BioFi Project



Sinal do Vale

Financing a Regenerative Bioeconomy

RECÔNCAVO DA GUANABARA, ATLANTIC FOREST, BRAZIL **WEBSITE**

Sinal do Vale is a place-based laboratory for bioregional regeneration in the Atlantic Forest of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Founded in 2011 and based on a 200-hectare campus approximately 50 km from Rio de Janeiro, Sinal has evolved from restoring and stewarding its own landscape into an organization working across the wider Recôncavo da Guanabara bioregion.

The territory connects Guanabara Bay with the Atlantic Forest mountains of the Serra do Mar. Forests, mangroves, rivers and globally important biodiversity coexist with metropolitan expansion, industry, smallholder agriculture, traditional fishing communities and significant social inequality.

This proximity between one of Brazil's largest urban economies and an extraordinary natural landscape creates a compelling opportunity: to make ecological regeneration the foundation for a new, place-based economy.

Challenge

Restoration and conservation are often financed as isolated projects. Trees are planted, communities receive grants, enterprises are supported, and protected areas are created—but the relationships, institutions, markets and financial mechanisms connecting these interventions remain underfunded.

Sinal's challenge is therefore larger than restoring hectares. It is about building the ecological, social and economic infrastructure that allows an entire territory to regenerate, while creating livelihoods and economic activities whose success depends on healthier forests, watersheds, biodiversity and communities.

The hardest part to finance is often the connective tissue: trust-building, territorial governance, convening, mapping opportunities, developing pipelines, supporting early-stage enterprises, connecting producers to markets, and maintaining relationships over time. Grants frequently operate in short project cycles, while ecological restoration and territorial transformation require patient engagement. Investors, meanwhile, often enter only once an opportunity has already been developed and de-risked. This creates a missing middle between philanthropy and investment.

Model

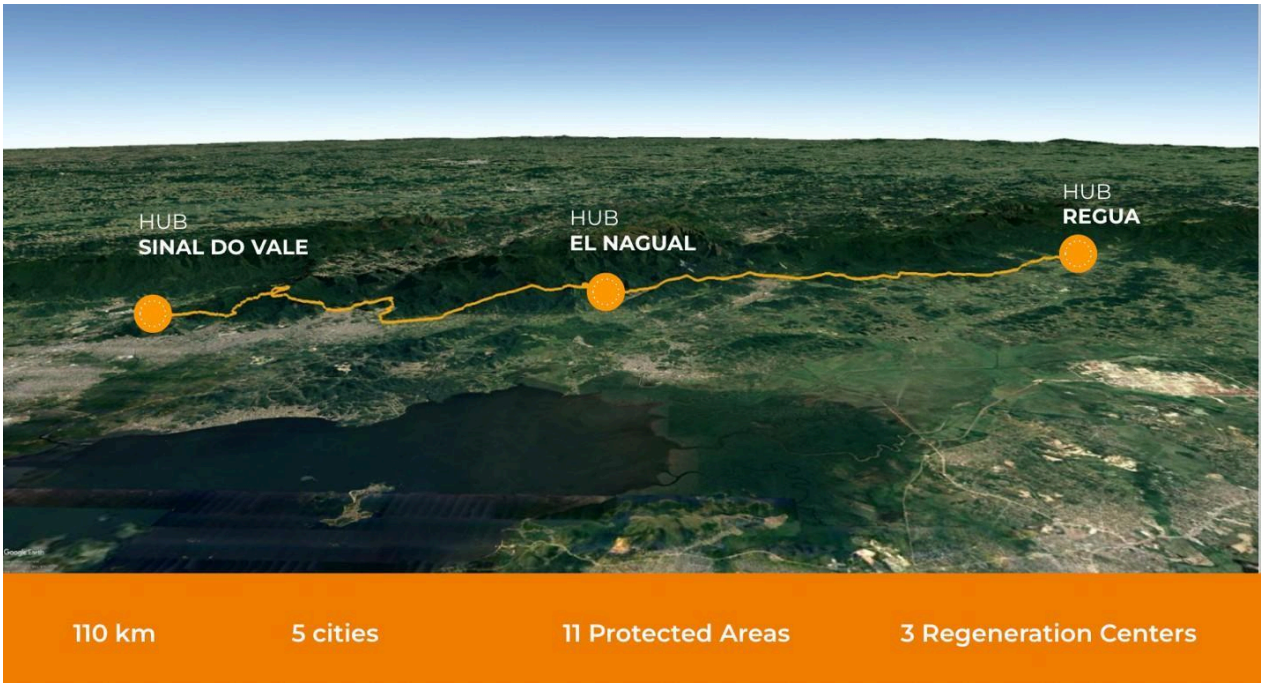
Sinal's model works across three interconnected scales:

BIOHUB → BIOREGION → REGENERATIVE BIOECONOMY

The Sinal do Vale campus functions as the Biohub: a physical and institutional platform combining ecosystem restoration, education, entrepreneurship, hospitality, research and convening. From this base, Sinal connects initiatives (including other Biohubs) across the wider bioregion, building relationships among communities, producers, enterprises and institutions. The longer-term aim is a regenerative bioeconomy in which livelihoods and economic activity increasingly contribute to restoring and sustaining the region's ecosystems.

A major piece of this connective infrastructure is the Caminho do Recôncavo da Guanabara, a 110-km regenerative trail linking five municipalities, eleven protected areas and three Biohubs. The trail is not only a tourism route: it connects conservation areas, communities, farmers, cultural heritage, local enterprises and regenerative tourism into a shared territorial vision.

The School of Restoration builds local capacity to restore Atlantic Forest landscapes by combining practical restoration with training, knowledge exchange and livelihood opportunities. It strengthens the human infrastructure required to expand restoration beyond individual properties.



Finance

Sinal's development has depended on a combination of philanthropic and catalytic capital, public resources, corporate partnerships and earned revenue. These flows exist today but remain largely separate; there is not yet a single vehicle pooling different forms of capital.

The Terra Prometida–Aboca partnership provides a concrete example. Sinal mediates between an international company and a settlement of smallholder farmers in the bioregion, helping build a responsible supply chain for medicinal plants. The partnership supports technical assistance, producer engagement, cultivation and processing development, traceability, and the institutional work required to connect farmers to the buyer.

The initiative began with three farming families and has developed production of acerola and stevia. Sinal's role is to build the conditions that allow producers, biodiversity and markets to become connected, with an increasing share of value eventually coming from the commercial relationship rather than grants.

Other existing flows include grants and partnerships for restoration, experimentation and training; earned revenue from hospitality and Learning Journeys; regenerative enterprises such as Madre Frutos; and emerging nature-finance mechanisms, including approximately 44 hectares of restored Atlantic Forest being brought into carbon certification.

The next step is to connect these flows through a blended bioregional financial architecture. Philanthropy could finance enabling conditions and early-stage risk; public and corporate resources could support restoration and shared infrastructure; and patient or impact-oriented

investment could help regenerative enterprises and value chains reach scale. The objective is not necessarily for all capital to flow through Sinal, but for Sinal to help create the infrastructure through which capital can flow effectively into the bioregion.

Outcomes

Fifteen years of work have created tangible foundations for this transition. Sinal has restored Atlantic Forest landscapes and is advancing nature finance through the certification of approximately 44 hectares of restored forest for carbon.

In Terra Prometida, Sinal and its partners have developed a UEBT-verified supply chain for medicinal plants with local farmers. Madre Frutos, a women-led enterprise connected to the Sinal Biohub, transforms locally abundant jackfruit into plant-based foods. Regenerative hospitality generates earned income through accommodation, food experiences, retreats and international Learning Journeys, while also bringing people and potential partners into the territory.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate different components of an emerging regenerative economy: environmental assets, biodiversity supply chains, local enterprises, restoration skills and livelihoods, and hospitality bringing people, knowledge and revenue into the territory.



Lessons

After fifteen years, Sinal has learned not to start with the financial instrument. It starts with the place: what needs to regenerate, who is already doing the work, what economic activities can reinforce that regeneration, and what capacities are missing. Only then does it ask what kind of capital is appropriate and at what stage.

It has also learned that different stages require different kinds of money. Trying to make every regenerative activity immediately investable does not work. Philanthropy can support experimentation, restoration, community organization and enabling conditions; corporate partnerships can develop supply chains; earned revenue strengthens institutional resilience; patient capital can help enterprises scale; and nature finance can create economic value from measurable ecological outcomes. The challenge is to sequence and combine these forms of capital rather than expecting one financial instrument to do everything.

Finally, relationships are infrastructure. Outside capital often lacks the trust and territorial knowledge required to operate effectively locally, while small producers and community enterprises often lack access to markets and capital. Sinal increasingly sees its role as bridging those worlds.

What's Next

Sinal is now moving from a portfolio of regenerative initiatives toward a more explicit bioregional investment strategy. The next phase is to strengthen territorial governance; expand the School of Restoration and network of Biohubs; develop pipelines of regenerative enterprises and restoration opportunities; strengthen Atlantic Forest value chains; and expand regenerative hospitality, tourism and opportunities in restoration, biodiversity, carbon and ecosystem services.

The larger proposition is a shift from funding isolated projects to investing in the long-term ecological, social and economic vitality of a place—and building an economy in which value generated by the territory can increasingly circulate back into its regeneration.

