

# CURITIBA

## Pioneering Curitiba

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- **DURATION**  
Ongoing
- **POPULATION 2024**  
**3.852.460 (Growth Rate 1,03%)**
- **URA SCOPE**  
ECOLOGY. Green Urbanism  
  
SOCIETY. Staying Human  
  
ECONOMY Urban Prosperity Beyond GDP  
  
STRATEGY. Shared Vision
- **TOPICS**  
MOBILITY, PUBLIC TRANSPORT, PUBLIC SPACES, STRATEGIC VISION, STRUCTURAL DESIGN, SUSTAINABILITY
- **MAIN ACTORS**  
Instituto Jaime Lerner  
The municipality of Curitiba and its structure, constituents, society at large



In the early 1970s, Curitiba was a rapidly growing city of 600,000 people (compared to 1.8 million today in a 3.8 million metropolis). At a time when unplanned growth threatened to overwhelm the city, former mayor Jaime Lerner and his teams turned bold ideas into actionable plans, pioneering solutions that would ripple across the globe. Over three terms as mayor during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Curitiba became an international reference point for urban innovation.

Among these innovations was the creation of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, a game-changing approach to urban mobility that has since been adopted in over 200 cities worldwide. Grounded in the concept of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), Curitiba's BRT system emphasized integrated urban planning, enabling mobility while fostering well-structured, compact growth.

The Jaime Lerner Institute believes that cities can transform lives. Its mission is to inspire innovative solutions for improving urban life by sharing lessons from the legacy of Jaime Lerner, a renowned architect and former mayor of Curitiba. The institute encourages sustainable, inclusive, and creative growth in cities worldwide.

Urban sustainability was central to Lerner's vision. Instead of opposing nature, Curitiba collaborated

with it by designing public parks in flood-prone areas to manage stormwater and create ecological corridors. Programs like the "green exchange" and "waste-that-is-not-waste" encouraged waste separation and environmental education, embedding sustainability into daily life.

Curitiba prioritized people in its urban design, notably with Rua das Flores, Brazil's first pedestrian mall, which shifted focus from cars to public spaces. Legislative measures also helped preserve the city's natural and cultural heritage alongside its growth.

Finally, Lerner's Urban Acupuncture approach left a legacy. This philosophy emphasized small, targeted urban interventions—such as the creation of cultural spaces and public art installations—that sparked significant transformations and reinforced long-term planning goals.

The Jaime Lerner Institute celebrates its legacy by encouraging cities worldwide to adopt innovative solutions to their challenges. By learning from Curitiba's transformation, it promotes a vision of cities as vibrant places of opportunity, resilience, and community.





## Impact

Curitiba is internationally recognized for its innovative urban planning and has received numerous awards over the years, including the prestigious City Award from the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona.

While challenges remain, the achievements of this Brazilian city demonstrate what can be accomplished through sustained institutional and political efforts, along with the active support and participation of its citizens.

The impact of Curitiba extends far beyond its borders. In 1971, the city had only one public park and approximately 0.5 square meters of green space per inhabitant. Today, that figure has risen to over 50 square meters, thanks to a comprehensive network of parks that not only enhances the city's beauty but also provides essential climate resilience infrastructure. These parks serve as vital green lungs for the urban environment, helping to mitigate the effects of pollution and urban heat. Similarly, Curitiba's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which began in 1974 with 20 kilometres of exclusive lanes serving 40,000 passengers daily, has evolved into an extensive and integrated transportation network that now transports an impressive 1.1 million passengers each day. This innovative transit system has set a benchmark for public transportation worldwide, making it one of the most successful and influential mobility solutions of the 20th century.

In addition to its transportation and green space initiatives, Curitiba has excelled in preserving both its natural and built heritage through forward-thinking land use strategies that have inspired national legislation. These efforts ensure that development is balanced with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

The city's ability to plan effectively for current and future needs has solidified its reputation as one of the best places to live and invest in Brazil, as well as an important hub for business tourism. Overall, Curitiba stands as a model for other cities looking to achieve sustainable growth and improve quality of life for their residents—showcasing the potential of visionary urban planning combined with community engagement and environmental stewardship.

## The Challenge

Curitiba's transformation arose from the need to address urban challenges threatening sustainability and quality of life. Unchecked growth revealed the necessity for a framework to guide development and manage market impacts effectively.

The city also faced mobility challenges, with a car-centric culture dominating urban spaces. This led to congestion, inefficient transit systems, and limited walkability, making it crucial to prioritize public transportation and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Overcoming public resistance to these changes, such as the creation of pedestrian-only streets, was a significant hurdle.

Another pressing concern was flooding, as Curitiba's location subjected it to intense rains. Conventional solutions like river channelling were inadequate, requiring innovative approaches to improve urban drainage and prevent natural disasters.

Environmental sustainability posed an additional challenge. Rising waste generation, combined with a lack of proper waste management systems, demanded a cultural shift toward recycling and responsible disposal practices.

Finally, Curitiba had to balance rapid urbanization with the need to preserve its natural landscapes and public spaces, ensuring that growth would not compromise its ecological heritage or diminish residents' quality of life.

## Solution Proposed

Curitiba's strategy for addressing urban challenges is characterized by simplicity, creativity, and a deep respect for life—particularly at the human scale. This approach combines innovation with a practical commitment, ensuring that policies are not only visionary but also actionable and enduring.

Curitiba's urban plan features a "structural sector" design that directs growth to suitable areas while prioritizing public transportation and pedestrian spaces over cars. This vision was demonstrated in 1972 with Brazil's first pedestrian mall, Rua das Flores, and further advanced in 1974 with a 20-km dedicated busway, setting a global standard for transit-oriented development.

Curitiba emphasizes harmony with nature by integrating natural landscapes into urban planning. Instead of conventional river channelling for flood control, it creates public parks that combine forest remnants with watercourses, acting as flood buffers and enhancing public spaces.

Environmental sustainability was further reinforced in 1989 with the launch of the "Garbage That Is Not Garbage" program, a pioneering waste separation initiative.

The program engaged households in waste sorting, with schoolchildren leading awareness campaigns to promote environmental responsibility. These simple yet innovative initiatives have established Curitiba as a global model for sustainable urban development.

<https://thebayawards.com/>