

Brazil's bid for tech-powered economy

By Tayfun King
BBC Click

At first glance Florianopolis, in southern Brazil, resembles the quintessential picture postcard resort. It has become one of South America's most popular destinations, a magnet for sun seekers.

But for all its hedonism, Florianopolis has its gaze firmly fixed on something altogether more serious - becoming the regional technological powerhouse.

Sapiens Parque science park is the \$1.3bn (£81m) brainchild of the Brazilian government, as part of a wider \$24bn (£15bn) initiative to promote science and technology in the country.

"When we talk about the amount of money that Brazil is investing in science, technology and innovation... compared to the other countries in South America, we are talking about ten times more," says Jose Eduardo A Fiates, executive director of Sapiens Parque.

But for all the talk of the money, it is tangible innovation that the region wants to shout about - and the investment is spawning a variety of solutions to very local problems.

Over the limit

One Florianopolis innovation helps protect beach-goers from staying too long in the sun.

The Ozon-in information point currently lies in pole position to become a familiar sight up and down beaches around the world.



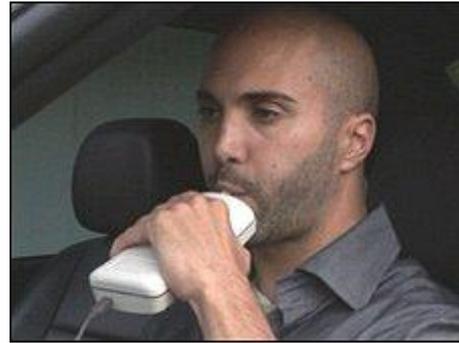
Investment is spawning a variety of solutions to local problems

At a glance it gives you a readout of UV radiation severity - and recommends protective measures to take, according to skin-type.

Florianopolis inventors have also helped with another red-hot issue in Brazil: drink-driving.

Engineers at the science centre have created the Bafometro, an in-car breathalyser that disables the engine - unless the driver passes a breath test.

It takes a photo of the driver, and alerts authorities if they are over the limit.



The Bafometro breathalyser immediately sends results to the police

"What makes the new model of Bafometro unique is the capability to transmit images wirelessly. With this, it removes doubt as to whether the person tested was the one driving or not," says Dhelyo Rodrigues, president of CSP, which manufactures the Bafometro.

That means companies can monitor their drivers from afar, and police can have test results and photographic evidence immediately transmitted to stations.

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Alongside the newer gadgets goes more venerable tech that has changed the old-style politics of Brazil.

Rodrigo Lossio
Technology journalist

Designed to combat electoral fraud, the electronic voting machine was launched nationally in 2000.

And it was after the debacle of the Bush-Gore US election that this particular gadget put Florianopolis on the international technology map.

"The electronic voting machine guarantees the authenticity of the person who is voting by digital printing, making the system more infallible against electoral corruption," says Luiz Henrique da Silveira, the governor of Santa Catarina.

It might not look like a very advanced piece of technology, maybe more like something from the 1970s - but that is one of its strengths.

The voting machines are very robust and have a 12-hour battery life. This means during elections it can be transported to the most remote regions.



Hoplion is trying to create a new breed of online game

Game gear

Another Florianopolis company hoping to bridge

the technological gap between Brazil and more developed nations is Hoplon, creators of the award-winning online game Taikodom.

The company has formed a partnership to take the multiplayer action game to 31 countries - and develop the concept towards a more social gaming experience.

"We're trying to create a new breed of online game here called a Massive Social Game or an MSG," says Tarquinio Teles, founder and boss of Hoplon.

"Being Brazilian, it's more in shades of grey and it's much more hedonistic than your usual sci-fi environment," he says.

But going global is not all hedonistic fun.

"Now it's our face that's showing outside of Brazil. It's our game. Whatever we do here, whatever we create here, will be what they know about us. It is quite frightening," says Hoplon employee Fabio Roger Manera.

In reaching out to the rest of the world, companies such as Hoplon are the exception. One problem say critics, is Brazilian companies tend to have an insular focus.

Observers believe that to really succeed, Brazil needs to look beyond its borders and take the initiative.

"The companies of Florianopolis need to begin to think globally. There are a lot of opportunities there and the companies don't believe they can get there," says technology journalist Rodrigo Lossio.

If Florianopolis is to become the Silicon Valley of South America, that lack of self-confidence needs to be addressed - as do other deep-set structural and cultural issues like low productivity, a shortage of tech graduates, and a bloated bureaucracy.

