

# Exploring the Touristic Potential of Linear Parks: A Sustainable Approach to River Revitalization in the Global South



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## Introduction

In the Global South, rivers have long been perceived as sources of life and vitality. Yet, unfortunately, they have also borne the brunt of unrestrained urban development and extreme climate changes. However, there is a silver lining: the rehabilitation of these degraded rivers not only offers an opportunity for environmental restoration but also for the development of sustainable tourism.

Creating linear parks along these rivers, both in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, can be a highly effective strategy to transform once-neglected spaces into vibrant destinations for leisure and tourism. By adopting an approach that integrates ecological restoration with economic and social development, we can recover degraded aquatic ecosystems and provide a variety of crucial ecosystem services to local communities and visitors.

The benefits of linear parks extend far beyond aesthetics. They serve as catalysts for essential ecosystem services, from soil formation and drainage to temperature regulation and biodiversity maintenance. Moreover, these natural spaces offer unique opportunities for tourism and recreation, contributing to people's physical and mental well-being. By exploring the cultural services provided by these linear parks, we can envision a new horizon for sustainable tourism. From recreational activities such as hiking and cycling to educational experiences such as guided tours and environmental interpretation programs, these spaces offer a variety of opportunities for visitors to connect with nature and local history.

Furthermore, linear parks can be key in promoting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Providing access to green spaces and promoting healthy lifestyles contribute to

the SDG of health and well-being. Similarly, by providing lifelong learning opportunities and promoting environmental awareness, they support the SDG of quality education. Additionally, they contribute to the SDG of sustainable cities and communities by creating inclusive, safe, and sustainable communities.

However, implementing and maintaining linear parks does come with costs. Initial investments are required for land acquisition, infrastructure development, and restoration activities. Moreover, ongoing maintenance expenses for landscaping, waste management, and security must be considered. Despite these challenges, the long-term benefits of environmental, social, and economic returns often outweigh the initial costs.

To successfully incorporate linear parks into urban planning and city management policies, it is essential to engage in comprehensive planning processes involving multiple stakeholders. Urban planners can integrate linear parks into city plans by designating green corridors along riverbanks, incorporating them into zoning regulations, and creating partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities.

By incorporating linear parks into urban planning and city management policies, cities can enhance their resilience to climate change, improve the quality of life for residents, attract tourists, and promote sustainable development. With careful planning, investment, and community engagement, linear parks have the potential to become valuable assets for cities in the Global South, offering a harmonious blend of environmental conservation, recreational opportunities, and cultural enrichment.

In the Global South, rehabilitating urban freshwater ecosystems, particularly in megacities like the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region (BHMR) in Brazil, presents a significant opportunity for improving environmental quality and enhancing the well-being of local communities. The rehabilitation of urban streams, such as those in the BHMR, not only aims to mitigate environmental pollution but also to promote ecosystem services crucial for residents' physical and mental health.

These examples from the BHMR underscore the potential of linear parks created along rehabilitated urban streams to serve as hubs for sustainable tourism and recreation. By providing green spaces for outdoor activities such as hiking, picnicking, and birdwatching, these linear parks offer opportunities for residents and tourists alike to connect with nature and improve their well-being. Furthermore, incorporating cultural elements such as interpretive signage, art installations, and guided tours can enhance the visitor experience and promote environmental education and awareness.

The success of linear park projects in the BHMR is a model for other tropical megacities facing similar environmental challenges. By engaging local communities in monitoring and managing urban watercourses, cities can foster a sense of stewardship

and promote active participation in environmental conservation efforts. Moreover, the economic analyses conducted in the BHMR provide valuable insights for policymakers, demonstrating the potential returns on investment in urban stream rehabilitation projects.

In conclusion, creating linear parks along rehabilitated urban streams represents a sustainable approach to river revitalization in the Global South. By harnessing the potential of these green spaces for tourism, recreation, and environmental education, cities can improve residents' quality of life, attract visitors, and promote sustainable development. The example of the BHMR illustrates the transformative power of linear parks in promoting environmental conservation, public health, and community well-being in urban areas.

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