Resisting Gentrification in Historic Coastal Cities: The Urbanization of Charleston and Porto

Resistindo à gentrificação em cidades costeiras históricas: a urbanização de Charleston e Porto

Jessica M. Moeller

Charleston School of Law
Assistant Dean of Experiential Learning and Visiting Professor of Law
jmoeller@charlestonlaw.edu
ORCID no. 0009-0009-6817-545X

ABSTRACT: This article examines the parallel challenges faced by two historically significant coastal cities, Charleston, South Carolina, and Porto, Portugal, as they navigate the pressures of modern urbanization and the consequential risks of gentrification. Despite their distinct cultural and historical trajectories, both cities face similar threats to their unique identities and the displacement of long-term communities. This paper will explore the rationales of urbanization in each context, the indicators of gentrification in Charleston, complicated by its history of racial disparities, and in Porto, fueled by its expansive tourism district. By investigating the existing preventative measures and urban planning strategies adopted by each city, this article critically examines their efficacy in mitigating the negative impacts of gentrification. This comparative analysis not only identifies the social and cultural pressures of gentrification, but also identifies potential legal and policy frameworks, such as housing laws, zoning ordinances, and heritage protection measures, that can better equip historic coastal cities like Charleston and Porto to balance urban growth and suburban sprawl with heritage preservation and social equity. The ultimate goal is to ensure an equitable future for all residents during this era of increased global mobility.

Keywords: gentrification, urbanization, historic preservation, Charleston, Porto

RESUMO: Este artigo examina os desafios paralelos enfrentados por duas cidades costeiras historicamente significativas, Charleston, Carolina do Sul, e Porto, Portugal, enquanto enfrentam as pressões da urbanização moderna e os riscos consequentes da gentrificação. Apesar das suas trajetórias culturais e históricas distintas, ambas as cidades enfrentam ameaças semelhantes às suas identidades únicas e à deslocação de comunidades de longa data. Este artigo explorará as justificações da urbanização em cada contexto, os indicadores de gentrificação em Charleston, complicados pelo seu historial de disparidades raciais, e no Porto, alimentados pelo seu amplo distrito turístico. Ao investigar as medidas preventivas existentes e as estratégias de planeamento urbano adoptadas por cada cidade, este artigo examina criticamente a sua eficácia na mitigação dos impactos negativos da gentrificação. Esta análise comparativa não só identifica as pressões sociais e culturais da gentrificação, como também identifica potenciais quadros legais e políticos, tais como leis de habitação, decretos de zoneamento e medidas de protecção do património, que podem equipar melhor as cidades costeiras históricas como Charleston e Porto para equilibrar o crescimento urbano e a expansão suburbana com a preservação do património e a equidade social. O objetivo final é garantir um futuro equitativo para todos os residentes durante esta era de maior mobilidade global.

1. INTRODUCTION: A TALE OF TWO CITIES / INTRODUÇÃO: UM CONTO DE DUAS CIDADES

For decades, the allure of the coast has drawn families symbolizing aspirations of future prosperity or a serene retirement, and since the 1960s, migration patterns in the United States have shown increased populations in key coastal cities (Wilson & Fischetti, 2010). The need for ample housing reflected this population growth and urbanization trend, and by the end of 2008, housing units along the coastline had grown 126%. The advent of remote work, significantly accelerated by the 2020 pandemic, further amplified this trend, enabling individuals to reside in desirable coastal locales while maintaining employment in inland or more densely populated urban centers (Marcus, 2022). In the United States, this phenomenon has led to a notable surge in migration to cities like Charleston, South Carolina. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, coastal population density has steadily increased for over half a century, with more than 39% of the U.S. population now living in coastal counties (National Ocean Service, 2024).

Across Europe, similar patterns have emerged, with population growth expanding beyond historic city centers, creating rings of urban sprawl around popular tourist destinations. This trend is particularly evident in Porto, Portugal, where lifestyle migration and tourist influx have driven housing costs alarmingly high and altered the urban fabric (Fernandes et al., 2018).

While numerous other coastal and historic cities across the United States and Europe undoubtedly face increased migration and subsequent urbanization, Charleston and Porto offer compelling case studies. Situated across the Atlantic from one another, these two cities share striking similarities: rich histories, coastal proximity, and significant tourism industries. Porto's historical core was deemed a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996 and is one of the oldest city centers in Europe, and a gateway to many more (Nash, 1992). Charleston is one of the oldest cities in the United States, founded in 1670, and one of the leading colonies when the country was established. Despite these claims to fame, they also grapple with common challenges stemming from rapid urbanization, particularly the pervasive issue of gentrification.

This article posits that by examining the unique manifestations and policy responses to gentrification in Charleston and Porto, we can derive valuable insights into effective urban planning and legal frameworks necessary to preserve cultural heritage, ensure social equity, and promote environmental sustainability in historic coastal environments globally. While this article situates Charleston and Porto within broader patterns of coastal urbanization, it does so with a particular focus on legal and policy instruments. By comparing available frameworks and planning initiatives across the two cities, this article adopts a comparative legal-urban planning approach, assessing how law can serve as both a driver and a brake on gentrification.[1]

2. DEFINING GENTRIFICATION AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS / DEFININDO GENTRIFICAÇÃO E SUAS MANIFESTAÇÕES

Gentrification is not an abrupt event but a gradual transformation, creeping into neighborhoods and altering their social, economic, and cultural landscapes. Dictionaries and scholars have attempted to define what exactly gentrification is *ad nauseam*. However, in 1964, Glass provided us with what has become a very popular and well-understood description of this process. "One by one, many of the working-class quarters have been invaded by the middle class – upper and lower ... until all or most of the working-class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed" (Glass, 1964., p. xvii, as cited in Yeom, 2018). This definition highlights the core elements of gentrification: an influx of higher-income residents into previously lower-income areas, leading to physical redevelopment, increased

---

[1] This article relies primarily on official public databases and documentary sources, including the United States Census Bureau, the European Urban Audit, and municipal housing and zoning plans in Charleston and Porto. It also draws on national legislation and municipal housing ordinances that were once in place, that have since been halted. Data reflect the most recent research completed 30 July 2025. Much census data, while available in 2025, is only as recent as 2023. Limitations include access to some proprietary municipal records and reliance on translated versions of certain Portuguese statutes. *See generally* Eurostat, Urban Audit Database, (2023), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat; U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population and Housing (2000, 2010, 2020), https://www.census.gov.

property values, and ultimately, the displacement of original inhabitants and a transformation of the neighborhood's social fabric.

However, as scholarly discourse has evolved, the understanding of gentrification has broadened beyond mere physical displacement of groups due to "affordable housing and other policies" (Tighe et al., 2015). This displacement goes beyond forcing current residents out of the community due to economic or other physical strains, to even preventing new residents of similar backgrounds from moving in (Cline, 2017). Certainly, gentrification can manifest in various forms, including cultural displacement, changes in public space utilization, and shifts in public representation, even when physical displacement is mitigated by policy (Tighe et al, 2015, p. 6). Often, as gentrification's effects increase in a community, demographics change to a point that dilutes the political powers of historically black neighborhoods. That loss of minority representation can affect trust in government and political engagement among minority constituents (Tighe et al., 2015, p. 5). Policies aimed at preserving "affordable housing" may slow displacement but rarely stop the erosion of community identity and long-term belonging (Zuk et al., 2015).

In the context of coastal cities like Charleston and Porto, gentrification is often intertwined with tourism and a desire for "lifestyle migration." The picturesque charm, historic architecture, and coastal amenities that attract tourists also draw new residents seeking a higher quality of life, often leading to increased demand for housing and commercial spaces. This demand, coupled with investment and redevelopment, drives up costs, making it increasingly difficult for long-term, lower-income residents to remain in their communities. Historic preservation efforts that lead to gentrification may preserve physical spaces; however, what is lost is the greater historical familial ties to the city (Bures & Cain, 2008).

Indeed, the growth of tourism is linked to the success of these historic preservation efforts, but only physical representation is maintained. Even something as simple as construction in urban rehabilitation can cause stress due to noise and pollution, negatively impacting local populations' health (Silva et al., 2023). The community's character changes, leading to the displacement of native families, and the overall urban sprawl outward towards new spaces in search of more affordable

housing (Silva et al., 2023). As these families move outwards, there are concerns about the loss of local identity and diversity, and that affluent or corporate users may displace traditional residents and businesses (Fernandes et al., 2018). This can eventually create a tourist monoculture, leading to the displacement of long-term residents and anyone outside of significant wealth, changing the quaint or historical city dynamics that lured the tourists to visit in the first place.

3. URBANIZATION TRENDS AND THE IMPACT OF GENTRIFICATION / TENDÊNCIAS DE URBANIZAÇÃO E O IMPACTO DA GENTRIFICAÇÃO

Cities across the globe, from historic port towns to bustling modern metropolises, are grappling with the complex and often contentious forces of urbanization that lead to gentrification. The push and pull between preservation, economic development, and social equity creates a unique set of challenges for local governments and communities. Indeed, this phenomenon is not isolated to a single region or country; it's a shared experience playing out in different ways on different continents. By examining the distinct histories and recent transformations of Charleston and Porto, we can gain a deeper understanding of the standard drivers of gentrification and the diverse ways communities are affected. For context, in 2024, Charleston was named the number one U.S. city for the 12th year in a row, and in 2023 Porto was named city of the year (Quinn, 2024; Porto: City of the Year, 2023). Because both cities certainly appeal as tourist destinations and historical powerhouses, they serve as authoritative case studies of the modern urban dilemma: how to embrace progress and prosperity without sacrificing the very people and cultures that make a city unique.

3.1 The Urbanization of Charleston, South Carolina: race, preservation, and pressure / A urbanização de Charleston, Carolina do Sul: raça, preservação e pressão

Charleston, South Carolina, boasts a rich and complex history, profoundly shaped by its origins as a colonial port city and its deep

connection to African and Central "Black" American culture and history. Initially founded in 1670 by English settlers and hundreds of Barbadian planters who settled on the west bank of the Ashley River, an area commonly known as Albermarle Point, Charleston was a city new agriculture (Dunn, 1971). Settling in the Carolinas was a grand emigration from Barbados, and a wide range of migrants brought servants and slaves to South Carolina in search of expansion opportunities. The city's foundation and its subsequent growth on the peninsula between the Cooper and Ashley rivers established strategic importance (Charleston: A Historical Overview, 2007). Its black American population, particularly the Gullah Geechee people, shaped the city's culture and economy. Over the centuries, Charleston evolved into a significant cultural and economic hub, with its black American communities playing a pivotal role in shaping its identity. Unfortunately, part of Charleston's economic trade fame was that it became America's largest port of entry during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Battle & White, 2013).

This historical legacy now confronts the pressure of modern urbanization and gentrification. From the 1990s onward, Charleston–like many American cities–experienced a reversal of the "white flight" era. The post-industrial era brought massive demographic shifts. Gentrification returned wealthier, often white, residents to urban centers, driving up property values and displacing African and Central American communities through economic pressure from potentially lucrative land (Fenton, 2022).

According to census data, between 2000 and 2020, the city's traditionally black American population was slowly replaced with a more predominantly white population. The median home price in Charleston rose over 70% between 2010 and 2020, with property taxes and renovation costs pricing out many long-term residents (Charleston County, Housing Our Future, 2023). One illustrative example is the East Side neighborhood, once a predominantly black community with deep historical roots. Redevelopment projects and tourism have transformed the area, bringing wine bars, short-term rentals, and soaring housing costs. Simultaneously, urban sprawl has pushed displaced residents to outer suburbs like Summerville or Goose Creek–areas less connected to the city's cultural and economic core.

One neighborhood within Charleston, "the East Side," exemplifies on a smaller scale the larger urbanization effects that Charleston has been facing. This neighborhood was originally planned as a suburb in 1769 by Henry Laurens, a wealthy slave-owner, and slowly the neighborhood transitioned to a working-class neighborhood (Cline, 2017, p. 15). Industrialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries influenced the socioeconomic status of residents, from the American Tobacco Company on East Bay Street and other prominent churches on Reid and Hanover (Cline, 2017, p. 23). As white residents began to move throughout the peninsula, segregation increased during the 1950s and 1960s and black residents became more concentrated in this East Side neighborhood (Bures & Cain, 2008, p. 4).

Preservation, once a noble cause in Charleston, now cuts both ways. Efforts to maintain architectural heritage, initiated as early as the 1920s, ironically increased gentrification by making the city more attractive to affluent outsiders. Over on the East Side in Charleston, starting in the 1970s, various preservation and planning initiatives aimed to protect the East Side neighborhood's historic character, but faced significant resistance from residents (Cline, 2017, p. 24). Often, the focus was more cosmetic, such as requiring wooden clapboard siding or decorative brackets, things that certainly kept the quaint charm of the city but ignored the realities of affordability and the strain on local families (Cline, 2017, p. 25). Between 1970 and 1990, home values south of Calhoun Street in this neighborhood increased by 295% (Bures & Cain, 2008, p. 5).

Even in 1984, when the city took steps to provide a comprehensive analysis of the neighborhood's history, demographics, and physical environment, it did not address the issue of gentrification (Cline, 2017, p. 26). Left unchecked, census data now shows the real-life effects of gentrification in this neighborhood. What was once a large family town is now significantly single-member households, and housing prices increased by 82% from 2000 to 2010 (Cline, 2017, pp. 119, 133). Furthermore, racial demographics shifted from a majority black population to a majority white population, with a 74% decrease in black residents from 1950 to 2010 (Cline, 2017, p. 133).

As one observes the city of Charleston, there are pockets of quaint historical homes, overshadowed next door by newly built mansions.

As these homes are built, or even renovated, the cost of living has ballooned year after year. Families that can trace their ancestry back hundreds of years are now forced to move outward. This escalating cost of living, driven by new development and renovation, directly contributes to the displacement of long-term residents.

The 10-year housing plan launched by the city emphasizes affordability and mixed-use development, yet local zoning restrictions–particularly in neighboring Mount Pleasant–continue to privilege high-income, low-density growth. A unique aspect of Charleston's urbanization, similar to Porto, is the phenomenon of urban sprawl. While there has been an increase in population within the historic city center, the massive growth has been the circle just around that, in what can best be described as urban sprawl. This outward push forces affected families further into rural communities to find affordable housing, making access to city services, markets, transportation, and health facilities much less attainable. This contrasts with typical gentrification, where displaced residents might move to areas still relatively close to the city center. The combination of central gentrification and surrounding sprawl exacerbates the challenges for vulnerable populations.

3.2 The Urbanization of Porto, Portugal: From Heritage to Hospitality / A urbanização do Porto, Portugal: do patrimônio à hospitalidade

Porto, nestled along the Douro River, has a legacy just as intricate as Charleston. It endured political turbulence during the Estado Novo dictatorship, which left many of its central districts in a state of architectural and infrastructural stagnation. The city's recovery accelerated in the 2000s, culminating in Porto being named the European Best Destination multiple times. Its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site and increasing global recognition have made it a highly attractive destination for both visitors and new residents.

However, with fame came strain. Tourism in Porto increased by over 300% between 2010 and 2020. This boom led to a surge in foreign investment, particularly in the short-term rental market. There was an 88% increase in hotel establishments from 2007 to 2017 (Fernandes

et al., 2018). As of 2023, there are over 6,000 active Airbnb listings in the city, many concentrated in the UNESCO-protected historical zone (Santos & Martins, 2023; Franco & Santos, 2021). Neighborhoods like Ribeira and Bonfim have undergone visible transformations. Long-standing residents are either pushed out by rent increases or offered buyouts by investors. Local grocers and hardware stores have been replaced by cafés, boutiques, and coworking spaces. Although the aesthetic appeal of these districts remains, the soul–the daily life of locals–has been significantly altered. In addition, the introduction of the "Gold Visa" program in 2012 attracted foreign investment, further inflating real estate prices, allowing for shifts to more high-end accommodations (Fernandes et al., 2023, p. 6581). Further, the city of Porto has experienced a number of significant urban changes due to large-scale events, from the European Football Cup in 2004, to Ryan Air opening a main base in 2009, and the creation of a metro system between 2001 and 2005. Ultimately, these all complicated the total urbanization of the city to increase its gentrification issues.

This is not simply a new trend. The Porto municipality participated in the Urban Audit project in 1998, which assessed living conditions across European cities (Santos & Martins, 2007, p. 411). It became clear that urbanization was leading to issues like environmental degradation, social exclusion, and insecurity (Santos & Martins, 2007, p. 413). The city's policies–such as the "MorAr Porto" program–aim to regulate housing and improve livability. Yet enforcement is inconsistent, and tourism's economic benefits make it politically challenging to limit investor interest. According to a study by Santos (2023), the shift from long-term to short-term rentals correlates directly with depopulation trends in historic areas, particularly among elderly and working-class citizens.

In Porto, the demand for short-term rental accommodations (like Airbnb), boutique hotels, and tourist-oriented businesses has led to the conversion of residential buildings, rising property values, and increased rents. This commercialization of residential areas displaces long-term residents and alters the traditional character of neighborhoods. Things that may seem trivial, such as traffic congestion, access to public transportation, shared mobility, and air quality all become impacted by a influx of a dense urban population, especially one that is not there

with long term ties (Jardim et al., 2023). The impact of gentrification has significantly impacted native families, with local stable populations remaining either the same or significantly lower, as tourist and short-term or "floating" city users continue to rise (Fernandes et al., 2018).

As gentrification and urbanization affect Porto, urban environments are affecting residents' health in complex ways. Displacement of the local residents has changed a variety of local amenities and services, and most investments have been to the benefit of the affluent population (Santos & Martins, 2023). This can be seen by the prevalence of English names in stores, often contributing to a sense of exclusion for native populations. Frequently, vulnerable groups, particularly older adults and economically deprived individuals, are more adversely affected by these changes (Santos & Martins, 2023, p. 10).

4. LEARNING POINTS AND PREVENTATIVE MEASURES / PONTOS DE APRENDIZAGEM E MEDIDAS PREVENTIVAS

Both Charleston and Porto have implemented various measures to manage urban growth and address the challenges of gentrification. However, the efficacy of these strategies varies, and both cities continue to grapple with balancing development with preservation and equity. Both cities illustrate the double-edged sword of urban revitalization: while it can bring economic benefits and improve infrastructure, it often comes at the cost of displacing long-term residents and eroding cultural heritage. Even further, the focus on climate stability over local economy has shifted some efforts in protecting populations from gentrification's forces. The urban sprawl observed in both contexts further complicates the issue, pushing vulnerable populations to the periphery and straining public services.

4.1 Charleston's Approach / Abordagem de Charleston

Charleston has a long-standing history valuing preservation and its local waterways, with a movement initiated as early as the 1920s that led to the cleaning and restoration of historic downtown houses

in the 1970s and 1980s (Charleston: A historical overview, 2007). This successful preservation effort, while protecting architectural heritage, inadvertently contributed to the city's desirability and subsequent increase in property values, leading to higher property taxes that forced many native Charlestonians to move to the suburbs. The 2000 U.S. Census reflected this exodus, showing that fewer than half of the historic peninsula's inhabitants were born in South Carolina (United States Census, South Carolina profile, 2025).

More recently, Charleston has focused on affordable housing as part of a 10-year plan, acknowledging the need to address the displacement issue (City of Charleston Comprehensive Plan, 2020). This legal framework, adopted in 2020, for housing and affordability has centered on zoning ordinances and incentive programs, introducing provisions for mixed-use development and voluntary density bonuses for developers who include affordable housing units (City of Charleston Comprehensive Plan, 2020). However, zoning ordinances and their limitations, particularly in areas like Mount Pleasant, Charleston's suburban neighbor, indicate ongoing struggles to control growth and maintain affordability. What started as an 180-day ban on new apartment plans in April of 2016, was soon extended into a formal two-year ban on new apartments and town homes in 2017 and ultimately was extended for seven years (Mount Pleasant Ordinance No. 25035, 2018; Slade, 2023). While this was intended to ease infrastructure strain, it unintentionally limited unaffordable housing supply. In federal terms, Charleston relies heavily on allocations from the *Housing and Community Development Act of 1974* which funds some affordable housing projects but have not kept pace with rising land values (Housing and Community Development Act, 1974). Inclusionary zoning remains voluntary in Charleston and its surrounding suburbs; without mandatory requirements, the legal framework continues to privilege high-income, low-density development.

While directly across the harbor from Charleston, the town of Mount Pleasant, which now sees significant urban sprawl from Charleston, was primarily agricultural land from the 1600s to the 1900s, and it wasn't until around the 1990s that developers attempted to create more aesthetically pleasing, dense, and traditional communities in this area just off the Charleston Peninsula (Ferillo, 2021). For example, a

brand new brick home in 1987, in the mature neighborhood of Wando Lakes fetched $87,000 (Empire Properties, 2025). In 2025, the median sale price in Mount Pleasant is $875,000 (Rocket Homes, 2025). To add to this, the median household income in Charleston County is under $90,000 annually, making it factually impossible for many to purchase a home (Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2025). One of these zoning ordinance initiatives that could provide a solution to address not only the burdens of affordable housing, but the social and community effects of gentrification is inclusionary zoning (Tecklenburg, 2021, p. 716). This form of zoning incentivizes developers to offer a percentage of units at below-market prices, attempting to promote economic diversity and generate affordable housing with minimal public expenditure (Tecklenburg, 2021, p. 717). Charleston and even Mount Pleasant currently offer density bonuses to developers who are willing to provide affordable housing units voluntarily (City of Charleston Zoning, 2019, § 54-299; Mount Pleasant Development Code, 2023, § 154.08).

These difficult decisions go further as discussions around limiting home-building permits and the expiration of apartment bans highlight the tension between development and managing population influx. Mount Pleasant had initiated a ban on new apartments and townhomes simply because the city's rapid growth could not be supported by its limited infrastructure without considering the broader impacts (Sharpe, 2025). Infrastructure needs were outweighed by the costs of a spike in local housing and rent costs, due to a simple lack of home availability. This exacerbated gentrification's effects when young homebuyers could not afford to stay near their generational homes, and seniors could no longer afford to age in place.

While affordable housing has not been the winning arrow in Charleston's quiver, the families who can trace their roots back to Gullah Geechee culture have found some protection by way of the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, designated by Congress, spanning from North Carolina down to Florida (Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Commission, National Heritage Areas Act of 2006). The barrier and local islands surrounding Charleston's peninsula have implemented many development regulations akin to affordable housing protections, but instead aimed at preserving and increasing the resilience of the

Gullah Geechee presence in those native lands (Swan, 2025). While minimal, these standards have given the community faith that there is a means to slowing the gentrification trends that have pushed many native families away.

In addition, Charleston and its local communities continue to focus on climate impact preservation. Even in a time when climate change and discussions of how to protect the environment can become political, across the board in Charleston communities have many initiatives to protect local waterways, wildlife, and sea life. From single-use plastic bans and encouraging paper bags, to the prohibition of Grand Tree removals without permits, to the ban of new sea walls regardless of the stature of the home built on the shore, many efforts have been made to respect the local earth community, which in a way retains the historical integrity of the city (Charleston County Ordinance, Sec. 7.5-141-146.2025; Mount Pleasant Zoning Code, Sec. 156.70-710, 2025).

4.2 Porto's Approach / Abordagem do Porto

Porto's urban planning efforts have largely focused on managing its dynamic growth, particularly in relation to traffic, public transport, and air quality (Jardim et al., 2023). While these measures contribute to a more sustainable urban environment, their direct impact on mitigating gentrification, especially tourism-driven displacement, is less clear.

The city has attempted to regulate short-term rentals and urban rehabilitation programs; however, the sheer scale of tourism and investment can often overwhelm such measures. In 2014, Portugal passed a measure that reformed current rental laws and allowed municipalities to regulate local accommodation, or *alojamento local*, such as Airbnb units (Decreto-Lei n.º 128/2014, de 29 de Agosto; Directorate of Tourism Supply Development, 2016). By 2017, local municipalities were given the authority to create "containment areas" limiting new tourist accommodations in saturated neighborhoods (Fernandes et al., 2018; Revista de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território (GOT)). That same year municipalities were given some authority to protect local historical and cultural establishments via a national law, freezing rents for 5 years and giving preference of transfer (Fernandes et al., 2018,

p.195; Lei n.° 42/2017, de 14 de junho). Ultimately, as recently as 2023 and 2024, these containment measures restrictions have continued and even been added to by considering energy efficiency of these homes (Decreto-Lei n.° 76/2024, de 23 de outubro; ; Lei n.° 56/2023, de 6 de outubro).

In Porto, these powers were applied to the UNESCO heritage zone in 2018. Complementing these restrictions, the "1st Right" program, or *Programa 1.° Direito*, was launched, a national housing initiative designed to support municipalities in providing housing for families lacking adequate accommodations, targeting 3,000 families in need (Fernandes et al., 2023, p. 11). This came with a total investment of EUR 119 million to be utilized from 2000 to 2025 to alleviate the severe housing shortages. Porto implemented this through its MorAr Porto plan, combining national funding with local action to rehabilitate vacant buildings for affordable housing (Greene, 2019; Municipality of Porto, 2019). In addition, a project labeled "Porto De Tradição" aimed to protect local businesses and cultural entities from gentrification (Fernandes et al., 2023, p. 11). This ordinance provided preferential leasing and subsidies to protect long-standing businesses from displacement (Lei n.° 42/2017). These instruments collectively illustrate the city's multi-level legal response to tourism-driven urbanization, though enforcement remains uneven.

Opponents argue that short-term rentals can even provide various economic benefits, such as job creation and urban revitalization, and while recent legislation in Porto has continued housing restrictions, many have seen a trend of easing measures (Carvalho & Francisco, 2024; Olazábal & Rodrigues, 2024) However, as these benefits slow down, the effects of gentrification seep in with reduced housing availability and rising housing prices (Albuquerque et al., 2024, p. 83) Ultimately, a balance needs to be found between urban tourism and cultural heritage in order for sustainable development to thrive.

"Urban Circular" initiatives appear to show promise, addressing not just gentrification in historic city centers, but tying in the urban sprawl that cities like Porto (and Charleston) are facing, and Porto has seen a significant increase in these initiatives since 2000 (Porsch et al., 2020). These types of circular designed cities have gained attention all throughout the EU and China, especially after the recent global pandemic

in 2019 (Pegorin et al., 2024). Porto has an ambitious plan of becoming a circular city by 2030, broadening resources between each layer of the urban dynamic and suburban sprawl, and its roadmap includes many key infrastructure developments that combat gentrification issues (Porsch et al., 2020, p. 17). Residents are already realizing results, with 16 out of 18 districts having urban garden initiatives, and a growth in ride-sharing services and co-working spaces in such cities (Porsch et al., 2020). While many of these initiatives often find great results in the "green" space, their efficacy in slowing gentrification remains to be seen. Often, there is a tendency to overlook the complexity of urban systems, and in protecting local culture, it is important to address social dimensions alongside economic and environmental factors (Pegorin et al., 2024). The question remains whether this will be the ultimate solution for Porto going forward.

5. FIGHTING FORWARD IN THE RACE AGAINST GENTRIFICATION / LUTANDO NA CORRIDA CONTRA A GENTRIFICAÇÃO

Charleston and Porto, while shaped by unique socio-historical legacies, offer a mirror through which we can understand how global trends in urbanization and gentrification manifest in distinct yet eerily similar ways. The pressures of increased tourism, historic preservation, and lifestyle migration collide with local cultures and long-standing communities. Both cities must grapple with the difficult task of preserving identity in the face of modern economic growth.

Both Charleston and Porto have experienced significant population influxes driven by lifestyle migration, post-pandemic mobility, and tourism (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023; European Union 2024; Slade, 2025). In both cities, urban growth is accompanied by an upsurge in housing prices and a proliferation of short-term rentals. This development not only displaces local residents but also reshapes the sociocultural fabric of entire neighborhoods. In Charleston, gentrification is deeply intertwined with a legacy of racial injustice, while in Porto, it is more closely tied to economic exclusion through tourism-based redevelopment. The similarity in consequences, such as rising housing costs, cultural dilution, and

political marginalization of vulnerable communities, demonstrates how globalized urban dynamics can override local history unless constrained by well-targeted policy.

When analyzed together, Charleston and Porto reveal several concrete legal and policy opportunities. Laws and ordinances governing zoning, short-term rentals, and cultural heritage protection emerge as decisive instruments in shaping urban development. Inclusionary zoning, for instance, could move from Charleston's voluntary density bonuses to mandatory quotas embedded in municipal ordinances. Porto's national framework for short-term rentals demonstrates the potential of municipal empowerment, though its effectiveness hinges on rigorous enforcement (Decreto-Lei n.° 128/2014;Lei n.° 42/2017). Cultural heritage protections must also move beyond architecture: Charleston's federally designated Gullah Geechee zones offer one example of law recognizing intangible heritage, while *Porto's Porto de Tradição* initiative illustrates how municipal ordinances can safeguard local businesses and cultural life. Both cities could further experiment with legal tools such as community land trusts, tax-based disincentives for vacant properties, and binding master plans that explicitly incorporate anti-displacement measures.

Charleston's approach is deeply rooted in historic preservation and legal frameworks that attempt to shield long-standing black communities, such as through the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (Boley & Johnson Gaither, 2015, pp. 155-176). However, Charleston's zoning laws and housing initiatives often struggle to keep pace with the velocity of real estate investment and development. Despite the city's 10-year housing plan and affordable housing incentives, rising costs and limited regulatory scope have left many gaps, often isolating communities facing the most dire financial circumstances (Bertrand, 2025).

In contrast, Porto's more recent initiatives reflect a growing European trend toward "urban circularity"–efforts to address gentrification not just through housing policy, but through integrated environmental, social, and economic sustainability strategies. The "1st Right" program and the "Porto de Tradição" initiative indicate a greater emphasis on protecting not only affordability but also the city's intangible cultural assets (Fernandes et al., 2023, p. 11). However, enforcement remains a challenge in the face of overwhelming tourism-driven market forces.

Ultimately, Charleston and Porto reveal several legal and policy opportunities:

- Inclusionary zoning has been sporadically implemented in both cities but could be strengthened with legal mandates rather than voluntary incentives. Charleston's reliance on density bonuses may be insufficient without enforceable quotas.
- Short-term rental regulations are critical. Porto's difficulties in controlling Airbnb saturation suggest a need for legal caps, tiered taxation, and prioritization of long-term leases. Charleston could benefit from implementing stricter licensing and neighborhood caps for short-term rentals, particularly in historically Black neighborhoods.
- Cultural heritage protections should go beyond architectural preservation. Charleston's recognition of Gullah Geechee heritage offers a blueprint for integrating cultural, not just physical, preservation into city planning. Porto's efforts to preserve local businesses and signage could be enhanced with formal heritage zoning overlays.
- Anti-displacement funding mechanisms, such as community land trusts or municipal buy-back programs, may offer both cities new ways to retain residents amidst gentrification.

The juxtaposition of Charleston and Porto demonstrates that historic preservation alone is not enough–cities must proactively integrate equity into urban planning. Both cities are coastal and increasingly desirable places to live, but their policies must center long-term residents and historical narratives in order to maintain authenticity and justice.

Where Charleston's struggles are rooted in America's racial and economic stratification, Porto's challenges reveal the power of global tourism and capital in shaping local housing markets. Each city's shortcomings inform the other's potential. A transatlantic dialogue that fosters shared learning between coastal cities facing similar pressures could lay the groundwork for resilient, inclusive communities in an era of rapid global mobility.

6. CONCLUSIONS / CONCLUSÕES

This article has compared Charleston and Porto as transatlantic case studies of gentrification in historic coastal cities, demonstrating how urbanization pressures manifest differently yet converge in their social effects: displacement, cultural dilution, and affordability crises. Legally, Charleston's reliance on voluntary zoning incentives and federal block grants contrasts with Porto's use of national statutes empowering municipalities to regulate short-term rentals and launch subsidized housing programs. Yet, both frameworks struggle to fully contain the market forces driving gentrification.

The comparative perspective suggests three broader lessons. First, heritage preservation must be redefined legally to include cultural and social identity, not only architectural aesthetics. Second, anti-displacement measures require enforceable legal mandates, whether through mandatory inclusionary zoning in U.S. cities or stricter licensing caps for short-term rentals in European contexts. Third, legal frameworks must be evidence-based, integrating demographic, geographic, and housing market data into urban planning statutes. Current master plans, such as Charleston's 10-year plan, may simply not be enough to protect the wide range of issues that gentrification brings, beyond simply protecting architectural structures.

Future research is needed to go beyond publicly available resources, and to examine the role of master plans as binding legal tools for anti-gentrification, the potential of transnational legal instruments such as UNESCO heritage documents to protect other vulnerable populations such as Dubrovnik, Havana, or New Orleans, and comparing that data further to help understand the dynamics of gentrification in historic coastal cities. By integrating law, policy, and planning historic cities can chart a path toward sustainable growth that preserves both cultural heritage and social equity.

REFERENCES

Albuquerque, H., Quintela, J. A., & Marques, J. (2024). The impact of short-term rental accommodation in urban tourism: A comparative analysis of

tourists' and residents' perspectives. *Urban Science*, *8*(3), 83. https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci8030083

Battle, M. & White, J. (2013). African passages, Lowcountry adaptations. *Lowcountry Digital History Initiative* (LDHI). https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/africanpassageslowcountryadapt.

Bertrand, D. (2025, July 11). Housing gap challenges Charleston. *Charleston City Paper*, https://charlestoncitypaper.com/2025/07/11/housing-gap-challenges-charleston/

Boley, B. B., & Johnson Gaither, C. (2015). Exploring empowerment withing the Gullah Geechee cultural heritage corridor: implications for heritage tourism development in the Lowcountry. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. *11*(2), 155-176. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2015.1080712

Bures, R.M., & Cain, C. (2008). Dimensions of gentrification in a tourist city, *Population Association of America.* https://paa2008.popconf.org/papers/81623

Carvalho, L., & Francisco, M. (2024, November 21). Local accomodation – Changes to the legal regime in Portugal. *DLA Piper*. https://www.dlapiper.com/en-us/insights/publications/2024/11/local-accommodation-changes-to-the-legal-regime

Center for Neighborhood Technology. (2025). Determining the cost burden of housing and transportation expenses placed on typical Charleston household. *H + T Affordability Index*. https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/

Charleston County, South Carolina. (2025). *Code of Ordinances*, Chapter 7.5 Environment, Article V. Single Use Plastic Carryout Bags, Plastic Straws, and polystyrene/plastic foam products. Sec. 7.5-141-146. https://library.municode.com/sc/charleston_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_CH7.5EN_ARTVSIUSPLCABAPLSTPOPLFOPR

Charleston County. (2023, January 30). Housing our future: Charleston County's comprehensive plan for housing and housing affordability. https://charlestoncounty.org/hof/files/doclib/Housing-Our-Future-Public-Review.pdf

Charleston, South Carolina. (2019). § 54-299 Availability. *Charleston, South Carolina-Zoning* https://library.municode.com/sc/charleston/codes/zoning?nodeId=ART2LAUSRE_PT15WOHODIOPZO_S54-299AV

Charleston: A historical overview. (2007, December 1). *Publication of the American Dialect Society,* 92(1), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1215/-92-1-1

City of Charleston. (2020). Comprehensive Plan 2020–2030. City of Charleston Planning Department. https://www.charleston-sc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/31227/Final-City-Plan-Adopted-October-12-2021

Cline, C.L. (2017). *Development without displacement: Analyzing factors of historic neighborhoods threatened by gentrification* [Master's thesis, Clemson University]. TigerPrints. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/2612

Decreto-Lei n.° 128/2014. (2014, August 29). https://data.dre.pt/eli/dec-lei/128/2014/08/29/p/dre/pt/html

Decreto-Lei n.° 42/2017.(2017, June 14). https://data.dre.pt/eli/lei/42/2017/06/14/p/dre/pt/html

Decreto-Lei n.° 56/2023. (2023, October 6). https://data.dre.pt/eli/lei/56/2023/10/06/p/dre/pt/html

Decreto-Lei n.° 76/2024.(2023, October 23). https://data.dre.pt/eli/dec-lei/76/2024/10/23/p/dre/pt/html

Directorate of Tourism Supply Development. (2016). Local lodging legal regime. *Turismo de Portugal.* https://business.turismodeportugal.pt/SiteCollectionDocuments/alojamento-local/Guia-AL-ENG-nov-2017.pdf

Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. (2024, June 10). Portugal: 2023 saw highest number of resident migrants on record. *European Union: Migration and Home Affairs.* https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/portugal-2023-saw-highest-number-resident-migrants-record-2024-06-10_en

Dunn, R.S. (1971). The English Sugar Islands and the founding of South Carolina. *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 72(2).

Empire Properties. (2025). Charleston housing market: Charleston home prices in the last fifty years. https://charlestonempireproperties.com/hot-market-charleston-home-prices-in-the-last-fifty-years/

Eurostat. (2023). Urban audit database. European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat

Fenton, R.P. (2022, October 17). Gentrifying Black Charleston: Exploring the displacement of Charleston's African-American population from 2000 to 2020. South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs. https://cma.sc.gov/sites/cma/files/files/Gentrified%20Charleston%20Brief%20(1).pdf

Ferillo, A.C. (2021). *Enhancing a new urbanism community: Diversifying housing opportunities in I'On, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina* [Master's thesis, College of Charleston].ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, https://

www.proquest.com/openview/7afade546fed2d7dc54dd667e110d436/1 ?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Fernandes, J., Carvalho, L., Chamusca, P., & Pinto, J. (2018, December). Gentrification in Porto: problems and opportunities in the past and in the future of an internationally open city. Revista de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território (GOT), n.° 15 (dezembro). Centro de Estudos de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território, 177-198. dx.doi.org/10.17127/got/2018.15.008

Fernandes, J., Chamusca, P., Pinto, J., Tenreiro, J., & Figueiredo, P. (2023). Urban rehabilitation and tourism: Lessons from Porto (2010–2020). *Sustainability*, *15*(8), 6581. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15086581

Franco, S. & Santos, C.D. (2021). The impact of AirBnb on residential property values and rents: Evidence from Portugal. *Regional Science and Urban Economics,* 88 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2021.103667

Greene, D. (2019, October 21). The 2019 affordable rental programme. *Portugal Resident*. https://www.portugalresident.com/the-2019-affordable-rental-programme/

Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Commission, Designation by U.S. Congress. National Heritage Areas Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-338, sec. 295 et seq., 120 Stat. 1850, (2006).

Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 93-383, 88 Stat. 633 (1974) https://www.congress.gov/93/statute/STATUTE-88/STATUTE-88-Pg633.pdf

Jardim, B., de Castro Neto, M., & Calçada, P. (2023). Urban dynamic in high spatiotemporal resolution: The case study of Porto. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 98, 104867. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2023.104867

Marcus, J.S. (2022). COVID-19 and the shift to remote work. *Policy Contribution,* 22(9), 1-23. https://www.bruegel.org/sites/default/files/private/2022-06/PC-09-2022.pdf

Mount Pleasant, S.C. (2018). Ordinance No. 25035. An ordinance to provide for a temporary moratorium on the acceptance and processing of major subdivision applications in Charleston County historic districts. *Mount Pleasant Code of Ordinances*. https://www.tompsc.com/DocumentCenter/View/51777/25035-FINAL

Mount Pleasant, S.C. (2023). Development Code § 154.08. Provisions for affordable housing. *Mount Pleasant Code of Ordinances* https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/mtpleasantsc/latest/mpleasant_sc/0-0-0-1300

Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. (2025). *Code of Ordinances,* Chapter 156: Zoning Code, Subchapter E: Tree Protection, §§ 156.70-710. https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/mtpleasantsc/latest/mpleasant_sc/0-0-0-137107

Municipality of Porto. (2019) *MorAr Porto Program [Programa Municipal de Habitação Acessível].*

Nash, R. C. (1992). Urbanization in the colonial South: Charleston, South Carolina, as a case study. *Journal of Urban History,* 19(1), 3-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/009614429201900101

National Ocean Service. (2024, June 16). What percentage of the American population lives near the coast? Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/population.html

Olazábal, T., & Rodrigues, J. (2024, October 28). Amendments to short term local rental establishments in Portugal. *Lexology.* https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=5e24d6f8-4a25-473d-8e25-039878aed852

Pegorin, M.C., Caldeira-Pires, A. & Faria, E. (2024, February 8). Interactions between a circular city and other sustainable urban typologies: A review. *Discover Sustainability* 5(14). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-024-00184-8

Porsch, L., Rabuel, L., Klebba, M., Bergant, N., Romano, F., Van Sprang, H., Marini, M., & Gaugitsch, R. (2020, January 4). *Sharing: Stocktaking and assessment of typologies of urban circular collaborative economy Initiatives (*EPSON Targeted Analysis Final Report). European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/sharing_finalreport.pdf

Porto: City of the year, by Food and Travel. (2023, 28 January). *Porto Best City.* https://www.portobest.city/post/porto-city-of-the-year-by-food-and-travel

Quinn, A. (Broadcaster). (2024, 9 July). Charleston named no. 1 U.S. city for 12th year in a row by Travel and Leisure. [Television broadcast]. ABC 4 News. https://abcnews4.com/newsletter-daily/charleston-named-no-1-us-city-for-12th-year-in-a-row-by-travel-leisure-wciv-abc-news-4-today-show-best-city-in-the-world-award

Revista de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território (GOT), n.° 15 (2018 December), dx.doi.org/10.17127/got/2018.15.008

Rocket Homes. (2025, June). Mount Pleasant housing market report. *https://rocket.com/homes/market-reports/sc/mount-pleasant*

Santos, L. D., & Martins, I. (2007). Monitoring urban quality of life: The Porto Experience. *Social Indicators Research*, *80*(2), 411–425. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27734543

Sharpe, A. (2025, January 31). Mount Pleasant's 7-year ban on new apartments and townhomes has expired. How did it impact growth? *The Post and Courier*. https://www.postandcourier.com/news/apartment-ban-expired-mount-pleasant-housing-costs/article_22e15918-df19-11ef-9163-5fefbccf7579.html

Silva, J. P., Santos, C. J., Torres, E., Martínez-Manrique, L., Barros, H., & Ribeiro, A. I. (2023). A double-edged sword: Residents' views on the health consequences of gentrification in Porto, Portugal. *Social Science & Medicine* (1982), 336, 116259. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.116259

Slade, D. (2023, February 13). Mount Pleasant moves to extend ban on new apartments and condos, approves other limits. *The Post and Courier*. https://www.postandcourier.com/mount-pleasant/mount-pleasant-moves-to-extend-ban-on-new-apartments-and-condos-approves-other-limits/article_01592f34-ac83-11ed-8243-4b6e38ab3868.html

Slade, D. (2025, March 13). South Carolina's new resident numbers are skyrocketing. Here's where transplants are going. *Post and Courier.* https://www.postandcourier.com/news/south-carolina-census-growing-population/article_9f8b6fa2-f08b-11ef-813a-5f0dd107b074.html;

South Carolina Beachfront Management Act. S.C. Code Ann. § 48-39-250 et seq. (2024).

Swan, N. C. (2025). *A comparative analysis of cultural preservation on focused land-use regulations within the Gullah Geechee cultural heritage corridor of South Carolina* (Publication No. 4473) [Master's thesis, Clemson University]. Clemson OPEN. https://open.clemson.edu/all_theses/4473

Tecklenburg, A. (2021). Adopting a state-wide inclusionary zoning enabling statute: A rational way to produce affordable housing in Charleston, South Carolina. *Charleston Law Review* 15(4) 713, 716.

Tighe, J.R., Wright, J., Renner, R., & Hyra, D. (2015, November 13). *Gentrification and racial representation: A comparative analysis* [Conference presentation]. APPAM Fall Research Conference. https://www.american.edu/spa/metro-policy/upload/appam-gentrification-and-racial-representation.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000, 2010, 2020). Decennial census of population and housing. United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov

U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). Profile South Carolina. United States Census Bureau. https://data.census.gov/profile/South_Carolina?g=040XX00US45

Wilson, S. & Fischetti, T. (2010). Coastline population trends in the United States: 1960 to 2008. *Current Population Report, 25-1139.* https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2010/demo/p25-1139.pdf

Yeom, M. (2018). *Identifying, explaining, and rethinking gentrification* [Doctoral Dissertation, Cleveland State University]. ETD Archive. https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/1067

Zuk, M., Bierbaum, A., Chapple, K., Gorska, K., Loukaitou-Sideris, A., & Thomas, T. (2015) *Gentrification, displacement and the role of public investment: A literature review.* Urban Displacement Project. https://www.buildhealthyplaces.org/content/uploads/2018/04/Urban-Displacement-Project_Zuk-et-al_Gentrification_Lit_Review_2015.pdf