

## Environmental Conflicts and Social Participation Related to Residential Tourism in Latin America. Experiences in the Eastern Region, Uruguay

### *Conflictos ambientales y participación social en torno al turismo residencial en Latinoamérica. Experiencias en Región Este, Uruguay*

Isabel Gadino\*, José Luis Sciandro\*\* y Nathalie Goldberg\*\*\*

Recibido: 19/12/2022. Aprobado: 09/03/2022. Publicado: 31/03/2022.

**Abstract.** While theory and legislation are evolving toward open and participatory governance models, one of the main drivers of mobilization in Latin America is environmental conflicts. On the coast of the Eastern Region, Uruguay, a territory historically allocated to residential tourism, the approval of multiple projects on the seafront or the beach are generally perceived as abuses by civil society. In this context, it is essential to determine the type of participation for coastal urban development opened up by land-use planning.

This study analyzes qualitative and quantitative information from workshops, resident surveys, interviews with activist groups from organized civil society, and a public statement of the national network of coastal groups. We observed a strong social concern about the conservation of the environmental conditions, poor information on specific coastal issues, and issues related to influencing final decisions.

These results are consistent with international statements related to the official discourse on environmental governance, with no real progress that would allow for important changes in the development model associated with real-estate extractivism. This situation urgently demands permanent formats for the horizontal dialog between

stakeholders, which, although not legally binding, would promote knowledge sharing and facilitate real participation in coastal territorial planning.

**Keywords:** participation, governance, residential tourism, Uruguay.

**Resumen.** Mientras teoría y legislación avanzan hacia modelos de gobernanza abierta y participativa, uno de los principales motivos de movilización en América Latina son los conflictos ambientales. En la costa de Región Este, Uruguay, territorio destinado históricamente al turismo residencial, múltiples aprobaciones de proyectos ubicados en primera línea frente al mar o sobre la playa, son en general vividas como atropellos por la sociedad civil. En este contexto interesa saber qué tipo de participación para el desarrollo urbano costero se abre a partir del ordenamiento territorial.

Se analiza información cualitativa y cuantitativa surgida de talleres participativos, encuestas a residentes, entrevistas a grupos activistas locales y un manifiesto público de las organizaciones costeras a nivel nacional. Se aprecia la fuerte preocupación por la conservación de las condiciones am-

---

\* Centro Universitario Regional del Este (CURE). Calle Tacuarembó esq. Avda. Artigas, Punta del Este, Maldonado, Uruguay. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8291-3791>. Email: [isabelgadino@cure.edu.uy](mailto:isabelgadino@cure.edu.uy), [isabelgadino@gmail.com](mailto:isabelgadino@gmail.com). Autora de correspondencia.

\*\* Dirección postal: Centro Universitario Regional del Este (CURE). Calle Tacuarembó esq. Avda. Artigas, Punta del Este, Maldonado, Uruguay. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7057-3144>. Email: [Jose.sciandro@gmail.com](mailto:Jose.sciandro@gmail.com)

\*\*\* Centro Universitario Regional del Este (CURE). Calle Tacuarembó esq. Avda. Artigas, Punta del Este, Maldonado, Uruguay. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2484-2013>. Email: [arq.ngoldberg@gmail.com](mailto:arq.ngoldberg@gmail.com)

bientales del sitio, baja información sobre temas específicos costeros y dificultades para incidir en las decisiones finales. Los resultados coinciden con planteos internacionales sobre la instalación del discurso oficial de la gobernanza ambiental, sin un progreso real que permita lograr cambios importantes en el modelo de desarrollo asociado al extractivismo inmobiliario. La situación planteada demanda con urgencia la

instalación de formatos permanentes de diálogo horizontal entre actores, que aun sin ser legalmente vinculantes, fomenten el conocimiento y permitan una participación real sobre la planificación territorial litoral.

**Palabras clave:** participación, gobernanza, turismo residencial, Uruguay.

## INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, environmental conflicts are one of the key drivers of social mobilization and public debate, associated with two conflicting paradigms of sustainable development: the application of development policies promoting economic growth based on the exploitation of ecosystem resources, and environmental revalorization, together with the acknowledgment of new rights and greater involvement of citizens in their defense (Suarez and Ruggerio, 2018).

One of the globally agreed instruments proposed for the management and resolution of social-ecological conflicts is the so-called environmental governance, a concept that entails participation, transparency, controls, and broad consensus applied to the institutions and organizations involved in regulating the use and protection of natural resources (Folke *et al.* 2005; Chaffin *et al.*, 2014). Since complexity and uncertainty are typical of environmental issues, works such as those of Schultz *et al.* (2019) emphasize the need to adopt adaptive governance to understand and improve instrument responses to the sustainability challenges. These authors highlight learning and collaboration between sectors and scales as key elements to achieving a shared vision through monitoring, information exchange, networking, and conflict resolution.

Particularly for territorial issues, it is understood that the various dimensions of governance should be displayed vertically (especially between local and regional scales), horizontally (through coordination across sectoral policies, territories, and the different stakeholders), and with the participation of citizens, both individually and as organized groups (Rosas Ferrusca *et al.*, 2012), while acknowledging a *continuum* between conflict and participation, with a range of pulses and permeabilities (Capalbo *et al.*, 2020).

In coastal areas, this vision adds to integrated coastal management. Growing emphasis has been given to the governance model since the early 21st century, incorporating the ecosystem approach, adaptation to climate change, increased public participation, the search for coordination and cooperation schemes, and the future as key features (Pérez-Cayeiro *et al.*, 2012).

In parallel with theoretical progress and specific cases confirming the benefits of environmental governance, there are studies documenting the persistent asymmetries between the different stakeholders regarding access to the political arena. These analyses address the territory from relational, multi-dimensional, and multi-scale perspectives, deepening spacial interpretations based on the practices such as *acting upon the action of the other*, conflicts, struggles, and resistance (Cruz, 2020). Within this context, space is the arena where power is exercised, strategies are deployed, conflicts are resolved, interests are fought, and disputes between political and economic aspects take place.

Some authors discuss the gap between an ideal governance scheme in which “(...) politics results in a shared consensus of equal actors (...)” and other scenarios reflecting “(...) the way whereby the weakest end up entering the hegemonic orbit of the dominant discourses” (Sevilla Buitrago, 2010). For Grindle (2017), the potential for government reform toward good governance is restrained by the power and interests of those who impose or negotiate political agreements and dependence on the existing institutions, all resulting from previous political contests. This standpoint is shared by Bustos Gallardo *et al.* (2019), who show that the mechanisms of territorial governance — although not aggravating historical, economic, and political processes at other temporal and social scales — do not provide real solutions to issues derived from the neoliberal project. Also, these mechanisms are

ineffective for reorganizing land uses collectively. These authors point out that governance mechanisms emerge to give continuity to the hegemonic production model and restore the legitimacy of extractivist sectors and companies under crisis scenarios. Meanwhile, Grindle (2017) argues that incremental changes are possible, albeit only within the boundaries defined by “adherence” or path dependence on institutional arrangements in place at a given time.

In the case of places characterized by tourism-appealing natural conditions, this road will be strongly driven toward ecotourism, as it is an activity hegemonically associated with sustainability and green-economy concepts (Duffy, 2015) displayed as potential alternatives to the current environmental crisis. However, critics denounce the green economy as a means by which neoliberal capitalism evades and conceals the contradictions inherent in tensions between sustained economic growth and ecological limits (Warner, 2014, cited in De La Rosa and Pérez, 2017, p. 143 ). Moreover, for authors like Castree (2008) or Pintos (2020), the privatization and commodification of nature produce new spaces and opportunities for investment and capital accumulation. In this same sense, tourism is conceived as a central practice of capitalism, through which the system sustains itself (Fletcher, 2016).

For Latin America, Zurbriggen argues that the way in which governance was promoted on national agendas from central countries and global development agencies implied a neoliberal State model and, consequently, the need to strengthen it for market forces to operate:

In a political system with these characteristics, approaches for processing demands, resolving conflicts, and distributing public resources and power were consolidated, aiming to fulfill the particular interests of individuals or groups rather than the common good (...). In other words, the discussion on governance and institutions pays little attention to political processes, cultural patterns, and the different types of coalitions of interests that promote or resist change (Zurbriggen, 2011, p. 56).

On the subject, Diez *et al.* (2013) point out

that, in the face of the current social tensions in local economic development processes due to the existence of stakeholders with different capacities and negotiation levels, it is the local government that should mediate between contrasting interests by providing the necessary means to resolve conflicts, to ensure the fulfillment of the rights of the weakest and most vulnerable sectors of society in all areas. However, Pintos (2020) indicates that the alliance between sovereign states and private owners, assisted by legal regulations, has been a key driver of the destruction of a previous legal order, which acknowledged social relationships and the link of social-ecological systems to a greater extent than the current one. In this same sense, Vainer (2000) maintains that some specific territories (particularly cities in Europe and Latin America), and with the agreement of the majority of citizens, have joined the scheme that he calls homeland-enterprise-market. In this scheme, the city is rejected as a political space (*polis*) to give way to a corporate appropriation of the territory in exchange for eradicating politics and eliminating the conflict and conditions for exercising citizenship. Without conflict, the city becomes a unique and cohesive subject with the capacity to compete in the market to develop in the global economy.

More recent works contend that, in the face of an implicit pact of extractivism, the national and local governments have chosen to deregulate the access to and exploitation of natural resources and to “(...) silence the victims of the model. A sort of public-private connivance. A pact that citizens and social movements have increasingly confronted in recent decades” (Suarez and Ruggiero, 2018, p. 18).

Based on the above scenario, this article analyzes the conditions for participation in the current land-use planning for the coast of the Eastern Region of Uruguay, a territory historically dedicated to sun-and-beach tourism. The questions that guide the work are: From the insertion of the participatory approach in regulations, is there a perceived greater transparency and legitimacy of processes in the community? Is there sufficient information management by the local inhabitants to sustain the participation encouraged? What role do activist groups play in this process? What have been the

effects of civil society actions that challenge the official deviation from land-use planning?

Our hypothesis is that as the Eastern Region coast is one of the national territories most sought by the national and international tourism-real-estate industry from land-use planning as such, as a short- and long-term source of labor, classifying large rural areas as suburban or potentially suitable for conversion. At the urban level, exceptions are allowed when the established guidelines do not match the market, which the local majorities welcome. In this framework, environmental governance is given minimum priority required in regulations to be used in the institutional narrative to support the public-private partnership of real-estate extractivism (*sensu* Hidalgo *et al.*, 2016), protected under the sustainable development shield.

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE EASTERN REGION COAST

The Eastern Region coast (Maldonado and Rocha departments) (Figure 1) shows a historical real-estate development linked to residential tourism, an activity targeting the production of second residences, infrastructure, services, and related spaces, with uses mostly related to leisure rather than production and reproduction (Aledo, 2016). Once basically rural and dedicated to extensive cattle ranching, its territory was structured into dozens of real estate projects approved in the first decades of the twentieth century. These projects were intended for sun-and-beach tourism from designs that bet on the higher profitability encompassing large extensions of dune fields and wetlands. Most of its plots were projected for single-family housing and had a mean surface area of 300 m<sup>2</sup>.

Environmental impacts produced by this development model include biodiversity impairment and loss, dry and circulating sand loss, water quality degradation; beach erosion; receding coast, lower beach dissipative capacity, lower scenic value, higher vulnerability to erosion, absence of a current source of sediments of sufficient magnitude for the recovery of dune fields lost from these

actions (Nagy *et al.*, 2016; Panario and Gutiérrez, 2006; among others). Alvez and Goso (2014) warned about a 50% reduction of mobile dunes since the 1960s, mainly due to dune fixation by afforestation.

Today, the permanent search for domestic and foreign real-estate investment for the sector is being promoted from various government levels. In parallel, urban consolidation and densification continue, added to the accelerated opening of multiple new real estate areas associated with the recent reclassification of rural-to-urban/suburban land (Gadino *et al.*, 2022).

From the beginning, the planning of this sector is based on a national land-use planning standard (*Ley de Centros Poblados*, 1946), a national sectoral regulation (*Código de Aguas*, 1979), and the corresponding departmental construction codes.

The global redirection toward sustainable development and planning in the late 20th century boosted a comprehensive approach to environmental and territorial issues, contemplating various topics and spatial scales (national, regional, departmental, and local). Under the paradigm that frames it, the new regulatory body set the following objectives: protection of indigenous ecosystems, care of natural and cultural landscapes, and concern for the preservation of a 250 m Coastal Defense Strip (*Faja de Defensa Costera*, FDC<sup>1</sup>) from the high-water line (LDR).

In parallel, either in the standard itself or as cross-cutting issues, aspects were included that allow or encourage the participation of civil society (local collectives, business groups, etc.), enabling new spaces for exchange, negotiation, decision-making, or control. Since the 1990s, new environmental instruments such as environmental impact assessment (EIA) have been issued, mandating that all projects with potential large-scale impacts (such as modification of a land-use category for new real estate developments) or those to be built on the FDC should include social participation. EIA should proceed through a public statement to gather opinions and suggestions and include a

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, acronyms correspond to the names in Spanish (translator's note).

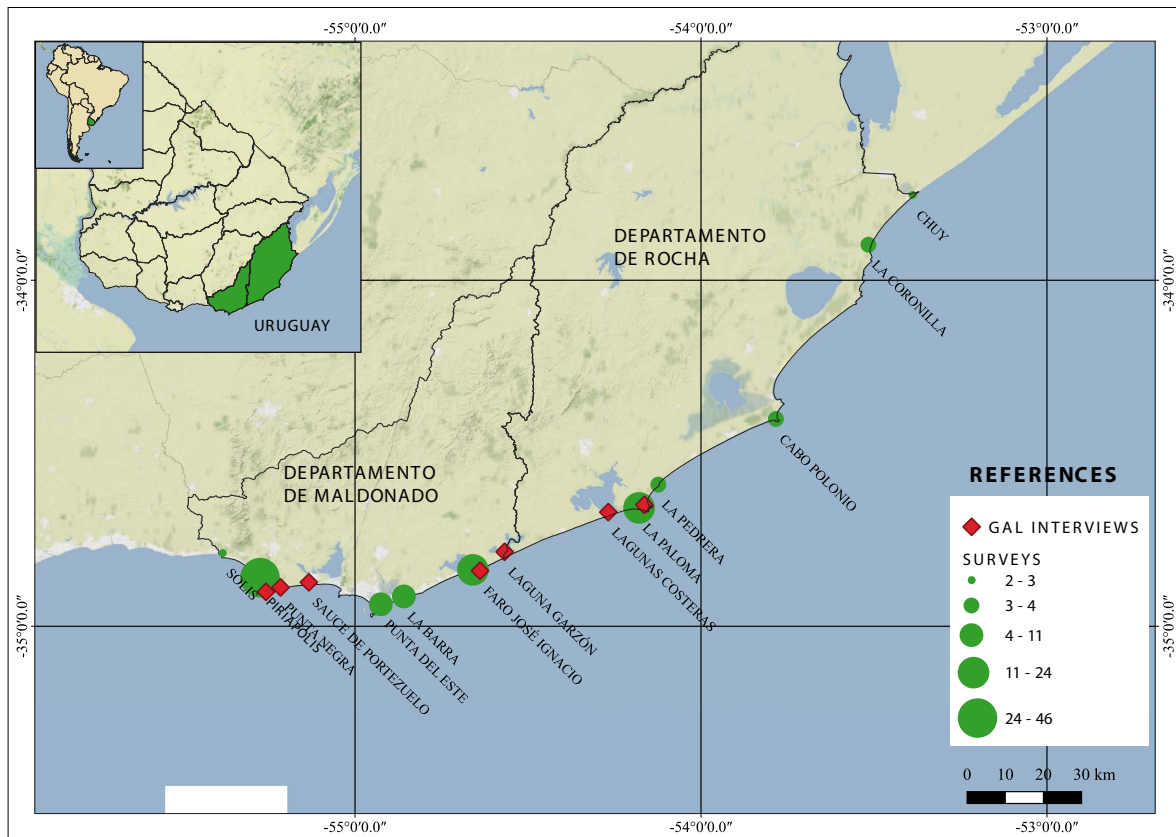


Figure 1. Study area and location of respondents and groups interviewed (GAL). Source: Own elaboration based on the image of Samamen Terrain Background.

public hearing as required. Advisory councils and advisory commissions are also created under the same paradigm. For instance, eleven basin commissions have been created for sustainable and participatory water management, considering river basins as management units. One of them is the Laguna del Sauce basin, located in the study area. The Environmental Protection Act (*Ley de Protección del Medio Ambiente*) is subsequently adopted, which states: “Environmental protection is a commitment that concerns society as a whole, so that persons and representative organizations have the right and duty to participate in this process”,<sup>2</sup> and the Law on Land-Use Planning and Sustainable Development (*Ley de Ordenamiento Territorial y Desarrollo Soste-*

*nible*; LOTDS), which includes among its guiding principles the “promotion of citizen participation in the drafting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and revision of land-use instruments”.<sup>3</sup> Although it does not establish that participation is mandatory, the LOTDS enables and encourages the implementation of mechanisms to expand and deepen the participation of different stakeholders in territorial processes. The National Coastal Guideline (*Directriz Nacional Costera*) was added in 2020, which promotes the coordination of institutions and stakeholders linked to sustainable coastal development at the regional, departmental and local levels, and in 2021, the Escazu Agreement on access to information, public participation, and

<sup>2</sup> Law 16,466 on Environmental Protection, article 6, clause d.

<sup>3</sup> Law 18,308 on Land-Use Planning and Sustainable Development, article 5, clause d.

access to justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean was signed.

In this openness scenario, multiple approvals of residential tourism projects (single-family houses, complexes, closed neighborhoods, and towers of up to 22 floors above the four allowed in the current regulations, support infrastructure) located on the seafront or the beach are generally perceived as violations to the law by society. One of the reasons is the policy of exceptions to territorial regulations and associated tax exemptions granted by the Maldonado department as incentives for investing in the real estate sector. The declared aim of this policy is to stimulate the local economy, including tourism, a campaign pledge that has allowed the same candidate to win two consecutive departmental elections, the second with the highest historical percent for any party in this governing body (54%). However, concerns and claims emerge in parallel – often coinciding with demands expressed by academic groups – toward ongoing initiatives implemented following the established mechanisms. Aspects challenged include the impact of infrastructure construction (irreversible changes in coastal dynamics, ecosystem fragmentation and loss, and altered landscapes, among others) and the approval process itself.

## METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, the results of four different population approaches are analyzed:

1) Follow-up to the policy of exemptions to land-use planning in Maldonado since 2015, including the results of a cycle of **participatory workshops**. These were held in Maldonado in 2017 and 2018 from an initiative of the *Centro Universitario Regional del Este* (Eastern University Center; CURE UDELAR), local organizations, and the Ministry of Housing, Land-Use Planning and Environment. More than 100 persons participated in three events, including neighbors; tourism, hotel, and real estate entrepreneurs; former municipal authorities; members of social organizations, neighborhood associations, and

trade unions; university students and professors; free-lance professionals; professional associations; and local and national government representatives of opposition parties at the departmental level. There was neither participation nor response to the invitation from the local government –which promotes the policy under analysis – nor was it from the construction union or the construction business chambers.

The first workshop aimed to introduce the topic and listen to the participants' concerns. The material collected was used to set the basis for discussion at the second meeting. In that instance, the attendees worked in heterogeneous groups established at the time, with moderators of *Universidad de la República*, based on keywords on how exemptions affect them as neighbors and on the activities in adjacent areas; and actions to recommend to managers, politicians, organizations, academia, and commercial business owners. The third workshop sought to reach consensus on important and feasible actions to be taken. The outcomes of this cycle were analyzed using the grounded theory by coding the answers obtained and generating thematic categories linked in a network.

2) **Survey conducted on a random sample within the universe of inhabitants of the Eastern Region coast** aiming to know the information handled by persons on basic elements for participation in land-use planning of the zone, such as the geomorphological functioning in coastal areas and its fragility in the face of anthropic alterations, the possibilities of participation in processes of territorial planning, and the management of information on how to proceed in case of need of support or making claims. The survey was conducted during the first half of 2021 using the non-probabilistic Snowball Sampling technique using a self-administered, semi-structured online form. It was sent via Whatsapp to contacts or contact groups living in the study area (environmental groups or neighbors self-organized to address neighborhood issues), who forwarded the form to third parties and successive contacts. The only condition requested to respond was to be a resident (permanent or temporary) of coastal areas in the Maldonado or Rocha departments, at a maximum distance from

the sea of 300 m. Figure 1 shows the areas where responses were gathered.

Responses to closed questions were analyzed quantitatively, while responses to semi-closed questions were used to generate codes according to the recurrence of concepts. The descriptive statistical analysis results are reported by combining quantitative and qualitative data.

### 3) Interviews with local activist groups (GAL) working on coastal protection in the study area.

The interviews, comprising 31 semi-closed questions, took place between May and June 2021, with the participation of representatives of seven groups.<sup>4</sup> Questionnaires gathered details of each group, networking levels, relationships with public bodies with local responsibilities, and degree of impact of their actions on the planning or management of coastal areas. Figure 1 shows the places of work of the groups interviewed. Responses were analyzed looking for identification data and affinities, coincidences, divergences, or contradictions in the topics consulted.

### 4) Contents of the Statement of the Network of Coastal Groups of Uruguay, which includes more than 50 coastal groups of the country, academic

stakeholders, and student associations. This work analyzed the contents of the statement submitted to the government and made public in October 2021.

All of the above inputs are analyzed and discussed in relation to the current regulatory framework and actions taken in the public sphere.

## RESULTS

The participatory workshop on exceptions to the regulations worked on the effects of this departmental policy. Narrative descriptions were arranged systematically in 221 citations grouped into six codes: the current misuse of the “exemption” tool, the expanded effects of drastic modifications of land-use planning in general, the mistrust and lack of transparency associated with this policy, the negative effects and urban handicaps arising from exemptions, potential measures to take in the future to prevent these cases, and the adverse effects of tax exemptions (Figure 2).

The third workshop explored consensuses on key feasible actions. Code analysis identifies four emerging issues:

A. Popular education: raise awareness about the right to a better city, create social control instruments to curb speculative economic interest, hold workshops for awareness raising, dissemination, and monitoring of land-use planning issues with the participation of neighbors and stakeholders.

<sup>4</sup> Asociación de Fomento y Turismo Sauce de Portezuelo; AVE Acción vecina La Paloma; Comisión Fomento de Punta Colorada; Nativos Punta Colorada; Asociación Civil Nativos Punta Negra; Fundación Lagunas Costeras; Liga de Fomento Faro José Ignacio.

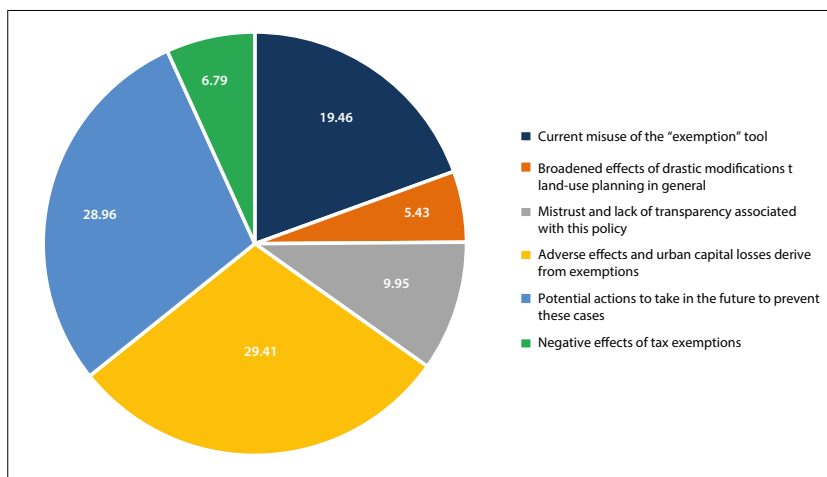


Figure 2. Main topics of interest identified in the Exemptions Workshop. Source: Own elaboration.

B. Permanent interdisciplinary observatory: support and promote a repository of constructed data and search comparative regulations as a background to enrich the analysis.

C. Demand for enforcing the regulations currently in force: use request and control mechanisms provided by the institutional political structure. Carry out actions to achieve appropriate land-use planning per the current regulations.

D. Promote a national law establishing the creation of mechanisms for mandatory consultation with neighbors and affected persons, aiming to defend neighbors' interests against substantial amendments in regulations and exemptions to land-use planning.

The **survey** gathered 120 responses, mostly from women (58.3%) and persons over 50 years of age (61.7%) living in Maldonado (70%) and Rocha (30%) (Figure 1). Eighty-eight percent of the respondents live or stay the summer in properties located less than 300 m from the sea, and the remaining 12% between 300 and 1000 m; 60% have been living or visiting the area for more than ten years.

Of these respondents, 98.5% have witnessed changes in beach structure such as sand losses or gains, advances or retreats of the shoreline, or changes in the size of sand grains; 93% mentioned how often they observe these phenomena and whether these changes have increased (48.4%), are maintained (32.8%), or have reversed (3.9%). A large

majority of respondents believe these changes are related to anthropic interventions (Figure 3), and 61.7% consider that building and infrastructure works (boardwalks, breakwater structures, etc.) on the beach are related to modifications in coastal dynamics.

Thirteen percent affirm that their own home has suffered damage from flooding or sand loss, and half of the respondents know additional cases facing similar situations. One-third of the persons affected indicate having taken remediation actions, mostly involving hard structures (20%) such as stones, cement, walls, and, to a lesser extent, measures to control the displacement of sand, such as wood fences or vegetation. Regarding whether any public agency collaborated to solve these issues, 30% and 20% answered *No* and *Yes*, respectively, mainly mentioning fencing (8%) or hard structures (5%). Twenty-nine percent report that the measures have been successful to some degree, and almost 20%, that the measures have failed.

Regarding the acquaintance with legislation or basic coastal dynamics concepts, about 40% of respondents are acquainted with some law, regulation, or mandatory legal procedure for buildings close to the beach, while almost 50% ignored this information. On measures that the respondents believe should be implemented to keep homes or the beach in good shape, more than 30% suggested increasing FDC controls, and 67.8% contend that the primary responsibility for implementation

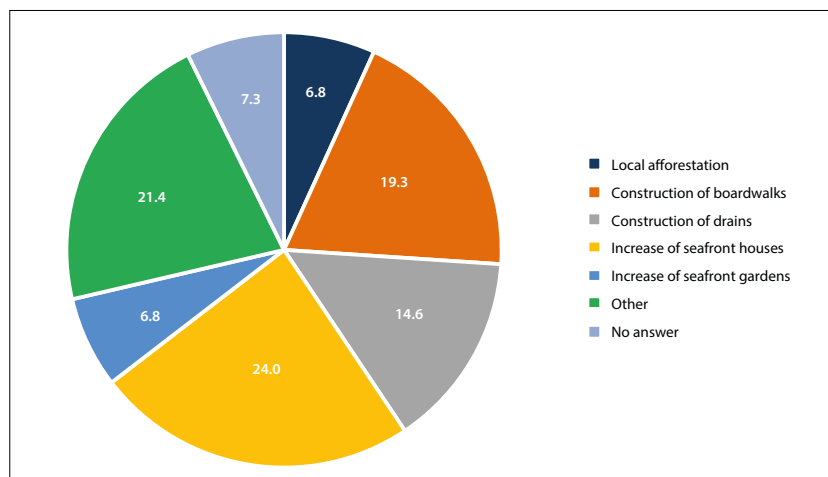


Figure 3. Anthropic interventions related to changes in the coastline (percentages from 120 responses received). Source: Own elaboration.



should lie with the national and departmental authorities (Figure 4).

When asked whether they are aware of any campaign or movement to improve the beaches, 52% and 42% answered *Yes* and *No*, respectively. Regarding participation mechanisms to request these improvements, consult, or give their opinion on interventions on the coastline, more than one-half answered that they know none, and only one-third do.

Finally, when asking about general knowledge of terms related to territorial or environmental issues, a clear predominance of global or high-impact environmental issues such as beach pollu-

tion was noted, and, to a much lesser extent, issues directly linked to the dynamics of the coastal zone (Figure 5).

**Closed interviews** were answered by seven activist groups (GAL) created between one year and more than ten years ago, with 10 to 60 active members. All groups work on preserving and valuing natural coastal areas in their locality, including beaches, dunes, associated ecosystems, and coastal lagoons in some cases (Figure 1). Their concerns also refer to local sustainable development, land use planning, care for the cultural heritage, promotion of social participation, local governance and action, and promotion of horizontal information and en-

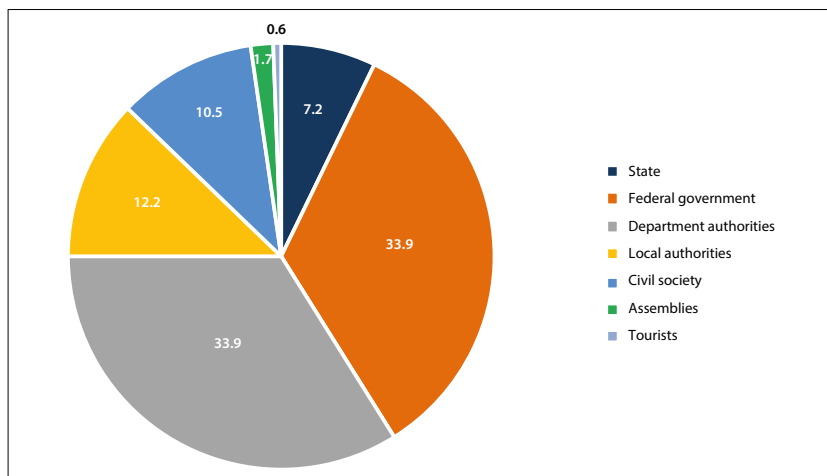


Figure 4. Bodies responsible for the measures to be implemented (percentages from 120 responses received). Source: Own elaboration.

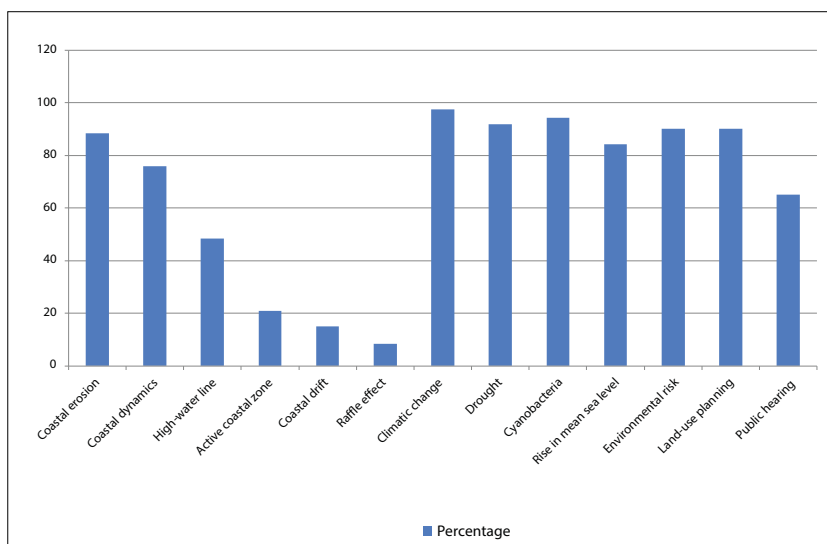


Figure 5. Frequency of key terms included in the survey. Source: Own elaboration.

vironmental education. They work based on meetings, billboard placement, activism through social networks, complaints and reports to authorities, beach cleaning, and training activities; some have collaborated in placing sand fences and monitoring environmental conditions and biodiversity. They supplement their activity with open calls that have reached multiple audiences, including adults and children. Some aspects worth highlighting are the cooperation with other civil society organizations (OSCs), the exchange of technical knowledge with other OSCs and academia, as well as the effort to engage and raise awareness of environmental issues in the community. These are self-financed groups, and some of them have received occasional national and international economic support (construction of the cultural areas, billboards, dissemination of events, among others).

More than half of the groups have participated in collaboration instances with government authorities on coastal issues, such as municipal council sessions and local workshops related to the National Environmental Plan or the National Climate Change Policy. Aiming to submit complaints, reports, or proposals, all have approached the authorities on dozens of occasions, mainly the National Environmental Directorate (DINAMA, currently DINACEA) and municipal and department governments, but the basin commissions were not mentioned. These contacts were mostly through notes or actions on the affected sites and, in a single case, through a presentation at a public hearing. The complaints report inadequate interventions in the FDC by public and private agencies, landfills in ravines, illegal construction works, sand extraction, and clearing of native vegetation in public and private areas, among others. Claims have also been submitted regarding the supply of services (lighting, roads, waste, etc.), information requests, and comments on infrastructure projects along the coast. The proposals regard the planting of native species, dune protection, interpretive observatories, and contributions to management plans.

Almost 90% of these requests were answered, but only one-half of the cases yielded results deemed positive (dialog, audits, approval of protocols or regulations), while in the remaining cases, the

responses did not bring the expected changes, thus warranting multiple contacts or involving delays of several months or even years to receive a response. The question about the link of the group's activities with the regulatory framework reveals that most groups handle extensive information on national and local environmental legislation and the theoretical frameworks that support it.

Regarding the willingness to participate organically in institutional coastal governance projects, all responded affirmatively, commenting that they would be willing to appoint delegates and work on land-use planning and environmental controls and monitoring. They all highlight the importance of having instances for dialog, horizontal decision-making, and interdisciplinary participation with representatives of social organizations, technicians, neighbors, and institutions. Finally, when questioned about the expectations of their work in the future, respondents mentioned concerns and uncertainty regarding the increase in the number and severity of coastal problems and anthropic pressures. There is pessimism about institutions' lack of territorial control, perceived political interests, and legal gaps that allow interpretations contrary to protection and the common good. On the other hand, they recognize huge challenges, such as ensuring that local land-use plans are carried out and the need to strengthen and influence environmental policies. They seek to increase their contribution to the areas where they operate, strengthen citizen participation, and be empowered regarding the intervention decisions made in their territory.

### **Statement of the Network of Coastal Groups.**

In addition to the contacts outlined above, the authors continue developing their bonds with local groups through various education programs and activities to achieve part of the objectives set out in the exemption workshops. One of the most representative organizations of these groups is the Network of Coastal Groups, which brings together more than 50 coastal groups in the country. In October 2021, this organization published a statement several decades after incorporating it into national regulations and addressing it by several political parties at the different scales of

the Uruguay government. It sets forth a profound disagreement with the systematic actions taken by the various decision-making and management bodies of coastal areas and demands the creation of a coastal environmental discussion table and a protocol for the integrated and participatory management of coastal areas.

The set of approaches allows the identification of four stakeholder groups: those concerned about the exemptions policy, local inhabitants in general, local activist groups, and the network of coastal environmental groups from all over the country. The main incentives include a strong concern for conserving the local environmental conditions. The interest of citizens in participating in decision-making on matters affecting them and influencing public policies is worth highlighting. To this end, their top priorities are strengthening local participative forums to channel calls to address issues; expressing themselves collectively and formulating proposals; and enabling the interaction between stakeholders, actions, and resources to obtain concrete answers.

Either because they express it or from indirect findings in the responses gathered, the four groups evidence the need to improve the education of the general population in subjects specific to coastal dynamics and associated regulations, aimed at improving participation and fostering responsible behaviors about environmental care. Faced with a relationship that implies a knowledge of the daily or ordinary environment involving information about damages to buildings by erosion, half of the respondents are unaware of participation forums on these issues, and the vast majority are unacquainted with basic terms on coastal zone dynamics — elements that would allow them to deal more broadly or deeply with local dynamics and participate in an informed manner, to achieve greater influence at the local level.

Regarding the dialog with groups working on the subjects of interest, although successful cases were mentioned, the requests or claims submitted to different government authorities have been poorly effective due to long response times, failure to consider or process requests, lack of responses, or denial of the issue.

On the other hand, this work underlines the need to improve regulatory frameworks and institutional management, which is generally considered insufficient and even is described as corrupt (poor transparency, unregulated negotiations, and discretionary management) in the most compromised case of an exemption.

## DISCUSSION

In the Eastern Region — as detailed by Hidalgo *et al.* (2016) for other sectors of the Latin American coast — the promotion of real estate in sites of outstanding natural value, mainly associated with residential tourism, is perceived as the solution to create jobs and attract investment. This idea has been shared by the various government agencies and political parties in charge. The associated environmental impacts are officially acknowledged but are portrayed as unavoidable damages to be accepted in exchange for job opportunities. In the case of Maldonado, where the delivery of public goods in exchange for job opportunities is extremely explicit, this approach has gained the approval of a majority that supports the departmental government in its second term.

This model of local development — which reflects what was analyzed at the international level by Castree (2008) or Pintos (2020) — generates approvals and disagreements because, as Cruz (2020) points out, the territory is the scenario where multiple interests coexist and several powers are exercised simultaneously at different scales. Conflicts are resolved, and various demands are being fought for. In this case, some social sectors demand and debate the growing loss of common goods such as public spaces, the beach, and the ecosystem services associated with it.

The results of the surveys and workshops conducted and the assessment of progress in regulations and their enforcement through institutional management confirm the claims by Bustos Gallardo *et al.* (2019) and Zurbriggen (2011) about the official discourse on environmental and participatory governance with no real progress that would allow achieving major changes in the

historical trend and development of coastal the residential tourism model associated with real estate extractivism.

There are sporadic cases of participatory forums, collaboration between sectors and territorial scales, and the incorporation of contemporary scientific knowledge into territorial coastal regulations. However, no attempts have been made to create a permanent forum for information exchange, monitoring, networking, continuous education, or search for shared visions for this sector.

Citizen participation has been limited to the approval of local land-use plans or construction projects of FDC that legally require its dissemination and, in some cases, public hearings. Thus, participating means knowing key information on a timely basis, even when the announcement is restricted and specific, and performing short-term tasks to inform, discuss, or coordinate with neighbors before the end of the discussion period. Today, the knowledge of the population on the subject has more to do with the interests and possibilities of individuals or self-managed groups than with government policies or programs. On the other hand, knowing, reflecting, or attending public events also implies having spare time and economic resources, conditions that pose from the beginning an enormous inequality between the stakeholders; hence, public participation becomes a self-limitation and control.

This situation adds to the meager results achieved in response to complaints or requests from local actors (bottom-up processes), which are often used to complete the implementation of development projects that further deepen unwanted impacts. Expressions of disagreement are restrained and fail to promote the discussion of projects or are not heard (most challenged projects are ultimately implemented). According to Airzcombe et al. (2009), questioning has led to changes in the discussion or assessment of the location of projects and their characteristics by its advocates, incorporating and guaranteeing, for example, the inclusion of "green spaces". However, everything points to that modifications, if any, are insignificant.

The situation detailed throughout this work urgently demands the implementation of per-

manent schemes of horizontal dialog between stakeholders, which, although not legally binding, foster knowledge and allow real participation in the coastal development model for the Eastern Region. However, Capalbo *et al.* (2020) remind us that participatory processes are ambivalent and should be considered one of several instances in the development of policy implementation processes since institutionalization does not eliminate conflict. As Morin (1990) points out, complexity brings disorder and uncertainty, but avoiding these complications risks failure to capture the full picture of an issue, and thus restrains its solution.

In this context, we understand that the following are an important part of the alternatives to be implemented to improve the local conditions described herein:

1. Creation of multi-stakeholder and multi-level forums specifically for the coastal zone to discuss land-use issues and advisory to decision-making bodies; Basin Commissions may be considered a suitable format.
2. Establishment of a permanent interdisciplinary coastal observatory to provide advisory in both discussion and decision-making instances to monitor regulatory amendments and perform real-time analyses of impacts that require planning adjustments.
3. Development of programs across different levels of formal education to incorporate contents on the particular characteristics of coastal areas and the responsibilities and rights implicit in land-use planning and related participation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank all the persons and groups that contributed to making this work possible.

## REFERENCES

- Aizcorbe, M, Fernández Bouzo, S y Wertheimer, M. (2013). Moros en la costa. Ambiente, actores locales

- y conflicto en torno a los megaproyectos de urbanización sobre la franja costera de los partidos de Avellaneda-Quilmes y Vicente López (2000-2011). En G. Merlinsky, (Comp.), *Cartografías del conflicto ambiental en Argentina*. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Fundación CICCUS.
- Aledo, A. (2016). Turismo residencial y vulnerabilidad en el interior del Levante español. En J. Gascón y E. Cañada (Coord.), *Turismo residencial y gentrificación rural* (pp. 37-59). El Sauzal (Tenerife) & Xixón: PASOS, RTPC & Foro de Turismo Responsable.
- Álvez, C. y Goso, C. (2014). Sedimentación dunar y vulnerabilidad a la erosión en la costa atlántica uruguaya. En C. Goso (Comp.), *Nuevas miradas a la problemática de los ambientes costeros*. (pp. 101-129) Montevideo, Uruguay: DIRAC.
- Bustos Gallardo, B., Lukas, M., Stamm, C. y Torre, A. (2020). Neoliberalismo y gobernanza territorial: propuestas y reflexiones a partir del caso de Chile. *Revista de Geografía Norte Grande*, 73, 161-183. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-34022019000200161>
- Capalbo, A., Scharager, A. y Tobías, M. (2020). La nueva política de urbanización y el rol de los mecanismos participativos en las villas de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. El caso de la Villa 31 (2015-2018). En G. Merlinsky (Coord.), *Cartografías del conflicto ambiental en la Argentina* 3 (pp. 55-82). Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Fundación CICCUS.
- Castree, N. (2008). Neoliberalising Nature: The Logics of Deregulation and Reregulation. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 40(1), 131-152. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3999>
- Chaffin, B. C., Gosnell, H. y Cosens, B. A. (2014). A decade of adaptive governance scholarship: synthesis and future directions. *Ecology and Society*, 19(3), 56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-06824-190356>
- Cruz, V. do C. (2020). De la producción del espacio a la gubernamentalidad del espacio: cambios metodológicos para un enfoque territorial de la geograficidad. *Cardinalis*, 15, 551-579.
- De la Rosa, A. y Pérez, C. (2017). Las formas de organización ecocentristas: una alternativa ante las empresas regidas por la economía verde. El caso de la ecoaldea. *Administración y Organizaciones*, 19(37), 137-162.
- Diez, J., Gutiérrez, R. y Pazzi, A. (2013). ¿De arriba hacia abajo o de abajo hacia arriba? Un análisis crítico de la planificación del desarrollo en América Latina. *Geopolítica(s)*, 4(2), 199-235. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.5209/rev\\_GEOP.2013.v4.n2.41460](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_GEOP.2013.v4.n2.41460)
- Duffy, R. (2015). Nature-Based Tourism and Neoliberalism: Concealing Contradictions. *Tourism Geographies*, 17(4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2015.1053972>
- Folke, C., Hahn, T., Olsson y P. Norberg, J. 2005, Adaptive governance of social-ecological systems. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 30, 441-473. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.energy.30.050504.144511>
- Fletcher, R. 2016. Cannibal Tours Revisited: The Political Ecology of Tourism. En M. Blázquez, M. Mir-Gual, M., Murray, I. y Pons, G. X. (Eds.), *Turismo y crisis, turismo colaborativo y ecoturismo* (pp. 19-29). XV Coloquio de Geografía del Turismo, el Ocio y la Recreación de la AGE. Mon. Soc. Hist. Nat. Balears, 23. SHNBUIB-AGE.
- Gadino, I., Sciandro, J., Taveira, G. y Goldberg, N. 2022. Tendencias y efectos socioambientales del desarrollo inmobiliario turístico en zonas costeras de Sudamérica. El caso de Región Este, Uruguay. *Revista EURE - Revista de Estudios Urbano Regionales*, 48(145). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7764/EURE.48.145.05>
- Grindle, M. (2017). Good Governance, R.I.P.: A Critique and an Alternative. *Governance International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 30(1), 17-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12223>
- Hidalgo, R., Camus, P., Paulsen, A., Olea J. y Alvarado, V. 2016. Extractivismo inmobiliario, expoliación de los bienes comunes y esquilmación del medio natural. El borde costero en la macrozona central de Chile en las postrimerías del neoliberalismo. *Innsbrucker Geographische Studien, Band 40: Die Welt verstehen – eine geographische Herausforderung. Eine Festschrift der Geographie Innsbruck für Axel Borsdorf* (pp. 251-270). Innsbruck: Geographie Innsbruck,
- Morin, E. 1990. *Introducción al pensamiento complejo*. España: Gedisa.
- Nagy, G., Bidegain, M., Verocai, J. y de los Santos, B. (2016). *Escenarios climáticos futuros sobre Uruguay. Basados en los nuevos escenarios socioeconómicos RCP*. Uruguay: MVOTMA.
- Panario, D. y Gutiérrez, O. (2005). La vegetación en la evolución de playas arenosas. El caso de la costa uruguaya. En *Ecosistemas. Revista científica y técnica de ecología y medio ambiente*. 14(2), 150-161.
- Pérez-Cayeiro, M. L., Chica Ruiz, J. A., Arcila Garrido, M. y López Sánchez, J. A. Análisis de la evolución de las metodologías de gestión integrada de áreas litorales en los periodos comprendidos entre 1990-1999 y 2000-2012. *Revista de Gestão Costeira Integrada - Journal of Integrated Coastal Zone Management*, 16(2), 207-222. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5894/rgci615>
- Pintos, P. (2020). Humedales en disputa a las puertas de Buenos Aires. Comunes urbanos, espacialidades injustas y conflicto. En G. Merlinsky (Coord.), *Cartografías del conflicto ambiental en la Argentina* 3. (pp 29-54). Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Fundación CICCUS.

- Rosas-Ferrusca, F., Calderón-Maya, J. R y Campos-Alanís, H. (2012). Elementos conceptuales para el análisis de la gobernanza territorial. *Quivera. Revista de Estudios Territoriales*, 14, 113-136.
- Sevilla Buitrago, A. (2010). Urbanismo, biopolítica, gubernamentalidad: vida y espacio en la renovación de los estudios urbanos, *Boletín CF+S*, 44, 41-49.
- Schultz, L., West, S. y Floríncio, C. (2019). Gobernanza adaptativa en construcción: Personas, prácticas y políticas en una reserva de biosfera de la UNESCO. *Revista de Geografía Norte Grande*, 74, 117-138. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-34022019000300117>
- Suárez, F. y Ruggiero, C. y otros (2018). Los conflictos ambientales en América Latina I : áreas de reservación, conflictos mineros e hidrocarbúferos, conflictos forestales. Argentina: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento.
- Vainer, C. (2000). Pátria, empresa e mercadoria. Notas sobre a estratégia discursiva do planejamento estratégico urbano. En O. Arantes, C. Vainer, E. Maricato (Eds.), *A cidade do pensamento único: desmanchando consensos*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Zurbriggen, C. (2011). Gobernanza: una mirada desde América Latina. *Perfiles latinoamericanos*, 19(38), 39-64. Recuperado de <https://bit.ly/3LhXvUF> el 18 de marzo de 2022.