

# Connect the Dots: Sustainable Territorial Development and the Knowledge Economy

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*This chapter presents a case study of the Connect the Dots Project, which encompasses a coordinated and connected set of actions aimed at sustainable territorial development, under the prism of the knowledge economy. The project, held in São Paulo City, Brazil, was awarded with the first place at the contest Mayors Challenge 2016, organized by the North American institution Bloomberg Philanthropies. Connect the Dots is a project aimed at strengthening producers and support their transition to an agroecological production system, as a way of protecting the rural landscape, conceived within the scope of the 2014 São Paulo Strategic Master Plan. The name of the project, an allusion to a puzzle game, has its inspiration in the fundamental connections between public and private actors. Its foundation is in the development of technological innovations, education collective actions, and decisions based on data and evidence typical of the knowledge economy.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a case study that encompasses a coordinated and connected set of actions aimed at sustainable territorial development, under the prism of the Economy of Knowledge. The project, held in the City of São Paulo in Brazil, is called Connect the Dots.

Connect the Dots is aimed at promoting ecological agriculture as a way of protecting the rural landscape. Besides developing tools and methodologies to encourage and help local farmers to transition from traditional to ecological farming, the Project also focused on helping them commercialize their organic production, being responsible for the development of a regional value chain for agricultural products.

In addition to receiving help to make the transition mainly through technical assistance and inputs compatible with agroecological farming, the farmers could increase the value of their crops, receive managerial and entrepreneurial training, improve their access to buyers and set partnerships with restaurants and local markets.

## **The Location of the Project**

Approximately 12 million people live in São Paulo City and 20 million in the Metropolitan Region. The municipality of São Paulo has an area of 1,500 km<sup>2</sup>. The rural area of São Paulo Municipality – target area of the project - is 420 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 28% of the municipality's total area. This rural area is in the south region of São Paulo City comprising Parelheiros, Marsilac and Grajaú Districts. They are poor districts inhabited by people living in rural areas, small towns and slums that suffer the impact of the expansion of São Paulo City in detriment of rural and environmental protection areas.

This is a strategic area of environmental protection because it contains the main water supply of Great São Paulo (the largest metropolitan region in South America), in addition to important remnants of the Atlantic Forest biome. This extensive area of native vegetation provides relevant ecosystem services for the metropolitan region, such as the production of water for public supply, climate regulation and biodiversity conservation.

Agriculture occupies less than 5% of this territory and it is mainly represented by families that use a conventional farming system.

This region has been a focus of state and municipal public policies for environmental protection for a long time. The first laws to protect public water supply sources for the metropolitan region of São Paulo date back to the 1970s. Most of these regulations are of the command-and-control type which have brought deleterious side effects as the abandonment of areas and the spreading of irregular urban occupations without any basic infrastructure and sanitation. Miranda addressed the theme of the deleterious effects of urban sprawl over rural areas in her 2002 works (Miranda, 2002a and b).

## **The Goals of the Project**

Considering the strategic and environmental value of this area, the lessons taken from previous unsuccessful efforts to preserve the Atlantic rainforest biome and the need to assist the rural communities to adopt sustainable farming, Connect the Dots Project developed a set of innovative solutions to address this challenge, based on the guidelines of sustainable territorial development and Economy of Knowledge.

Among these solutions is promoting ecological agriculture as a way of protecting the rural landscape and helping local communities of farmers to transition from traditional to ecological farming. Besides enabling them to improve their income and quality of life, the project's goal is to transform them in guardians of nature, preservers of the strategical land where they live.

All technological innovations, systems and methodologies developed by the project are based on data and evidence, something characteristic of the Economy of Knowledge. Thus, its replication effort should be smaller for other cities in Brazil, Latin America and even in Europe.

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