The Megacity Book

Rental Car Tours
for
Urban Areas
(Urban Agglomerations)
with
10,000,000+
Population

By Wendell Cox

THE MEGACITY BOOK
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INTRODUCTION

The Megacities Book brings together the *Urban Tours by Rental Car* that have been prepared for all of the urban areas (urban agglomerations) of the world. *Urban Tours by Rental Car* is the outgrowth of a serious concern that conceptions of the world's large urban areas are the result of myopic impressions that are largely the result of visiting urban cores.

The Beginning

Ask an urban planner about Sao Paulo and you will be told of how in a world with cities that have not been planned, Sao Paulo is the worst. Words like "haphazard," "sprawl" and worse will invariably be called upon.

The reason for Sao Paulo's urban form has been hinted at --- people. A lot of people. And, as from Lagos to Detroit, not all of the new residents come with fistfuls of cash. People flock to cities because of the potential for betterment. In a middle-income nation, like Brazil, most of the new urban arrivees will be less well off than in higher income nations.

Thus, surrounding Sao Paulo and interspersed in the city itself are large tracts of low-income areas and favelas (shantytowns) --- so-called informal settlements that become permanent rather quickly. At first, favelas are densely packed dwellings made of wood or cardboard, and later they are replaced by concrete block construction, still very densely packed. There has been a modest "Chicago School" attempt to force favela residents into high rise projects reminiscent of the Robert Taylor homes along the Dan Ryan Expressway, but that appears to be no more successful than its model.

To affluent American eyes, the poverty is shocking. But Sao Paulo's poor moved here because things were worse where they came from. Like the Irish or Italian immigrants to New York, some probably return home. Virtually all could return, but the overwhelming majority wouldn't think of it. For the rural poor from the North East and elsewhere in the nation, Sao Paulo (like other large urban areas) shines as a beacon of opportunity, however dimly by high-income world perceptions. This was the genesis of *Urban Tours by Rental Car*, with the first edition published under the title *Sao Paulo: City of Hopes*.

The Series

Urban Tours by Rental Car offers perspectives on urban development obtained by automobile tours through urban areas. Rental cars are not the favored method for visiting cities, especially those outside one's own country. Instead, tourists and urban planners favor packaged tours or local public transport systems. Both are splendid ways for seeing the city as it used to be --- the very reason for most tourist visits. The historical core areas contain monuments, prime government and religious edifices and quaint neighborhoods that are often centuries old. This is particularly important to tourists from the newer urban areas of the American, Canadian or Australian West, where history extends not far before World War II. It is further understandable that few tourists travel thousands of miles to see the newer suburban areas that look very much like home. But most tourists do not profess to be students of the urban area.

For the urban planner interested in understanding the whole urban area, it is not enough to study the core alone, regardless of its architectural attractiveness, romanticism, history or affirmation of an individually preferred life style. No one, regardless of the depth of their education can develop reliable conceptions from an unrepresentative sample, and urban cores are the very essence of unrepresentative samples. Both public transport and packaged tours miss the larger part --- the expanse of sprawling residential and business development that rings virtually all major urban areas. They may be of little interest to many urban planners, but they should be.

Stripping away regional architectural facades, one might as well be in the suburbs of Phoenix, Portland, Perth or Paris. Here, the automobile is king, because no public transport system has been developed that can effectively serve destinations outside the core (at least at a price any society can afford). While public transport market shares are higher in European suburban areas than in the New World, much of the difference is attributable to lower incomes and less automobile access. Indeed, public transport's principal weakness, lack of automobile competitiveness, is itself a contributing factor to the rising motorization occurring from the suburbs of Copenhagen and Nagoya to the suburbs of Lagos and Mumbai. To oversimplify this phenomenon as being a "love affair with the automobile" is the equivalent of saying that Singaporeans or Brazilians have a love affair with air conditioning. Human beings prefer comfort to discomfort and they prefer free time to time over which they have no control.

It is no wonder that tourists return to the United States thinking that all Paris looks like the second arrondissement (less than one percent does) and that urban planners think all of Milan looks like the architectural treasures that surround the Cathedral. In fact, the sprawling suburbs of Europe, Japan, Canada and Connecticut resemble one another in many ways. For any seeking to study the urban area in its entirety --- not just the favored haunts of core-dwelling elites --- there is no alternative to "getting behind the wheel." Thus, *Urban Tours by Rental Car*