their social group affiliations. As Hjarvard (2013, p. 149) further observes, media not only reflect but also actively construct lifestyles presented as “guidelines for modern living.”

A semantic content analysis was conducted on conversational-style podcast discussions between a host and guests from the real estate sector in BC. A subsequent analysis of the discourses revealed their organization according to five dimensions. The factors under consideration are as follows: (i) recognition and consensus; (ii) language and discourse; (iii) institutional grant; (iv) social distinction; and (v) economic resources. The study highlights how conventional narratives concerning security and exclusivity perpetuate the ongoing valuation of properties situated along BC’s coastal regions. The objective of this study is to provide a critical analysis of the social construction of the real estate market in coastal areas and the impact of media dynamics on the production of social differentiation.

### Touristification and real estate valuation: dynamics of beachfront occupation

The last census showed that the municipality of BC has a population of 139,155 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022). However, during the summer season, the city reaches one million people. This is not an isolated phenomenon in the region. In 2023, Santa Catarina received 2.8 million tourists during the summer season (Pinheiro, 2024). In comparison with other Brazilian federal units, the data reveal that Santa Catarina is the state with the highest percentage of HOU, nearly 10.30% of the total number of private residences. This factor is related to the so-called coastal “touristic vocation” since several municipalities have a percentage of HOU still higher than that, such as Jaguaruna (63.68%) and Balneário Rincão (58.83%).

The concept of “tourist vocation” has been a persistent feature of the local social imagination since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in 1918, the Florianópolis newspaper *Terra Livre* published the results of a conference between high-level state politicians. The agents were interested in investing in infrastructural improvements to the city. (*O futuro da cidade*, 1918 *apud* Ferreira, 1994, p. 110). The phenomenon of tourism can be interpreted as a reverberation across various social groups. Individuals occupying positions of privilege often engage in travel and tourist activities, serving as distinction markers, akin to owning a house or a car. These experiences, rooted in material resources, possess symbolic value and are culturally codified, thereby reinforcing social status and distinction (Urry, 1996).

The urbanization of the beachfront, oriented toward leisure, commenced in the second decade of the last century and has since been shaped by the cultural diachrony of beach use. Despite the long-standing presence of visitors and proprietors of secondary residences in the area, the social utilization of the beach has undergone profound and dynamic changes over time. The urban landscape has undergone a sequence of transformations over time. Initially, the development of modest holiday cottages occurred to replace agricultural lands. Subsequently, the de-

velopment of small-scale apartment buildings ensued. This process has recently reached a new phase, marked by the emergence of massive skyscrapers that house luxury residences. These successive transformations not only reflect shifts in architectural form but also embody broader changes in social aspirations, consumption patterns, and the symbolic meaning attributed to coastal living.

Figure 1 – Occupation of the seafront in the early 1970s.



Source: Historical Archive of BC, collection nº 924.

An examination of the data on residential occupation reveals a transformation that is currently unfolding. The current number of unoccupied households is 28,289, 32.84% of the total – a substantial decline from the 49.96% documented in 2000. This change is indicative of a broader shift in the region's demographics and potential economic trends. It is also associated with a process of alignment with the worldviews and aspirations of the social groups that utilize and frequent this coastal space, as we will see throughout this paper.

Table 1 – Number of Private Households in BC by Year

| Year | Total private households | Private households not occupied | Categorized as occasional uses | Categorized as vacant |
|------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2022 | 86,149                   | 28,289                          | 22,994                         | 5,302                 |
| 2000 | 46,859                   | 23,416                          | 19,667                         | 3,749                 |

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from IBGE (2000; 2022).

A historical examination reveals that the initial development of the area (in the 1920s) was driven by the influx of the industrial bourgeoisie from neighboring cities such as Blumenau and Itajaí. After that period, the coastal region has been predominantly shaped by the hotel industry. The luxury hotel segment, inaugurated in 1957, has historically catered to a discerning clientele, in-



cluding former Brazilian President João Goulart, who later acquired a residence in the locality to spend the summer months (Schlickmann, 2016). These shifts also invite consideration of the extent to which the public sector has played a role in fostering and regulating tourism, thereby reinforcing the dynamics of coastal urbanization.

The verticalization of beachfront residences emerged in 1960. That coincides with the expansion of sun, sea, and sand tourism not only for local neighborhood residents but also for Brazilian society as a whole. The Brazilian Tourism Commission (Combratur) was formally established at the federal level through the issuance of Decree nº 44.863/1958. This commission is directly linked to the Presidency and possesses both consultative and executive functions. The primary objectives of the commission are threefold: first, to coordinate tourism policies; second, to standardize procedures; and third, to articulate state and private sector initiatives. Subsequently, at the state level, Law nº 3.684/1965 was enacted, establishing the State Tourism Service of Santa Catarina and the State Tourism Council. The overarching objectives of this legislative initiative encompassed the organization, fostering, and supervision of tourism activities, the regulation of enterprises, and the promotion of infrastructure, including hotels and transport services (Cavalcanti and Hora, 2002).

The relationship between institutional arrangements and disputes over local development routes had an impact on the contours of urban design. In particular, the reconfiguration of public space in favor of tourist activities and the real estate market had consequences for the daily practices of residents. At the same time, the reconfiguration of public space made it possible to exclude residents from their own city (Skalee, 2008).

An analysis of real estate valuation data from the region, particularly from the last years and encompassing the municipalities of BC, Itapema, and Itajaí, demonstrates that properties within this area consistently command the highest average prices per square meter in the country. For instance, in January 2019, the average square meter price in BC was BRL 7,141.00/m<sup>2</sup> (USD 1,400.00/m<sup>2</sup>). By January 2024, this figure had increased to BRL 12,660.00/m<sup>2</sup> (USD 2,500.00/m<sup>2</sup>), increasing 78.73% (Fundação Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas, 2024). The value per square meter is directly proportional to the proximity to the sand. The real estate on Atlântica Avenue can reach an average price of approximately BRL 80,000.00/m<sup>2</sup> (USD 16,000.00/m<sup>2</sup>), which is significantly higher than the prices reported in the FipeZAP study (Fundação Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas, 2024).

This phenomenon of rapid real estate appreciation, when juxtaposed with the 43.75% surge in IBOVESPA share values during the same period, highlights the superior performance of the real estate market over prominent financial capital firms listed on Brazil's stock exchange. These dynamics underscore the intensity of real estate speculation in the locality.

Figure 2 – Occupation of the seafront in 2025.



Source: Authors.

Beyond the economic dimension, the decision to invest in a secondary residence in coastal cities such as BC transcends the logic of material utility, becoming instead a symbol of affiliation with a lifestyle characterized by luxury, leisure, and exclusivity. The pursuit of status is not merely a matter of seeking comfort or consuming services; it is also a means of legitimizing status before peers (Pulici, 2010). Travel, visitation to specific tourist destinations, and ownership of properties in these locations represent elements that manifest symbolic resources that transcend income or material wealth. These elements are consolidated as distinctive cultural practices (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2012).

The relationship between urban space, the consumption of cultural goods, and the reproduction of social hierarchies is both evident in the landscape and in the discourses that naturalize the “touristic vocation” and the development oriented towards the elites. The sociological analysis of these processes enables us to understand how the shoreline represents a space for leisure and a privileged locus for the expression and reproduction of social inequalities. There, the potential for economic capital is intricately intertwined with cultural and symbolic resources, thereby reinforcing the distinctions between social groups.

In the following section, we will explore the notion of *doxa* and *theodicy* to examine the denaturalization of seaside occupation.

### The legitimization of elite power in coastal spaces

In light of Patrick Champagne’s pioneering contributions in “Les paysans à la plage” (1975), the study of beaches has evolved beyond a narrow focus on leisure. Instead, beaches have emerged as a unique setting to analyze social stratification, offering a multifaceted lens to observe social dynamics in action. These singular spaces, situated at the intersection of the sea and the land, serve

as intriguing laboratories for sociologists to elucidate power relations, strategies for distinction, and disputes over access to various resources (Bruno and Salle, 2018; Loloum and Aledo, 2018).

This relatively homogeneous social space, characterized by the potential for unequal representation among social groups, is subject to domination, leading to the formation of *doxa*. It represents a symbolic form of power inherent to both established formal institutions and informal or semi-formal institutions capable of appropriating the prevailing framework of values. For instance, the notion and desire of deriving a good life from one's retirement years by residing near the beach has become increasingly prevalent. According to Bourdieu, *doxa* is defined as "a set of fundamental beliefs that does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16). *Doxa* is a concept that ensures the stability of any social space, where social structures are produced and reproduced through the practices and cognitions of agents.

The construction of social reality tends to establish a gnoseological order: the immediate meaning of the world, and in particular the social world, presupposes what Durkheim calls logical conformism. It refers to a homogeneous conception of time, space, number, and cause, which agrees minds possible. This construction is what Bourdieu calls symbolic power, that is, the power to "make see and make believe," to construct through enunciation and recognition between those who exercise power and those who are subject to it. It is in the relationship between social spaces and the structuring of order that belief is produced and reproduced, above all through the legitimacy of the one who speaks (Bourdieu, 1989, p.15).

A prominent realtor asserts that the sale of a residence is not merely a transaction; it signifies the acquisition of a lifestyle. In this regard, the assertion that residing in BC equates to inhabiting one of Brazil's most exclusive locales, characterized by opulence, security, and well-being, is made. The discourse does not delve into the technical dimensions of the property, such as its square footage or the number of bedrooms, nor does it address the city in terms of indicators of social inequality. Instead, the focus is on the social significance of housing, underscoring its role in shaping the quality of life and the individual's well-being. A mutually reinforcing cognitive dynamic, involving an exchange of perceptions regarding the comfort and privilege associated with an ocean view, is observed to occur between the real estate developer and the buyer. These dynamics serve to foster the buyer's perception that residing in BC is a truly privileged endeavor, accompanied by the understanding that there is a financial cost associated with this privilege.

This evocation of dominant ideas, perpetuated by narratives that contribute to the maintenance of the worldviews of agents who justify themselves in the social order, is a specific type of symbolic power called *sociodicy* (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 43). *Sociodicy* is the process by which the *doxa* legitimizes a given social order, presenting it as natural and inevitable, which naturalizes its arbitrariness and reproduces inequalities. In the case of BC, it will be demonstrated that the discourses of real estate agents align with this concept.

To comprehend this context, it is imperative to acknowledge that the recognition and consensus surrounding legitimate practices emanate from a pre-reflective adherence by the agent. According to Bourdieu (2009), the recognition of social hierarchies and the consensus around them do not stem solely from coercion or direct imposition. Rather, they are the result of a tacit adhesion, the internalization of values and naturalized perception schemes. The agents' recognition of these dominant structures as legitimate is rooted in their perception of them as components of a "natural order" of things, leading to their acceptance of the prevailing norms and hierarchies. Consequently, when agents adopt a particular worldview, they often unconsciously perpetuate the

prevailing social order due to their early exposure to and assimilation of the social rules they have incorporated.

In their analysis of Saint-Tropez, located on the French Mediterranean coast, Bruno and Salle (2018) demonstrate the legitimization of the economic and symbolic power of local elites. According to them, this legitimization reflects a tacit consensus among this social group regarding their “right” to engage in land grabbing and reshape the space according to their preferences. Consequently, a legitimization of inequality is established, wherein the forces of contestation are insufficient to impede the movement of legitimation, as hierarchies are inherent to the “natural” context of an opulent coastal environment. Consequently, a pervasive *doxa* has emerged, fostering the perception of inequality as both inevitable and legitimate. This perception is widely shared among both the privileged and the unprivileged, who have come to accept the status quo in St. Tropez as the norm.

Within this process, language and discourse assume a privileged role, given that they do not merely serve as vehicles for communication; rather, they function as instruments of legitimization for social and practical positions. This phenomenon is intimately linked to the capacity to establish valid definitions of the world, primarily through the monopolization or domination of language and the categories of perception. Consequently, individuals in positions of prestige and authority have the capacity to make their utterances resonate as universally accepted truths, despite the possibility that these statements may in fact reflect specific interests (Bourdieu, 1989, pp. 14–15).

In the context of northeastern Brazilian beaches, a discourse has emerged that lauds the coast as “paradise” or “place of opportunities.” This discourse serves a dual purpose: it attracts investments and consolidates privileges. Developers employ persuasive tactics to appeal to prospective buyers, offering promises of economic prosperity. The expansion of residential projects is facilitated by a conducive institutional framework, wherein state agents act as market intermediaries and local authorities perceive land speculation as a means to stimulate regional economic growth (Loloum and Aledo, 2018; Sartore and Gomes, 2025). A similar phenomenon is also observed in Florianópolis, the capital of Santa Catarina. In that city, coastal localities are considered naturally promising for real estate investments in neighborhoods spotted as “exclusive” and high-standard (Ertel, 2023; Ertel and Mazon, 2025).

This ability to project an image of an abundant and prosperous future is referred to as “utopian performativity.” This phenomenon, as elucidated by real estate developers, public managers, and media outlets, involves the propagation of narratives surrounding development and modernization. These narratives, when repeatedly disseminated, contribute to the establishment of an environment that fosters speculative investment. This investment is subsequently legitimized in the eyes of the population, thereby solidifying its social acceptance. Consequently, the discursive boundaries between “inevitable growth” and “indiscriminate profit” become indistinct, while the hierarchies of access to land are reinforced under a guise of naturalness and consensus (Loloum and Aledo, 2018).

This sedimentation of recognition is intersected by the actions of institutions and the State, which engender forms of production and means of imposing legitimate classifications (Bourdieu, 2014). The term “institutional granting” refers to the manner in which legal frameworks, social conventions, and authoritative bodies endorse, validate, or favor particular forms of spatial utilization and the allocation of resources. In the coastal universe, urban planning, environmental licenses, and specific revenue mechanisms can favor the high profitability of the real estate market, shaping the beach-grabbing process.



In Saint-Tropez, for instance, a close nexus exists between local public authorities and entrepreneurs, resulting in institutional frameworks that facilitate the elitist appropriation of the seaside. Therefore, a model of the physical space is established through the symbolic power exerted on the space. This phenomenon occurs because local governments act to enable the wealthiest proprietors to preserve and augment their affluent enclaves when legislating on zoning, building permits, and inspections (Bruno and Salle, 2018, p. 440).

It is essential to consider that this process is not solely a matter of economic power. The concept of class positions is further elucidated in the context of status, which refers to the esteem, prestige, or social honor that an individual or a group holds. These social categories share a certain lifestyle and are relatively socially recognized (Weber, 2004). Capital, economic, cultural, social, and symbolic levels are expressed in preferences, tastes, and lifestyles. These expressions function as social markers. The power of distinction is exercised when certain groups manage to impose their mode of consumption and aesthetic preferences as more refined, noble, or superior to others (Bourdieu, 2007).

In the context of considered high-standard beaches, this mechanism becomes particularly apparent. The acquisition of properties with "sea view" or in select condominiums, attendance at exclusive beach clubs, and the presence of an infrastructure focused on high-cost leisure all serve to crystallize the character "only for some" of the territory (Bruno and Salle, 2018). In the context of the Brazilian Northeast, the phenomenon of tourism speculation gives rise to a "new landscape," characterized by the emergence of resorts and private condominiums. These developments serve to accentuate the divide between affluent tourists or investors and the local population. The latter are often relegated to the role of laborers contributing to the coastal economy. The cultural capital of foreigners and national elites, when combined with the economic capital, results in specific tastes that ultimately become recognized standards for the development of the seaside (Loloum and Aledo, 2018).

In the context of economic resources, it is crucial to underscore that the total financial capital available to a group does not solely represent the group's purchasing power. The ability to convert this capital into advantageous positions in social spaces, facilitated by knowledge and social connections, is also a key aspect of the study. This symbiosis of economic resources with other species of capital enables certain groups to exercise dominance over pivotal sectors of the economy and attain prominent positions in the hierarchical structure. Consequently, the market is not a neutral environment; rather, it is associated with values, preferences, and differentiation strategies (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 103).

The exploration in this study encompasses the dimensions of *recognition and consensus*, *language and discourse*, *institutional grant*, *social distinction*, and *economic resources*. These elements are intricately intertwined with the Bourdieusian concept of *doxa*, symbolic power, and *sociodicy*, offering a multifaceted lens through which to comprehend the intricate impacts of agents and the real estate market in coastal contexts. The coexistence of tourism and residential zones in these spaces engenders conditions for the observable manifestation of elite power dynamics, particularly as manifested in the appropriation of natural resources, including the beach, the vista, and the shoreline.

The articulation of the five categories explored here, intertwined with the Bourdieusian notion of *doxa*, sheds light on the possibilities of interpretation of the multifaceted impacts of agents and the real estate market in coastal contexts. The fact that such spaces are simultaneously touristic,

residential, and symbolically valued creates conditions for us to perceive how elites remarkably exercise their power. This is evidenced by appropriation of natural resources (the beach, the view, and the shoreline) or by political and institutional influence.

## Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the complexity of a social universe, particularly regarding the dispute of interests in the real estate sector that influence the urban coastal configuration. For this purpose, we selected five podcast channels, hosted on the most popular audio platforms, published between 2022 and 2024. These channels served as the primary sources for the research *corpus*. Eight episodes were selected for analysis, amounting to 432 minutes of recorded conversation.

In contrast to conventional qualitative materials, such as interviews or questionnaires, podcasts frequently integrate formal and informal dialogues, personal anecdotes, and expert perspectives. This integration of spoken content offers certain advantages associated with the spontaneity of discourse. The selected channels' content focuses on the real estate business, with episodes featuring well-established actors in this market, which connects directly to the broader process of mediatization. However, it is imperative to emphasize that this does not, in itself, ensure the accuracy of the information transmitted. Podcasts were utilized as substantial primary data in the analysis of discourse, according to the principles outlined by Kulkov *et al.* (2024). We regard them as components of a more extensive data ecosystem, which encompasses historiographical data, promotional documents, and statistical sources.

The podcasts were analyzed using the technique of semantic content analysis, a method regarded as effective in understanding the conditions under which discourses are produced and in systematically organizing them objectively (Bardin, 2011). The analysis comprised four primary steps:

- Data transcription: it was carried out using Escriba software. Subsequently, the transcription was reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the data.
- Cataloging and coding: the transcribed text was organized and systematically categorized using the Taguette software, a program designed to facilitate the annotation of pertinent categories and units of semantic meaning.
- Tabulation and organization of data: the categories and units were meticulously compiled into tabular form in spreadsheets.
- Theoretical inference: the final analysis sought to establish a correlation between the empirical findings and sociological theory, thereby establishing connections between the identified categories and the notions of power, legitimacy, and distinction.

To elucidate this procedure, an illustrative example is provided below. According to Bardin (2011, p. 137), "the context unit corresponds to the message segment whose dimensions are optimal for understanding the exact significance of the recorded unit". An inductive approach was used to identify units of registration within the transcribed corpus. These units were then grouped into categories, as demonstrated in the following examples:

Table 2 – Example of the Methodological Operation of Content Analysis

| Category                     | Units of registration                                                           | Context unit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| i) Perceptions of the market | 1 - Pricing;<br>2- Expectations;                                                | <i>You've got the reasons for buying, the desire factors, and then you end up with facts that actually move the market, because, in the end, the market runs on expectations. So, when the beach gets expanded, that makes it real — you have a clear factor that creates expectations, and that's why people start pushing prices up.</i> |
| (ii) Professional image      | 3 - Know the real estate market<br>4- Trustworthy;<br>5 - Honest.               | <i>I have to show that I am an honest, sincere, trustworthy person, and, above all, that I know the real estate market very well.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| (iii) Urban regulation       | 6 - Master plan.                                                                | <i>Man, in BC today, you cannot build studios. Limitations of the master plan.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| (iv) High-class experience   | 7 - Celebrities;<br>8 - Safety;<br>9 - Nightlife;<br>10 - Beach and gastronomy. | <i>That is why there are many celebrities who invest, who like it, mainly because of safety. Safety combined with the beach, with nightlife, with diverse gastronomy. That ends up attracting this audience.</i>                                                                                                                           |
| (v) Continuous valuation     | 12 - Raises the price.                                                          | <i>Here comes the magic of BC: this guy raises the price. That oceanfront apartment that cost BRL 2.5 million now costs BRL 4.5 million, and he sells it.</i>                                                                                                                                                                              |

Source: Elaborated and translated by the authors.

Subsequently, the categories were grouped into five broader sociological dimensions, defined *a priori*, to establish relations between the empirical data and theoretical interpretation. These dimensions are as follows:

1. Recognition and consensus: they refer to the collective and shared recognition.
2. Language and discourse: they refer to the relation between the control of language and the establishment of authority over a position or object.
3. Institutional grant: it refers to the relation between the creation of norms, values, and practices and their institutional crystallization reverberated in the social space.
4. Social distinction: it refers to the demarcation between social positions based on cultural and social capital.
5. Economic resources: they refer to financial resources and material forms controlled or attributed to an individual or group.

This analytical framework enabled the identification of tensions between social agents and the coastal urban occupation process, as well as its associated environmental impacts.

## Narratives to promote inhabiting the beachfront: a look at power relations in residential space production through digital media

The dissemination of digital media to promote the image of BC can be regarded as a rational form of communication. The podcasts and other video formats have the potential to provide insight into the discourses surrounding the commodification of the beach and the worldviews of the social agents involved in this process<sup>1</sup>. Through systematic observation and methodical analysis, we identify the manifestations of hierarchies within the materiality of residential occupation.

Typically, videos promoting the beachfront real estate market commence with aerial and panoramic images of Atlântica Avenue. The initial element that emerges is the “natural beauty” of the beach. However, the central focus of the work is to display the contrast between the natural beach and the imposing buildings in front of the sea. The brightness of the sun and the blue sky are adjusted through a color grading technique to create a more convergent atmosphere with what is expected of a place with a tropical spirit, where saturation and warm colors are privileged. In this sequence, the concept of luxury is introduced, signified by the presence of high-end vehicles such as sports cars, yachts, and jet skis. These items are adorned with prestigious brand names and depicted as accompanied by a range of sophisticated services. Upon entering the “high standard” apartments, the open-concept pattern in the foreground is immediately apparent, its luminescence emanating from the expansive translucent glass windows. The furniture and decorative elements exhibit a harmonious alignment with the blue tone of the sea, functioning as a constant background element (cf. Pilguer, 2025).

The communicative form of this type of digital media is linked to the dimension of *recognition and consensus*. This phenomenon is indicative of the pervasive influence of pre-existing consumer concepts. As a real estate agent recounts during the presentation of a property to a prospective client: *“Upon arriving at the apartment, he would proceed to display a sense of familiarity, as if he had inhabited the space for an extended period, instilling an atmosphere of security.”*<sup>2</sup> The employment of poetic devices in this familiar and formal context serves to evoke experiences and sentiments associated with the possession and utilization of objects, particularly the home as a symbolic and affective entity. Advertising functions not merely as an informative tool but as a symbolic practice that relies on poetics to establish an emotional bond with consumers. In real estate marketing, the discourse surrounding advertising mobilizes the concept of “home” as a metaphor for values of belonging and family continuity. Consumers then project their own experiences and aspirations onto this concept (Bourdieu, 2006, pp. 43-44).

This visual manifestation of exclusivity and luxury is congruent with verbal discourses rooted in the notion of patrimonial protection, substantiated by the rationale of investment, which constitutes a component of the superficial stratum of this social universe. Among the sources that contribute to the proliferation of these discursive frameworks, real estate echoes through digital media, and advertisements play a central role. These programs, typically characterized by an informal and relaxed atmosphere, are designed to simulate conversations relevant to the public interested

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of this can be found on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Il4KEGNacW8> (accessed on 9 Sept. 2025) and <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7vt1oPL65InLynlBDDeMQvC?si=FoLtsmZIRHqjPIHFFR-5A&nd=1&dlsi=23a04eed-fb8445b8> (accessed on 9 Sept. 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Untranslated version: *“Ele chegava no apartamento e ele demonstrava o apartamento como se ele morasse ali, como se ele já conhecesse há muito tempo, então trazia muita segurança.”*



in investments and the luxury market. The guests (predominantly real estate agents and other real estate experts) occupy prominent social positions within the local real estate field. Their narratives reinforce financial security, prestige, and distinction. Regarding podcasts, the ambiance of the episodes is characterized by the exchange of personal and professional experiences, accompanied by insights into business opportunities.

A close focus on the disputes and recognition surrounding the residential patterns of elite groups reveals a set of "bourgeois" housing preferences, such as the praise of "simplicity," tied to the assumption that contemporary society seeks "less luxury, more comfort". However, as Pulici (2021) pertinently observes, this conception of the "simple" is detached from the intrinsic properties of objects and instead becomes both the product and the outcome of the recomposition of logics of distinction. In the case of BC, the evidence suggests an explicit articulation of residential preferences, characterized by an overt manifestation of luxury and ostentation. *"So, by bringing this type of content parties, restaurants, boats, sports cars, luxury properties, city events [...] on a rooftop of a restaurant, to show the city from above, right, we attract the target audience to the real estate market"*<sup>3</sup>, as one real estate agent remarks.

When we enter the dimension of *language and discourse*, we can observe that control, positioning, representation of the city, and the way these aspects are fed back by real estate agents, emerge as a privileged vector for understanding the process of building links between the marketed product and the potential customer. The content analysis of realtors' discourse reveals that categories emerge, underscoring the interplay between their self-image and the representation of the locale where negotiations are conducted.

Real estate agent X: "So, with this kind of content, which is about selling the city, you know, we sell without really selling. Our strategy is to showcase the properties, but inside the properties we don't talk about the features, make them explicit, but without going into details, you know, while bringing in some kind of negotiation, some kind of drama."

Real estate agent Y: "So, I'm more of a consultant than a guy who's going to give you exact measurements of the square footage."<sup>4</sup>

The agent attributes the efficacy of deal consolidation to the agent's ability to build trust between the seller and the customer, a pattern of expectation observed in the convergence of expectations around real estate.

Real estate agent Z: "We get that trust is the key — today it's all about making the real estate market more human. That's our big advantage. Trust is essential for doing business, and if we want deals to run as smoothly as possible, with the least amount of stress, that's exactly why we built this relationship department."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Untranslated version: *"Então, e aí, só que nós trazendo esse tipo de conteúdo, que é festas, restaurantes, barcos, carros esportivos, imóveis de luxo, festas da cidade [...] num rooftop de um restaurante, para mostrar a cidade de cima, né, certo, atraímos o público-alvo para o mercado imobiliário."*

<sup>4</sup> Untranslated version: agent X - *"Então, com esse tipo de conteúdo, que é vender a cidade, né, a gente vai vender sem vender, então a nossa estratégia é mostrar os imóveis, mas dentro dos imóveis não falar sobre as características do imóvel, deixar isso explícito, mas não entrando nos detalhes, né, e trazendo algum tipo de negociação, algum tipo de drama"*. Agent Y: *"Então, eu sou mais um consultor do que um cara que vai te dar exatidão do metro quadrado"*

<sup>5</sup> Untranslated version: *"A gente entende que o elo de confiança, em que hoje a gente tem que humanizar o mercado imobiliário, esse é o grande trunfo, a confiança é essencial para negócios, e para que a gente faça negócios com o mínimo de desgaste possível, com a maior tranquilidade possível, é por isso que a gente desenvolveu esse setor de relacionamentos."*

This process is part of a larger phenomenon that agents have referred to as “market humanization,” predicated on the notion of constructing a “relationship.” This perspective aligns with the shift in how potential customers access the real estate catalog. The realtor thus ascends to a position of notable prominence, at times even approaching celebrity status. In this role, the realtor serves as a facilitator, orchestrating the realization of clients’ aspirations. Billboards displaying the image of a realtor are ubiquitous in urban landscapes. These advertisements typically feature the realtor’s likeness, accompanied by images that depict him in formal attire, such as a suit and tie.

As part of a strategic approach to self-affirmation through social media, it has been observed that the realtor willfully obscures the boundary between personal and professional domains. The stories, reels, and publications demonstrate the daily life of real estate agents, achieving a balance between lifestyle and product presentation. This strategy is explicitly articulated, as evidenced by the following observations: *Real estate agent Z: “[...] it’s no use to be good, you have to look good.”*<sup>6</sup>. In this context, the term “being good” signifies the embodiment of individual success compatible with the values of the prospective client. This compatibility is evident in various aspects, including but not limited to: attendance at exclusive locations, utilization of sophisticated services, and the realtor’s vehicle model. Consequently, the establishment of the “relationship” is contingent upon the congruence of worldviews between the client and the broker, thereby solidifying the transaction as a distinctive and profoundly personalized encounter.

This “relationship” is partly based on the impersonation of the real estate broker as a “consultant” who communicates the possibilities of successful market investment. On one hand, it operates through a trust dynamic anchored in the notion of “security,” presented in two main issues: patrimonial (related to the residence itself) and experiential (referring to spaces beyond the domestic environment).

As property security, there is a deep social root in the idea that the private home is an essential condition for family formation and perpetuation, close to what Bourdieu (2006) observed in the analysis of the market of home ownership. In this scenario, the real estate market is positioned as an attractive alternative for clients who prefer visualizing their assets concretely.

*Real estate agent K: “Real estate means security, [suppression of name of podcast host], it’s also deeply rooted in our beliefs, in this cultural thing we Brazilians share: the house, owning your own place, the right to a family home. Research even shows that this is still the biggest dream for Brazilians. Starting your own business comes second, but owning a home is still on top.”*<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the security of residential exteriors, the national context of urban insecurity is a salient issue that pervades most metropolitan areas. The concept of residing in a secure urban environment is a compelling proposition for prospective clients. Real estate agent Y says: “Because people who come from outside are looking for safety, and they know they’ll find it here. Here you can walk around with a nice watch, drive a good car, without being afraid of getting robbed on the street”<sup>8</sup>. According to data from the Santa Catarina Public Security Secretariat, SC had a rate of 94.14 annual

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<sup>6</sup> Untranslated version: “[...]que é não adianta ser bom, você precisa parecer bom.”

<sup>7</sup> Untranslated version: “O imóvel é segurança, ele está também enraizado na nossa crença, Pedro, essa questão cultural que nós brasileiros vivemos, a casa, a casa Própria, o direito de bem familiar é importante. Inclusive em pesquisa apontam que esse segue sendo o maior desejo dos brasileiros ainda, empreender pelo negócio próprio é o segundo maior, mas a casa própria segue liderando.”

<sup>8</sup> Untranslated version “Porque quem vem de fora, busca segurança, sabe que aqui encontra. Aqui você pode andar com bom relógio, pode andar com bom carro, sem medo de ser assaltado no meio da rua.”

thefts per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023. This rate is significantly lower than the national average, which was 428.60 in the same year (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024; Portal Visse, 2024). The discourse of security is rooted in social reality and fulfills a dual function: it serves to mitigate the fear of violence and promote economic prosperity in an environment perceived as less violent.

As indicated by the content of podcasts' speeches, the majority of real estate buyers are from other regions of Brazil. Beyond security concerns, the allure of exploring beyond the conventional tourist destinations, characterized by their association with sun and beach, is a significant factor in the decision-making process. This opens the way to the dimension of *social distinction*. It is well established that the adherence of elite groups to tourist destinations, mediated by the 'experiences' offered, functions as a marker for the classification of markets (Netto and Miraldi, 2017). The discourses under consideration converge by exalting the city as part of a "paradise" circuit, which includes stretches of the coast of Santa Catarina. In these narratives concerning the "natural beauties," we emphasize the notion that seasonal visitors, upon encountering the infrastructure of services and experiencing the region's multiple charms, "discover" the desire to extend their stay and, consequently, to acquire a property.

Narratives also show that the city is seen as an ideal place to retire, leading the second-home property to gain more value than the main one in two possible ways: First, the real estate property is in itself a savings for a planned retirement, and, when the time comes, the owner will sell and turn it into money to retire. Second, the retired can occupy the residence permanently and intermittently enjoy the local lifestyle offered in the city. The 2022 Census shows that the city had 18.39% of elderly population, while the national percentage is 15.81%. This real estate business model, which combines objective and subjective factors to attract customers, competes for recognition as an investment standard to be implemented in other locations in Brazil, especially through the action of the public power (*cf.* SPAUTZ, 2024).

*Podcast host: "We interviewed Mayor Fabrício here, and we could see it's not just a public initiative, it's not just a private one either. It feels like there are a lot of people with the same focus, the same mindset to turn this into something different – and it really is, they actually pulled it off"*<sup>10</sup>

This enables us to transition into a different domain: *institutional grants*. The aforementioned narratives acknowledge the role of pertinent laws and regulations that act in this market. They also recognize that the regulation of building standards, implemented through urban planning, is the main institutional mechanism that allows developers to construct high-standard buildings. These buildings, in turn, consolidate a specific model of urban space transformation. The nexus between the allocation of public authority in the context of intense vertical development and the architectural paradigm of superior residential environments appears to influence the dynamic interplay between public regulation and private responsibility. The interplay of forces between public and private power converges on counterpart interests in the form of occupation of the beachfront. Data show that 57.22% of the city's population lives in apartments, and BC has the largest proportion of the population living on rent in Brazil, 45.2% (Pacheco, 2024).

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<sup>10</sup> Untranslated version: "A gente entrevistou aqui o prefeito Fabrício e a gente deu para ver que não é uma coisa só de iniciativa pública, não é uma coisa só de iniciativa privada. Parece que tem muita gente com o mesmo foco, o mesmo mindset de fazer isso aqui um negócio diferente e de fato é, de fato conseguiu ser."

This dynamic underscores the state's function as a mediator and proponent of a territorial occupation that mirrors not only private interests but also the consolidation of socially legitimized norms and values. Urban regulation, by prioritizing verticalization and the provision of "high-standard" real estate, reinforces a city model that privileges select social groups and excludes a significant portion of the population from the most valued areas. Consequently, the state not only regulates urban space but also produces the symbolic legitimization of an ideal urban beach that naturalizes inequality and social selectivity.

This phenomenon serves to reinforce the prevailing perception that residing in a coastal dwelling is a hallmark of status and exclusivity. Moreover, it perpetuates the notion that real estate valuation and restricted access are by-products of a concept of "natural development". The state is not an impartial entity; rather, it functions as a pivotal institution in the production and sustenance of norms that shape how urban space is inhabited. This observation aligns with prior research conducted on the beach in Florianópolis (*cf.* Ertel and Mazon, 2025).

The state has prioritized projects for revitalization in the Atlântica Avenue area, with a particular focus on nourishing the beach due to coastal erosion. The initiative to augment the central beach area, increasing the space's extent by an average of 25 meters, commenced in March 2021 and was concluded in December of the same year. The project incurred a cost of BRL 90 million to public funds and exerted a direct influence on the valuation of local properties (Frighetto, 2024). As indicated by the data, the price of properties closer to the sea increased 20%-40% in the same year (Konchinski, 2021). The relationship between verticalization and urban projects that adapt public spaces to make them more attractive is what the podcast interviewees claim to be the "lubricated gears" between the public power and the interests of developers. Consequently, state agents function as market agents.

With the consolidation of the leniency of the state agents facing the developers focusing on the expansion of the luxury residential market, the central beachfront of Atlântica Avenue remains disputed by architectural projects of "brands" linked to national and international builders (*cf.* FG Empreendimentos, 2025; Tonino Lamborghini Residences Balneário Camboriú, 2025). In this space, there is a circumscription of a more or less specific landscape and aesthetic pattern. The skyscrapers of contemporary design, with facades often presented in mirrored glass, wide balconies, and the said sophisticated finish, all this is part of what the promoters call "high standard".

*Real estate agent K: "But there are people who simply want an apartment with a fully integrated balcony, overlooking the entire skyline, and that person is not thinking so much about money or returns. They know that investing in BC is a good choice, but their focus is on family satisfaction — the size, the view — buying a BRL 20-million apartment with a private pool for their grandchildren to enjoy."*<sup>10</sup>

The *economic* dimension is characterized by a high price to entry into this social universe. Furthermore, renowned soccer players such as Neymar and Cristiano Ronaldo have been employed as promotional ambassadors, thereby fostering a connection between the prospective client and the residential model. In addition to the appeal of appearance, the buildings also seek to exalt the

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<sup>10</sup> Untranslated version: "Mas tem pessoas que simplesmente querem ter um apartamento com uma varanda totalmente integrada, com uma vista para todo o skyline, e esse cara não está pensando tanto no dinheiro no retorno. Ele sabe que vai aplicar bem o Balneário Camboriú, mas o foco dele é a satisfação da família, um tamanho, uma vista, comprando um apartamento de 20 milhões com piscina privativa para os netos aproveitarem esse imóvel."

amenities and functionality of the internal services sector. One such example is the attachment of spaces to accommodate speedboats and other water sports equipment (*cf.* Marina Beach Towers, 2025). Another example is the infrastructure for conduct luxury vehicles inside homes that are hundreds of meters from the ground floor.

In essence, the dispute over the space in question exemplifies a dynamic interaction between two fundamental aspects of the social world: economic maximization and social differentiation based on the hierarchy of social practices associated with the values defended by more or less specific groups. The beachfront is regarded as a suitable and secure location to fulfill the aspirations of affluent classes, intended for exclusive use and as a refuge from the challenges of poverty. On the one hand, it comprises opulent residences and refined services, all of which are facilitated by the administrative and economic support of the public power. Conversely, the social and environmental ramifications of this urban configuration are a matter of public knowledge (Skalee, 2008).

This endorsement of beachfront occupation, driven by real estate expansion unrestricted by building height limits, has produced numerous environmental impacts. The beach, the area's most significant economic and environmental resource, is transformed into an environment that is not conducive to bathing. The suppression of coastal vegetation (*restingas*) and the pollution of seawater, resulting from ineffective sewage treatment, are widely recognized and disseminated by the media. Real estate agents themselves have been aware of this issue. *Realtor - K*, for example, has stated that "*Nowadays Balneário has a really bad reputation in the media because of the sewage on the beach.*"<sup>11</sup> *Realtor Y* – "*Who's responsible? Why is the beach polluted?*"<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that 2019-2024 was a period of significant escalation in property values, with an average increase of 78.73% as reported by FipeZap (Fundação Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas, 2024). Coincidentally, the central beach, situated at station one, was classified as unsuitable for bathing on 171 out of 257 samples collected, representing 65.5% of the total analyses conducted (Instituto do Meio Ambiente de Santa Catarina, 2025).

Consequently, this social universe produces dilemmas related to contemporary society. On one hand, there is a strong collective desire to live near the beach, perceived as natural and reinforced by real estate agents and urban planning guidelines established by public authorities. On the other hand, the realization of this desire depends on substantial economic investments and the control of high-end apartment supply. The perpetuation of this housing system has been shown to lead to the segregation of different social groups and to contribute to significant environmental degradation.

## Conclusion

This article systematizes a framework of discourses embedded in social reality, demonstrating a specific form of both economic and symbolic appropriation and valorization of the beachfront. Our analysis has outlined a prevailing *modus operandi* that permeates the process of legitimizing the commodification of the coast as a space allocated for privileged groups.

The title, "The sky is no longer the limit," alludes to the numerous instances in which this phrase was invoked by realtors in podcasts, underscoring the city's pronounced vertical expansion, whe-

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<sup>11</sup> Untranslated version: "*E aí, a cidade de praia, o maior atrativo dela está poluído. Está inativo.*"

<sup>12</sup> Untranslated version: "*Quem é o responsável? Por que a praia está poluída?*"



rein skyscrapers embody the prevailing business paradigm. As previously mentioned, this verticalization does not occur in isolation. It is the result of a convergence between public authorities, who impose no limits on high-rise development in the urban master plan, and private interests focused on marketing high-end apartments.

The fundamental quandary lies in the naturalized perpetuation of this housing system, a process that is contingent on the perpetuation of social segregation and substantial environmental degradation. The social sciences research agenda has been endeavoring to comprehend this contemporary social phenomenon.

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### Link to access the article's empirical data

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EgoUMJNd-Jxq5VzUwqJmnlldKKknhDjBg?usp=sharing>

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## **“O céu já não é mais o limite”: Os dilemas da sobrevalorização imobiliária em Balneário Camboriú, Brasil**

### **Resumo**

O presente artigo explora como as transformações na ocupação costeira se refletem na dinâmica da valorização imobiliária, por meio do estudo de caso de Balneário Camboriú (BC), em Santa Catarina, um dos principais centros de valorização imobiliária no Brasil. O estudo em questão adota uma perspectiva bourdieusiana, por meio do conceito de doxa, com o intuito de analisar a forma como as práticas e os discursos contribuem para a legitimação da mercantilização da orla marítima. A abordagem metodológica adotada consiste na realização de uma análise semântica de conteúdo. A divulgação de episódios de podcasts com corretores imobiliários da região foi identificada como um elemento-chave na promoção de propriedades específicas. Os resultados do estudo demonstram que o fenômeno em questão é facilitado por discursos relacionados com a representação nas mídias sociais, que contribuem para a perpetuação da noção de acesso exclusivo a propriedades situadas à beira-mar. A promoção de empreendimentos em vídeos e podcasts enfatiza um estilo de vida baseado no consumo de bens e serviços de elevado padrão, consolidando a praia não apenas como um espaço de lazer, mas também como um ativo financeiro. Adicionalmente, a análise demonstra que a rentabilidade e a segurança urbana se sobressaem como fatores predominantes na atração de investidores, reforçando, deste modo, a noção de BC como um refúgio para determinados grupos sociais. Palavras-chave: Construção simbólica do espaço; Ocupação costeira; Mediatização; Balneário Camboriú.

## **“El cielo ya no es el límite”: Los dilemas de la sobrevaloración inmobiliaria en Balneário Camboriú, Brasil**

### **Resumen**

El presente artículo explora cómo las transformaciones en la ocupación costera se reflejan en la dinámica de la valoración inmobiliaria. Para ello, se utiliza el caso de la ciudad de Balneário Camboriú (BC), Santa Catarina, Brasil, uno de los principales centros de valoración inmobiliaria en el país latinoamericano. El presente estudio adopta una perspectiva bourdieusiana, centrándose particularmente en el concepto de doxa, para examinar cómo las prácticas y los discursos contribuyen a la legitimación de la mercantilización de la costa. El enfoque metodológico implementado en este estudio se basa en un análisis semántico del contenido. La difusión de episodios de podcasts protagonizados por agentes inmobiliarios de la región se ha identificado como un elemento clave para promover propiedades específicas. Los hallazgos de la investigación sugieren que este fenómeno se ve facilitado por los discursos que envuelven la representación de los medios de comunicación, los cuales perpetúan la noción de acceso exclusivo a las propiedades frente al mar. La promoción de empresas en vídeos y podcasts subraya un estilo de vida caracterizado por la adquisición de bienes y servicios de alta gama, lo que consolida la playa como un espacio que trasciende su función recreativa, y así se convierte en un activo financiero. El análisis realizado revela que la rentabilidad y la seguridad urbana emergen como factores predominantes en la atracción de inversionistas, lo que fortalece la percepción de BC como un refugio para determinados grupos sociales. Palabras clave: Construcción simbólica del espacio; Ocupación costera; Mediatización; Balneario Camboriú.

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