

Municipal governance and the 2030 Agenda: An analysis of public policies in São Cristóvão, Brazil (2019–2025)

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

This research examines how the historic city of São Cristóvão (SE, Brazil) has incorporated the UN 2030 Agenda into local policy from 2019–2025. Although the city has gained external recognition through Sustainable Cities awards, a systematic analysis of its SDG-related governance is lacking. The study aims to: (i) map municipal programs across social, environmental and economic dimensions; (ii) classify them by the 17 SDGs; and (iii) assess coherence between policy goals and development indicators.

Figure 01. Location of São Cristóvão in Sergipe, Brazil, and aerial view of São Francisco Square, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2010).

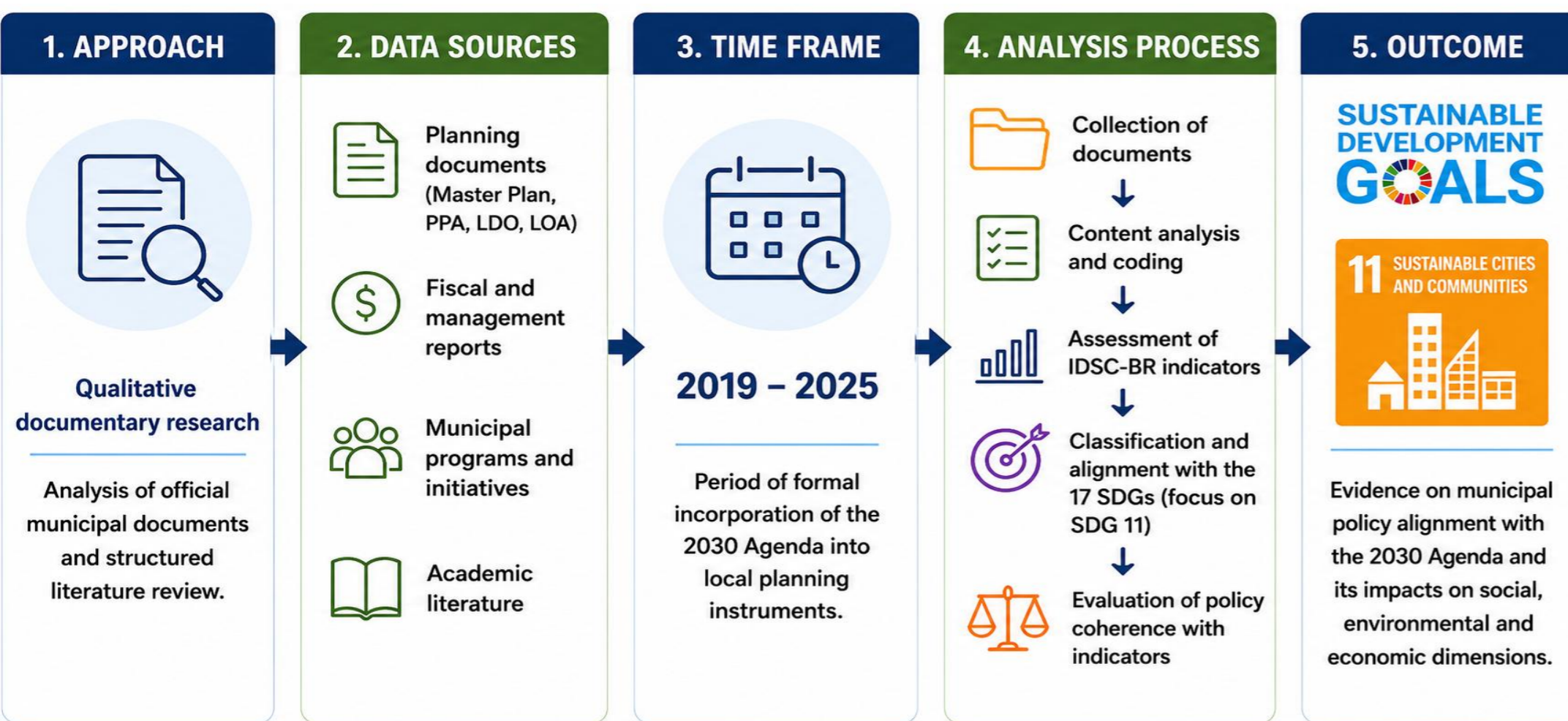


Key dates – Heritage protection

- 1938 - Declaration as a State Historical Monument City by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN).
- 1940 - Individual listing of buildings
- 1967 - Listing of the Architectural, Urbanistic, and Landscape Ensemble
- 2010 - World Heritage designation by UNESCO

UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2010

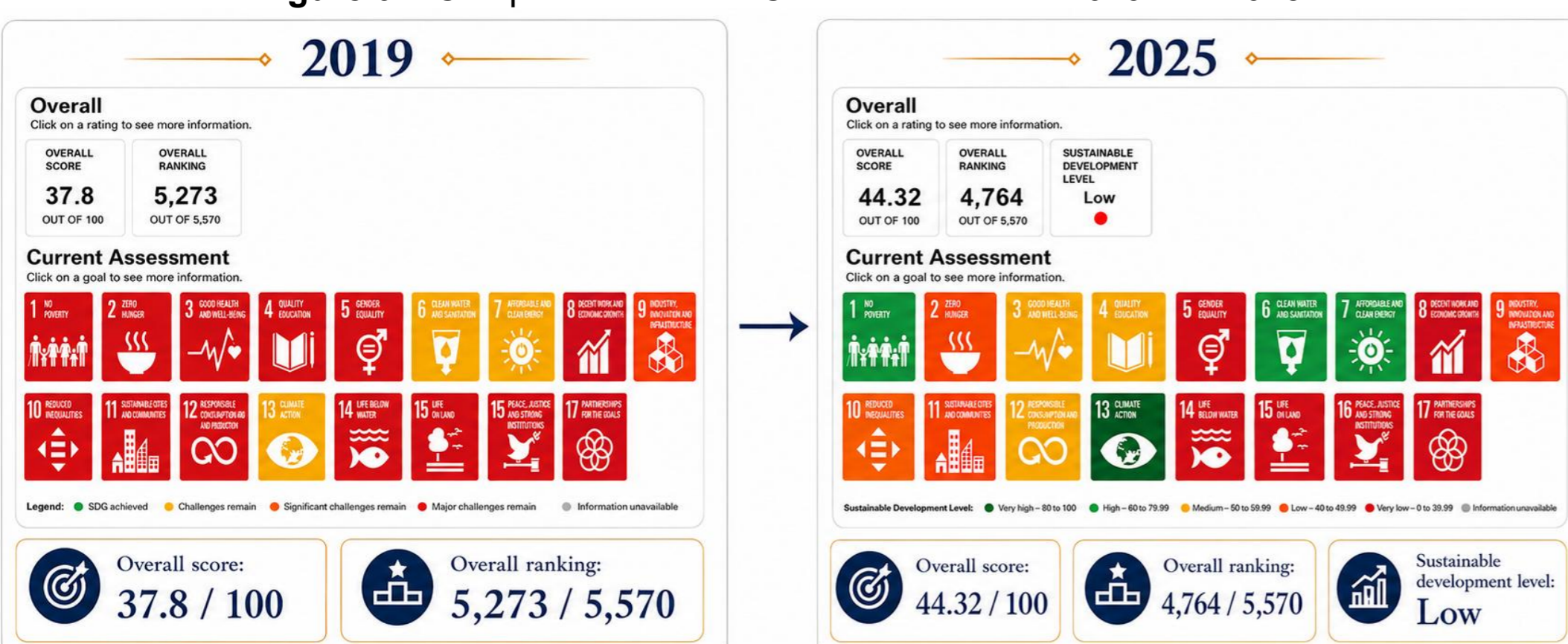
METHOD



RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Despite the improvement in score and ranking, São Cristóvão is still classified at a low sustainable development level in 2025. Figure 02 therefore suggests a tension between institutional progress in SDG implementation and persistent structural challenges in municipal sustainability performance.

Figure 02. Comparative of São Cristóvão between 2019 and 2025.



From 2019 to 2025, São Cristóvão advanced from 37.8 to 44.32 points, improving its ranking from 5,273rd to 4,764th among 5,570 municipalities. Progress is modest, and the municipality remains at a **LOW** sustainable development level.

Source: IDSC-BR / SDSN (2019; 2025).

The selected programmes indicate that São Cristóvão has sought to localise the 2030 Agenda through sectoral initiatives linked to education, water supply, social inclusion, food security, digital governance and cultural-environmental action, indicating how municipal policies have been framed in relation to specific SDGs. These initiatives have generated external recognition, including Sustainable Cities Awards and SDG Seals. However, such recognitions should be read as evidence of institutional process rather than as definitive proof of structural transformation. The table therefore supports the central argument of the study: São Cristóvão has advanced in the formal and programmatic incorporation of the SDGs, but the coherence between these initiatives and municipal development indicators still requires critical assessment.

Figure 3. Summary of selected municipal programmes associated with the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda in São Cristóvão.

Municipal Programme	Primary SDG	Description	Impact / Recognition
Meu Primeiro Lanchinho	SDG 4 Quality Education	Provides a meal before the start of the school day for students enrolled in the municipal school system.	Associated with improvements in IDEB performance between 2012 and 2020.
Águas de São Cristóvão	SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation	Involves the installation of tubular wells to provide treated water supply in rural settlements.	Awarded 1st place in the 2019 National Sustainable Cities Award, in the Access to Services category.
São Criativos	SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	Promotes the local creative economy.	Awarded 2nd place in the 2019 National Sustainable Cities Award, in the Economic Inequality category.
GeoDados	SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	Modernises public administration through the use of georeferenced data.	Contributed to the rationalisation of decision-making and public investment.
Diálogos, Diversidade e Inclusão	SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	Initiative aimed at reducing inequalities affecting the LGBTQIA+ population.	Awarded 1st place in the 2023 Sustainable Cities Award, in the economic category.
Food Security Reference Centre (Cresan)	SDGs 2 and 11	Initiative focused on food security.	Awarded 3rd place in the 2023 Sustainable Cities Award.
FASC Sustentável	SDGs 11 and 12	Initiative developed during the festival, focusing on environmental education, selective waste collection, eco-exchange activities, and waste management.	Received the SDG Seal in 2025 in recognition of its socio-environmental impact and broadened the understanding of the festival as both a cultural and an environmental policy.

Source: Organised by the author based on Andrade (2022) and information available on the official website of the Municipality of São Cristóvão (2021; 2022; 2023c; 2024c; 2024d; 2024e; 2025g; 2025h; 2025i).

CONCLUSION

São Cristóvão has made institutional advances in adopting the 2030 Agenda (SDG-focused planning, ODS commission, VLR preparation) but faces structural challenges. Economic fragility and infrastructure deficits limit progress. The study highlights a strong urban SDG framework but weak on-the-ground coherence: ambitious targets coexist with severe deficits in housing, transport and services for the poor. This case underlines the need for aligning municipal planning with concrete investments in basic services and social protection. Without addressing these gaps, local policies will struggle to translate sustainable development rhetoric into inclusive, resilient outcomes.

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