

THINKING BRAZIL

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A Newsletter of BRAZIL @ THE WILSON CENTER & THE COMPARATIVE URBAN STUDIES PROJECT

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Woodrow Wilson
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for Scholars

Mega-Cities and the Process of Planning

On April 23, 2002 The Comparative Urban Studies Project and Brazil @ The Wilson Center hosted Jorge Wilhelm and several other distinguished scholars to discuss the issues of planning for Mega-Cities.

The vibrancy and sustainability of the world's cities will be truly tested in the next thirty years. The sheer increase in population, the process of globalization, the phenomenon of extreme capital concentration, and the emergence of new actors have altered both the global and local contexts for urban development. The city of São Paulo is no exception to this rule, as Jorge Wilhelm, the Secretary of Planning for São Paulo, explained when he introduced his proposed Strategic Master Plan at the Woodrow Wilson Center. Such an environment, Wilhelm contended, necessitates a renegotiation of the social contract between state and society.

As the fourth largest city in the world, São Paulo now registers a population of 10.4 million residents, with a total metropolitan population of almost 18 million. The challenges of the Brazilian milieu, namely extreme inequalities and a still undefined national strategy for development, complicate São Paulo's own barriers to equitable and sustainable development. The city's own barriers include a 17 % unemployment rate, an average of 120 km of traffic jams per day, an average commute of two hours, a 20 % informal housing rate, and a homicide rate of 57 per 100,000 people, a figure equivalent to that of civil war. Yet, São Paulo also boasts the largest airport in Latin America, reputable universi-

ties and medical centers, vibrant culture, fast-growing business, and an adaptable and qualified supply of manpower.

The Strategic Master Plan Wilhelm is proposing for the city of São Paulo was designed to capitalize on the city's two most important assets: the law and the ability to plan. The plan itself centers on six leading principles: to act in solidarity towards excluded populations; to consider housing as a social right; to complete and expand roads and transportation sys-

tems; to salvage the urban environment; to transfer funds from developers to public works; and to strengthen the public sector's initiative and planning.

Janice Perlman, president of Mega-Cities Project, Inc. and professor at Trinity College, called Wilhelm's Strategic Master Plan a "tour de force," citing its conceptual coherence and ability to generate jobs and income as the central pillars. Perlman warned,

however, that the implementation of such a "masterpiece of master plans" will be the real challenge. Through her own study of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Perlman conveyed the importance of breaking the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty.

Using his native Barcelona as an example, Josep Subirós emphasized that urban development is an operation of both construction and deconstruction, and argued for the beautification of public space as a central mechanism for instilling self-esteem and pride in the urban community. He emphasized that the city is not just a physical conglomerate, but the space of citizenship. Thus, despite his praise for Wilhelm's plan, Subirós



Jorge Wilhelm

warned that because it's scope is so ambitious, Wilhelm must be careful to establish tactical priorities and enable the population to quickly visualize change.

On the basis of his extensive field experience in Africa, Richard Stren, professor at the University of Toronto, noted that the African regulatory and legal structures are not prepared for a plan such as the one Wilhelm proposes for São Paulo. The current preoccupation in African cities is with local governance and community organizations. The African urban experience, Stren noted, therefore informs us that the political solution to local governance is a prerequisite to planning. Yet, Stren also noted that the African city is becoming much more a "city of Africa" than it has been in recent years.

The final commentator, Aprodicio Laquian, visiting scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, related Wilhelm's plan to the many mega-cities in Asia. Laquian argued that we have entered the stage of the mega-urban region, an era in which planning for individual cities is no longer relevant. He argued that more emphasis needed to be placed on how Wilhelm's plan for São Paulo related to the nearby cities of Santos or Rio de Janeiro. Laquian also noted that political realities must be considered, and cautioned that nongovernmental organizations are not immune to government or corporate manipulation.

Cities should be the creations of their inhabitants. Yet, producing unity, organization, and sustainable growth from the desires of a diverse and conflicting constituency is a daunting task. Revitalizing urban centers without excluding the millions of excluded is just one among many challenges that Wilhelm's Strategic Master Plan aims to confront. Yet, as Wilhelm noted in his closing remarks, gentrification isn't a problem if you live in a just society.



News From Brazil @ The Wilson Center

== Upcoming Events ==

- = **May 17th** - Brazilian Foreign Policy under Fernando Henrique Cardoso, with Luiz Felipe Lampreia, Former Minister of Foreign Relations
- = **May 23rd** - The Science and Technology of Agribusiness : Cooperation Between Brazil and The US
- = **June 17th** - Countdown to The Brazilian Elections

Comparative Urban Studies Project

The Comparative Urban Studies Project (CUSP) was established in 1991 in an effort to bring together U.S. policy-makers and urban researchers in a substantive discussion about how to build the viable urban governance structures and strong democratic civic culture that are essential for sustaining cities. The CUSP operates through a working group of internationally recognized urban researchers and practitioners, who meet annually to examine contemporary urban challenges. Support for the CUSP comes from the Woodrow Wilson Center and from the U.S. Agency for International Development through a cooperative agreement with the University of Michigan's Population Fellows Programs.

Dr. Blair A. Ruble and Dr. Joseph S. Tulchin serve as co-chairs of the Comparative Urban Studies Project.

For questions or comments regarding the Comparative Urban Studies Project, please e-mail Diana Varat at varatdh@wwic.si.edu.

Thinking Brazil is a publication of **Brazil @ the Wilson Center**. This project is founded on the conviction that Brazil and the U.S.-Brazilian relationship deserve to receive better attention in Washington. Brazil's population, size, and economy, as well as its unique position as a regional leader and global player fully justify this interest. In response, and in keeping with the Center's mission to bridge scholarly research and public action, **Brazil @ the Wilson Center** sponsor activities designed to create a "presence" for Brazil in Washington that captures the attention of the policymaking community. **Brazil @ the Wilson Center** is grateful for the support of the Ministry of Culture of Brazil, ADM, Cargill, Texaco, FMC, and GE Fund.

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