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Teaching Case

The airports PPP in the republic of Bruzundanga: everyone's fight for the crown jewels

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Abstract

This teaching case presents the tension between technical, political, and economic interests in the preparation of the airport concession notice for the imaginary Republic of Bruzundanga. Technical studies and analyses conclude that two large and surplus airports and twelve small and deficit airports should be jointly tendered. The Minister of Infrastructure, however, presents political and economic elements for bidding for just one large airport. The National Secretary of Air Transport is responsible for adjustments, preferably with specialized support. The study can be inserted into the opposition between political will and technical foundations, in the nuances inherent to the negotiation of large projects, in the importance of a good ex-ante analysis of the social and economic impact of the contract, as well as in the politicization of bureaucracy through the induction of regional interests in national airport policy.

KEYWORDS: Political will. Technical basis. Ex ante analysis. Politicization of bureaucracy.

A PPP dos aeroportos na república de Bruzundanga: a disputa de todos pelas joias da coroa

Resumo

Este caso de ensino apresenta a tensão entre interesses técnicos, políticos e econômicos na elaboração do edital de concessão de aeroportos da imaginária República de Bruzundanga. Estudos e análises técnicos concluem pela licitação conjunta de dois aeroportos grandes e superavitários, bem como de mais doze pequenos e deficitários. O ministro da Infraestrutura, contudo, apresenta elementos políticos e econômicos

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para a licitação de apenas um grande aeroporto, o que alteraria as pesquisas. Cabe ao secretário nacional de Transporte Aéreo efetuar os eventuais ajustes, de preferência com embasamento especializado. O estudo pode ser inserido na oposição entre vontade política e fundamentação técnica, nas nuances inerentes à negociação de grandes empreendimentos, na importância de uma boa análise *ex ante* do impacto social e econômico do contrato, assim como na politização da burocracia mediante indução de interesses regionais na política aeroportuária nacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Vontade política. Fundamentação técnica. Análise ex ante. Politização da burocracia.

El PPP de los aeropuertos de la República de Bruzundanga: la lucha de todos por las joyas de la corona

Resumen

Este caso didáctico presenta la tensión entre intereses técnicos, políticos y económicos en la preparación del anuncio de concesión de aeropuertos para la imaginaria República de Bruzundanga. Los estudios y análisis técnicos concluyen que deberían licitarse conjuntamente dos aeropuertos grandes y superavitarios, y de otros doce aeropuertos pequeños y deficitarios. El ministro de Infraestructura, sin embargo, presenta elementos políticos y económicos para licitar solo un gran aeropuerto, lo que alteraría la investigación. Corresponde a la Secretaría Nacional de Transporte Aéreo realizar cualquier ajuste, preferiblemente con apoyo especializado. El estudio puede insertarse en la oposición entre voluntad política y fundamento técnico, en los matices inherentes a la negociación de grandes proyectos, en la importancia de un buen análisis ex ante del impacto social y económico del contrato, así como en la politización de la burocracia mediante la inducción de intereses regionales en la política aeroportuaria nacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Voluntad política. Base técnica. Análisis ex ante. Politización de la burocracia.

INTRODUCTION

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) for airports in the Republic of Bruzundanga have been formatted in blocks. These blocks have large airports being offered together with small ones, often those without economic and financial viability to be offered alone. The management carried out by the public airport infrastructure company already used the attractiveness of profitable airports to compensate the deficit ones, thus providing them with low fares, increased investment and quality in administration. This modeling, however, increases the level of discretion in different combinations, giving rise to conflicts of technical, economic and political interests.

The fundamental condition for this model to work is to ensure that the loss-making airports that become part of the block do not make the concession unviable. In other words, small airports should not push away those interested in managing the large ones.

In this case, employees from the Ministry of Infrastructure analyzed the airports on the list of interest for concession and found the ideal model with the inclusion of two large airports – Wright Brothers and Cegonhas – and twelve other small ones. The result came from the study of passenger movement, the saturation of local infrastructure, the need for works and improvements, historic designations, potential growth, general efficiency of operations, competition from other

aerodromes and the expected return on investment. In other words, there was an analysis of the financial attractiveness and the resulting interest of the private sector in participating in the bidding according to this design.

The composition of the block with fourteen airports took place after several simulations carried out by the ministry's technical staff, with different propositions and financial estimates. The objective was to find sustainable blocks, capable of guaranteeing the quality to citizens and users of the service provision.

STRONG WINDS AND TURBULENCE IN BRUZUNDANGA'S AIRPORTS MANAGEMENT

The president of the Republic of Bruzundanga is worried about the result of the next round of airport auctions, as the presidential elections are close and PPPs are a major banner of his government program. A failure at this point would also have disastrous consequences for the Ministers of Infrastructure's political career. He has been under daily pressure for the inclusion or exclusion of airports in the next round of concessions.

Political pressure is huge, whether through representatives of small cities, those of the smaller airports, or through representatives of the State of Guanabara, where Wright Brothers airport is located. The last one is due to the fear that such an airport, if granted, will compete with the Rei Leão airport, already granted before, and which has generated an accumulated loss of 7.5 billion dollars since the beginning of the PPP contract in 2014.

In tense environment full of different interests, there is no clear opposition between technique and politics. Although divergent, they merge into a creative solution that highlights the scope of discretion of the public administration in the design of a PPP: Wright Brothers is removed from the block to be offered later, together with Rei Leão airport. The return of the Rei Leão is obtained consensually with the current administrator.

Since Cegonhas airport is the most attractive, it was possible to keep several smaller airports at its block. However, with the departure of the Wright Brothers, two small airports left the block in an attempt to equalize the advantage.

Although the solution was adopted at an advanced stage of the concessions process, there's work to be done to accommodate the different interests, aiming to reconcile politics and technique in a creative and challenging way.

THE TAFFY PEDDLER DO WHAT HE PLEASES

The President of the Republic is worried about the possibility of not fulfilling one of his campaign promises. In the last election, he assured that he would solve the airport problem and deepen the national privatization plan, but three years have passed since his inauguration and the results obtained are far below that.

The issue of airports in the state of Guanabara is particularly critical, since one of those that serve the State capital, Rei Leão, is having successive deficits. There's already a rumor about returning

the concession for a new auction.

The president, bothered by criticism of the delay in auctions, does not know what to expect from the opposition with the eventual closure of Rei Leão.

In the midst of this political storm, the President's advisor picked up the phone and called the Minister's office. The call was answered by the secretary, who was unable to say where the minister was. Afterwards, the President himself, already angry, managed a video call:

— Sir Minister, how are you? How's the airports' bidding notice?

— Good morning, Mr. President. I'm good. How are you? We are already in the final phase. We have two options. We decide today whether Wright Brothers airport will be...

The president interrupted the Minister's speech. He doesn't like long or detailed conversations over the telephone, as he has always suspected that his devices were bugged by the CIA, China and opposition agents.

— Great, great, great. Please send the final version to the Civil House today, ok? The agency and the Secretary of State are aligned, right?

— Yes sir. Everything is alright.

— I'm counting on you, okay?

— Okay, Mr. President. Thanks. Good morning to you sir!

In a harsh manner, the president said goodbye:

— Have a good time!

The Minister then called his secretary:

— Etelvina, call the secretary right away, please.

Therefore, a conference call was scheduled with the National Secretary of Air Transport.

THE JEWELS IN THE CROWN

The minister knew that his political career was at stake. Eventual success at airport auctions could propel him to bigger flights. But it was not simple to balance the interests at stake.

At the very beginning of the process, an auction model was designed for airport lots in which two of the largest in the country, Cegonhas and Wright Brothers, would be auctioned together with twelve other smaller ones.

In the first meetings, the following table was presented to the minister:

BOX 1**Analysis of the operational results of Bruzundanga airports**

Airport	Annual operating income the management of the public company	Estimated operating income under PPP management
Cegonhas	+ R\$ 1.260.145.300,03	25% increase in profit
Wright Brothers	+ R\$ 980.100.850,04	20% increase in profit
Pitomba	- R\$ 112.180.005,52	Deficit reduction, with neutral operating result
Sobradinho	- R\$ 83.380.005,59	Deficit reduction by 70%
Piranhas	- R\$ 158.054.045,06	Deficit reduction by 30%
Falcão	- R\$ 131.250.045,20	Deficit reduction by 20%
Samambaia	- R\$ 101.250.045,20	Deficit reduction by 80%
Crocodilo	- R\$ 178.195.000,84	Deficit reduction, with neutral operating result
Palmares	- R\$ 258.437.125,47	Deficit reduction by 10%
Tubarão	- R\$ 112.236.940,32	Deficit reduction by 50%
Asa Norte	- R\$ 122.580.694,23	Deficit reduction by 35%
Castanheiras	- R\$ 48.067.123,00	Deficit reduction by 40%
Araucárias	- R\$ 89.180.005,52	Deficit reduction by 80%
Presidente Joselito	- R\$ 47.658.226,25	Deficit reduction by 10%

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Based on this data, the aim is to create a block that would support the loss-making airports, guaranteeing significant bids in the auction, given the State's fiscal crisis.

The discussion gained political nuances when representatives from Guanabara and from the most different locations in the country began to exert pressure in favor of local interests in choosing the airports that would make up the next block of concessions.

The Guanabara deputies demanded that the Wright Brothers leaves the next block and remains reserved to save the Rei Leão in the future. They are in the same city and Rei Leão is in a pretty bad shape.

As if it wasn't enough, the Minister had been receiving requests from politicians from all cities

with airports considered for inclusion in this round of auction.

Finally, it was time for the final meeting with the national secretary of Air Transport.

Without wasting time, the Minister said:

— Thank you for your prompt appearance. The issue is urgent and we have already taken too long on the subject, Mr. Secretary. Could you summarize how the process is going on, please?

— Of course! Seventh round of airport auctions. We chose several airports that were in deficit in the hands of the public company. According to the Secretariat's reports, these micro airports together operated with an average annual deficit of R\$ 1.4 billion over the last five years. The initial idea was to put them up for auction within the same block as the two large airports, the jewels in the crown: Cegonhas and Wright Brothers, to provide attractiveness, guaranteeing joint operation with the prospect of an average annual surplus of R\$ 800 million for the next fifteen years, according to the projections of our technicians. This is in the studies approved by PMI and already has technical and political support to continue...

The minister shook his head and interrupted the explanation:

— Excuse me, Mr. Secretary. I thought I made it very clear that the Wright Brothers can't be in this round. We will just have one big airport. To serve the Guanabara state bench, we will leave the Wright Brothers for a future block together with Rei Leão.

— I thought the doubt had returned after the hearing with those interested companies, remember? They reinforced the studies that show that removing the Wright Brothers could generate a stampede of the biggest administrators and leave us without interested parties. In an election year, it would be a fiasco.

— The Wright Brothers go to the next round and that's my final decision! The political pressure from the state of Guanabara is enormous. Furthermore, I am convinced that the synergy of two large airports in the same state, in the hands of the same administrator, can make the auction much more attractive than in this block.

— Are you talking about the Rei Leão? It has made a lot of losses, right? We will need to assess whether, in fact, the synergy with the Wright Brothers makes the block economically viable. By the way, will it really be returned by the current dealer?

— The administrators have already made it clear that they no longer want it. Furthermore, they called a possible competition with Wright Brothers "unacceptable", especially if starts to include international flights.

— So the idea is to bring Rei Leão together with Wright Brothers and make a Guanabara-only block?

— Exactly. With one shot, we save the Rei Leão, please the Guanabara gang and create a strategic block with great regional synergy. It will be a blast!

— But what about the current block? Without the Wright Brothers? I do think it could work, but we're going to risk attractiveness. Should I now ask the team to redo the ex ante planning and analysis?

At that moment, the phone in the Minister's office rang and he said:

— One minute, Secretary...

And he left momentarily to answer the call.

PITOMBA'S DESTINY IS IN YOUR HANDS

On the other side of the line was a congressman, born and raised in small Pitomba, a singer famous around the city. He was concerned about the possibility of the Wright Brothers airport be excluded from the seventh round of PPP auctions, which would also exclude some of the smaller ones. It was necessary to prevent Pitomba airport from being among those excluded.

Therefore, he decided to call the Minister of Infrastructure.

— Hello? Is it the Minister?

— Congressman! Long time no see! I really liked your latest hit: “Three beers in your condo”.

With no jokes, the deputy continued:

— How are you, Minister? I imagine you already know what I want to talk about. And it's not about music.

— I can't think of anything else. And when I sleep, I dream about it.

Calmer, the deputy vented:

— Me too, my friend. But look: a little bird told me that some of those small airports are going to leave the seventh round of auctions. I had a hard time believing it.

— Deputy, we are making arrangements in the block...

Suspecting that his hometown would be outside the next block of concessions, the deputy shouted:

— Just don't tell me that my beloved Pitomba, the city where I was born, is going to leave the Cegonhas' block!

— Studies show that...

The deputy interrupted the minister's speech, something he rarely did:

— Pitomba? No! Just don't, minister! That airport is the heart of the city. It brings the many Bali employees, the tourists... A lot of people depend on it. If he doesn't go to auction with Cegonhas, no one will want to take it. And an entire city will suffer. That's outrageous!

— Calm down, congressman. As I was saying, studies show that Pitomba is only viable with Cegonhas. It stays. It's closed matter.

— And who leaves?

— We don't know yet.

— No idea? We are at the last minute of the game.

— Off records, ok? Araucaria and Castanheiras. But it's not defined yet.

— All good then. The people of Pitomba and I want you to know the good you are doing for our city. And you are now invited to my next concert. VIP. “All you can drink”.

— See you, congressman.

The minister returned to the meeting with the National Secretary of Air Transport.

IS IT COMING OR NOT?

The Secretary, a modest and reserved man, joined the public service through a competitive process and never had political intentions. However, he had the opportunity to work in the past with the current minister, who liked his technical approach.

The political dynamics do not please him, but the logic of the meeting he was attending indicated

the need to redo several technical studies for political reasons.

While waiting for the Minister, he rambled on about what criteria would be used to exclude some airports from the auction. There were good arguments for maintaining any of them.

His thoughts were interrupted by the Minister:

— Sorry, but I had to take this call. Secretary, we are going to remove some small airports from the block, okay?

— Wright brothers coming out, we really have to get some little ones out. Cegonhas do not secure 12 small airports. People from the Aviation Agency are with me in real time and they're telling me that there are up to 10 interested parties. Does it really stay?

— Yes, it does. But Araucárias and Castanheiras could perhaps be relocated to another future block. I don't know. Wright Brothers leaves this round and remains for a future one. So, we will have Cegonhas and 10 little ones. What do you think?

While waiting for the response, the Minister recalled that he had already been to Araucárias and Castanheiras airports and felt very welcome. The populations of both municipalities are extremely needy and largely dependent on the airports to attract companies, tourists and boost the local economy.

The Mata Verde Paper Factory was established in Araucárias 10 years ago, creating many jobs and increasing municipal tax collection by 30%. Without the airport, there is a serious risk of migration to a better location.

He also remembered Castanheiras, which is located in one of the most naturally beautiful cities in the country. The arrival of the airport boosted tourism and the income of the local population.

In this storm of ideas and concerns, knowing the impacts that the exclusion of Araucárias and Castanheiras would generate for those municipalities, the Minister heard from the Secretary:

— I confess that I was already used to the idea of Cegonhas and the Wright Brothers together. The two most promising in the country, in my opinion. But it can work that other way. Yes. I will ask the staff to prepare the draft, review it and send it to you by 4 pm.

— Sharp!

The secretary confirmed:

— Sharp!

MISSION GIVEN, MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

The President of the Republic was not a man known for his patience. Although polite and respectful in his dealings, he hated waiting and demanded solutions without having to ask for them.

That same day, he had spoken to the minister about the airport auction, but had not yet been informed about the developments.

Anxiously, he decided to do a video conference with him:

— Good afternoon, Mr. President! We are finalizing the draft of the...

The president interrupted the minister's speech:

— Good afternoon, Minister. I have already put the Secretary of State on notice to speed up and complete the analysis of the final version of the document today.

— All right, Mr. President.

— We have never had such a competent team! One last thing, Minister: I trust your technical gut regarding this issue. Maintaining technical teams in ministries will be one of the mottos of my re-election campaign. Fulfill your mission, okay?

— I will accomplish, Mr President.

And he promptly hung up, thinking to himself: “I even like the Minister, but if he delays my auction...”.

CASE CLOSURE

It's Delivered

At the end of the day, the Minister approved the final version of PPP auction notice. Wright Brothers was out. It met the deadline set by the President and met the demands of the main political actors. With much relief and some satisfaction, he called the Secretary of State:

— Dear Secretary, I am now forwarding the final version of the airport notice.

At the National Air Transport Secretariat, however, the feeling of satisfaction was not that intense. Although the final version was technically adequate, the national secretary believed that the previous version, with the two jewels in the same notice, was the best alternative. Tired and still thoughtful, he said to himself: “Balancing politics and technique is complicated”.

Then, he took the previous version of the notice and threw it into the paper shredder. One last thought crossed his mind: “Is this the fate of all good ideas that don't get the approval of politicians and don't find a suitable political agenda?”.

Dilemma

The seventh stage of airport concessions in the Republic of Bruzundanga walked on the fine line between the technical performance of the Ministry's bureaucracy and the perspective of the political actors, giving rise to a problem that affects the administration/politics dichotomy .

The airport concession in blocks gave managers discretion in making decisions regarding the best configuration of the airports that will be transferred to the private sector in the successive bidding stages. In this process, the dilemma arises when political pressure force to change the block, which was initially designed with fourteen airports: two of which have surpluses (Wright Brothers and Cegonhas) and twelve have deficits.

On the one hand, the initial design of the block is the result of studies, simulations and technical estimates. There is even a predisposition on the part of the President to make technical options regarding that matter, without, however, giving up delivery in the same year, as a political booster in his re-election campaign. On the other hand, political interventions affect the design of the block to be tendered, which was illustrated by the direct contact from the congressman of Pitomba to the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Furthermore, the mention of a meeting with companies demonstrates, in a marginal way to the problem itself, an additional pressure: that of private companies interested in obtaining Wright Brothers and Cegonhas at once.

Political pressure is the most evident. Agents advocate for the interests of the localities of the airports involved, unfathomable by the knowledge produced within the ministry's walls, whether to plead for the removal of the Wright Brothers airport from the bidding stage – which would have a future joint bid with the Rei Leão –, whether to postulate the maintenance of Pitomba airport alongside Cegonhas airport, one of the jewels in the crown.

With the departure of Wright Brothers, two small airports, Araucárias and Castanheiras, also had to go, causing losses to the economic activity of the host cities.

Questions for discussion

- 1) Did the Minister of Infrastructure act well in his dialogue with the national secretary of Air Transport and the deputy? Why?
- 2) Political agents acted appropriately when trying to influence the design of the blocks?
- 3) In your opinion, was the decision to withdraw and reserve the Wright Brothers airport to later save the Lion King correct? Why?
- 4) Based on the case presented, can it be said that ex ante analysis procedures for public policies were adopted? Explain.
- 5) What are the control guidelines and the actors authorized to evaluate the technical discretion involved in the design of airport bidding blocks?

TEACHING NOTES

The application of the teaching case is suggested in undergraduate and postgraduate courses in applied social sciences, in the disciplines of public administration, regulatory policies and public policy. To apply the case in the classroom, it is suggested that the teacher provides theoretical material that provides students with knowledge about the topic to be studied. A prior reading of the case is advisable, along with the resolution of the questions, delivered at the beginning of the class, making it possible to analyze the student's progress throughout the discussion.

BOX 2

Pillars of the teaching case

Item	Description
Problem statement	Clash between administration and politics in the seventh round of airport concessions.
Engagement Strategy	Pitch video (link indicated at the end of the text).
Dilemma	Choosing between two PPP models: one with two lucrative airports to save 12 smaller ones in the interior of the country or reserving one of the good ones to save just one large, loss-making airport located in the same city.

Continue

Item	Description
Learning Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the interactions between administration and politics. • Understand the evolution of PPPs governance in the airport concessions system. • Study the discretionary space for public choices.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

VIDEO MATERIAL

This case comes with a ten-minute video.¹

¹ Available at: <https://periodicos.fgv.br/rgplp/article/view/90546/85138>. Accessed on: Jan. 29, 2024.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The dataset supporting the results of this study is not publicly available.

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