

Brazil's new plan of urbanism is the best mirror of country's social and wealth i...



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Currently Brazil is grappling with a future city planning debate involving New Urbanism. While the most sustainable way of development would be to build “walkable” cities, with mixed use zoning laws and residential areas very close or sometimes intertwined with industrial and commercial facilities, many of the social elite and upper middle class are clamoring for the suburbs into gated communities. This flight to the suburbs has many reasons, including a clamor for a nostalgic, conservative way of life and an escape away from the urban violence that plagues Brazilian cities.

The author, Fernando Luiz Lara, asserts that this phenomena can be explained by the historical trend of culture cannibalization that has been a facet of upper class Brazilian life for the past century. Lacking a true “Brazilian” identity, and not prescribing to modernist ideas that were prevalent in the middle of the 20th century (for reasons later discussed below), it seems that the Brazilian upper classes pivoted to include a fabricated idea of the “good ole days” as a U. S. suburban ideal (A garage, large yard, and cul-de-sac).

I think that it’s interesting that these new developments are presented as “modern” to tap into trends of Brazilian upper class enjoying the cultural cannibalization, while also presenting themselves with many conservative ideas such as large yards and large security fences.

Another idea explored in this paper was the slow movement of social interaction from every day on the street interactions to much more private friends and family only ones. Slowly, perhaps scared by the large crime levels, urban Brazilians are turning more to close friends for their social

needs. This presents an opportunity for the new developments to try and capitalize on the nostalgia of what Brazil “ used to be” with regards to social interaction. Brazilians long for a neighborhood where they have no worries and can be free to walk around and interact with neighbors in the streets without fear.

I can see a symptom of the above phenomena just walking along the street in Rio. Being young, I often walk much faster than many average people on the street. Often when walking around someone they will tense up and quickly check who it is. This constant paranoia, while possibly necessary, is a sad statement into the minds of a day to day carioca and reflects what might appeal to the buyers in these new subdivisions.

Eventually, the developments began catching on to the ideas of “ New Urbanism” when developing new neighborhoods. Many of the ideas that are advertised by these new developments are presenting an idealistic picture of what looks to be American suburban life.

The problem with this newly presented “ ideal” that is marketed to upper class Brazilians is that they often haven’t experienced and are not familiar with the drawbacks of suburban life. A dependence on cars, isolation, lack of community, and generally incredibly homogeneous neighborhoods are all symptoms of this ideal. In addition, it is in almost every facet bad for the country as a whole, with damage to many cultural and environmental aspects.

One parallel that I see between Brazil and United States is the idea of “

White Flight”. Although I don’t believe that the Brazil flight to the suburbs is <https://assignbuster.com/brazils-new-plan-of-urbanism-is-the-best-mirror-of-countrys-social-and-wealth-inequalities/>

entirely race-based, the symptoms are increasingly similar. One major one is the “ desire for exclusivity” as a selling point to a neighborhood. While this was marketed in the United States by redlining and not allowing minorities to buy houses, today in Brazil its mostly marketed by large guard towers and walls surrounding the new developments that are being built.

I think that one reason for this reversion back to the “ better days” is an overall pessimism for the future of their country. As the paper details, during the 1950s and 1960s Brazil experienced a great expansion of modern architecture and development. Great examples of this can be seen in Brasilia and Belo Horizonte. I think that the success of this type of building was due to the optimism present in the people. Due to great economic growth and fast city growth there was overall a feeling of living “ in the future”.

The problem with the attempts to implement “ New Urbanism” is that many of the ideas essential to the idea of “ New Urbanism” are contrary to what the upper class value in their home. Although the walkability is often advertised, time and time again the upper class has shown that they much rather value security and safety over other benefits that could be offered. One great visual example in the paper is the neighborhood being advertised as being directly adjacent to a lake and yet, a large security fence separates the two completely.

One of the main things that I find depressing about this flight to the suburbs and conservatism is that it’s a self fulfilling circle. As more and more people move to the suburbs, often neighborhoods that are carbon copies of what the suburbs look like in the United States, there is a large step back in terms

of architectural culture. While at one time Brazil was at the forefront of new modern architectural ideas, with Oscar Niemeyer and his global success, today there is movement toward a lack of new culture. According to the author, they are clamoring for Spanish style architecture popular in gated communities in Miami.

I find it incredibly interesting that Fernando Luiz Lara asserts that you can directly tell the overall mood of the Brazilian upper class by the way that they “ present” themselves to the outside world. During times of peril, or even just non-growth, upper class Brazilians try to distance themselves from the country they were born in. As an American, this anti-nationalism is very interesting as it is almost a direct opposite of an American response to economic downturns. Often when the country is struggling in the United States they turn to much more nationalistic and conservative ways, often manifesting itself in the political candidates that are elected (2016 is a great example of this).

I do wonder however if this is a cause or a symptom of the problems in Brazil. A flight to the suburbs seems to be a natural reaction to the crime in cities. It’s a frustrating conclusion however as it doesn’t lead to greater political discourse or empathy between classes. In addition, the lack of unique culture and community ideals is troubling as well.

I don’t believe that this is a problem that can be solved by regulations on the side of the developments. In contrast, I think that this can be better solved by making cities more appealing to bring the upper classes back into the fold. Unfortunately, due to urban decay, much of the tax money that the city

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can collect goes along with the fleeing middle class. In my opinion it's important for the Brazilian government to prioritize infrastructure and projects to make city living more appealing. In addition, it seems that crime is one of the most important push factors away from the city. A increased focus on responsible policing, legalization of certain drugs (to attack the pockets of criminals), and an improved economy are all increasingly important facets to fighting this flight of the middle class away from urban centers. Eventually I think that a greater optimism about the future of Brazil will prevail in the coming decades and we will see a return to modern movements as urban life becomes more appealing. However in the meantime it is important that the divides being artificially created in the new communities do not do long lasting damage to the country as a whole.