

## **S42-Urbanization: The challenge of new forms of urban growth**

### **P42.14**

#### **Porto Seguro, BA: The hidden face of touristic urbanisation**

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#### **1 - Introduction**

Porto Seguro is the most well known touristic resort of the state of Bahia, Brazil. It has experienced extraordinary rates of growth, mainly due to migration, during the last two decades. Porto Seguro offers the unique combination of one of the most important historical heritages of colonial times, and quite impressive environmental conditions, often associated with magnificent landscapes and beaches.

From the seventies onwards, tourism evolved from a small scale local activity into a broad mass-touristic enterprise of large firms merged with property development and business. Intense and socially segregated urbanisation was the main outcome of such process, with severe implications for both population and environment. The spatial outcome is a two-fold urbanisation pattern: the so-called touristic urbanisation and what we are referring to as "hidden" urbanisation, a term that in the case of Porto Seguro can be taken literally.

#### **2 – Some notes on the concept of urbanisation and touristic urbanisation**

There are several meanings attached to the use of the concept of urbanisation, the most common being its demographic variant, that is, the proportion of population living in urban areas and/or involved in urban or non-primary activities. Even that is not unproblematic inasmuch as there are several criteria to define, and therefore to measure and enumerate, urban population (Clark, 1982).

The notion of urbanisation as a process of change both in quantitative and qualitative terms is central to our understanding of recent urban-environmental processes, particularly those related to the presence of one dominant economic activity as tourism. Urbanisation is sometimes used as a proxy of urban growth either in demographic or spatial terms; other times is used to describe the particular features of an urbanised area or development in terms of provision of housing, services and basic infrastructure.

In a higher level of abstraction, Lefebvre (1999) proposes to the concept of total urbanisation as a virtual phenomenon, to refer to a generalised process of production of space that is mainly determined by the urban-industrial logic, as inherent to the present stage of capitalist development. If, in 1996, 78,36% of the Brazilian population lived in urban areas, urbanisation as a set of values involving work relations, cultural practices, consumption and production patterns, can be considered a widespread

phenomenon influencing practically the whole society. And yet, even within the so-called urbanised areas, there are significant proportions of the population living in conditions that have hardly a minimum degree of urbanity.

The contradictory nature of capitalist urbanisation, expressed in the Brazilian case by significant qualitative differences in terms of the prevailing patterns of urbanisation according to income and socio-economic background, is reinforced whenever intense urban growth and migration occur a consequence of massive investment in a specific economic sector. This is particularly true in the case of tourism, an activity generally known to allow the development of a broad range of services, from the highly modern ones to the most backwards. In such cases, urban/spatial segregation and exclusion come together ambiguously with different levels of economic inclusion through the service sector.

The idea of production of specific urban areas for tourist consumption, associated with an idealised aesthetic pattern of leisure, landscape and urban development, constitutes the recent notion of touristic urbanisation (Lopes Jr., 2000; Ruschmann, 1997). It includes city centre urban renewals, exclusive resorts, cultural complexes, shopping centres, second residence developments, and the like. Usually, touristic urbanisation articulates public and private investments, property capital, large-scale and small scale firms and individuals. Touristic urbanisation is associated with the consumption of the place, not with local residents and everyday life. That is its public, well-known face. As we argue, there is always the other side, the spaces of reproduction of those working for/with tourism, the hidden face of touristic urbanisation that never shows in the maps.

### **3 - Tourism and urban growth**

Porto Seguro constitutes a landmark in Brazilian urban history as the place where the Portuguese first set foot in the continent in 1500. Since then the city experienced different waves of importance. For several reasons, including access by road, it remained isolated from the country's urban network from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 1970s, when tourism started to be developed in Southern Bahia. The degree of transformation that occurred in the region and particularly in the city during the last three decades can be summarised by the following quotation:

“Tourism has brought many important improvements to Porto Seguro that centuries of isolation had denied. (...) Tourism is enabling the once inwardly-centred Porto Seguro to become more cosmopolitan, but it is also tearing down its meaningful traditional sociocultural basis. It is introducing ‘alluring’ outside ways of life, but it is also giving rise to high levels of tension towards outsiders. Tourism is introducing ‘modern’ parameters of what determines economic accomplishments and development, but it is not equally distributing the means to achieve

them. It is introducing ‘modern’ economic structures, but it is also introducing hunger, exclusion, destitution. It is generating jobs, improvement, and wealth, but it is also generating massive immigration, high unemployment rates, and misery” (Tofani, 1996: xxiv).

Urban growth during the eighties and nineties reached very high rates, mainly due to migration attracted by the possibilities of employment in the service sector. From an urban population of less than six thousand in 1980, Porto Seguro jumped to almost eighty thousand in twenty years, which represented 83.2% of the total population in 2000<sup>1</sup>. This figures refer to residents, therefore they do not include countless groups of seasonal population, who nevertheless constitute an important demand for urban services and facilities and a significant source of local revenues.

Table 1  
PORTO SEGURO - EVOLUTION OF POPULATION

YEAR	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL	%URBAN
1980	5 742	40 562*	46 304*	12.4
1991	23 301	11 263	34 564	67.4
1996	52 241	12 716	64 957	80.4
2000	79 557	16 108	95 665	83.2

Source: FIBGE – Censo Demográfico, 1980, 1991, 2000; Contagem de População, 1996.

\*Includes Eunápolis, a fastly growing urban area outside the official urban boundaries. Eunápolis became an autonomous municipality in 1989.

Migration is a key element in the extraordinary urban growth of the city, particularly regional migration. According to FIBGE, 83.6% of migration in the nineties come from the surrounding region, while 15.8% come from other parts of the country. Although employment is a central element in the attraction of migrants to Porto Seguro, access to housing was also a key element. For that matter the local government seems to have played an important role in offering the necessary conditions to fix the labourforce required to fuel tourism.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the urbanization of the region is much more intense, as the neighbouring municipality of Eunápolis, bordering an important federal road (BR-101), concentrates an even larger amount of local population, mainly workers. It also provides the region with a diversified degree of services, not always available in Porto Seguro.

Table 2  
ORIGIN OF MIGRANTS\*

PLACE OF ORIGIN	ABSOLUTE	%
State of Bahia	16.598	83.6
Other states	3.145	15.8
Other countries	114	0.6
Total	19.857	100.00

Source: [www.ibge.gov.br](http://www.ibge.gov.br), 1996.

\* Refers to people not resident in the municipality until 01/09/1991.

In spatial terms the combination of such high rates of growth, with the production of specific urban spaces oriented for leisure and tourism, has generated an urban structure, in which the patterns of urbanisation are differentiated according to the degree of involvement with touristic activities. The expansion of the urban area in various directions stands side by side with the preservation and recent restoration of the historical landmarks in the city centre. The same spirit of preservation geared towards historical buildings and sites, however, were not present as far as nature is concerned. Urban expansion and the constant development of touristic sites and resorts seems not to follow the most elementary rules for environmental and ecosystems protection<sup>2</sup>.

In general terms, the following different forms of production and appropriation of the urban space could be identified: the historical city centre, touristic coastal sites, speculative property developments for leisure and second residence, and popular developments or, as we argue, the hidden face of such touristic urbanisation represented by the "Baianão".

The historical city centre comprises the protected historical area, that is, the "upper city" (cidade alta), and the traditional city centre which had a substantial increase in density rates during the last two decades. At the same time a substantial increase in illegal occupation of marsh areas occurred as a direct consequence of recent migration and population growth.

Touristic coastal resorts and leisure/second residence land developments are the main form of expansion of the urbanised area and represent the local version of touristic urbanisation as briefly discussed above. They are mainly private developments oriented towards outside residents and tourists. Luxury housing and all sorts of temporary accommodation are built in such places, extending endlessly the borders of the urbanised area in a pattern where low density developments occupy what

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<sup>2</sup> As this is a work-in-progress paper, leading to a master's thesis, so far there is no systematic data on environmental damages caused by irresponsible production of new developments and resorts.

used to be Atlantic forest<sup>3</sup>.

The other spatial form of urban growth is represented by a particular pattern of urbanisation that dominates the peripheral landscape of most Brazilian metropolitan areas, cities, and more recently, even small towns: the popular development, an incomplete form of urbanisation that houses the majority of the low income urban working population. In Porto Seguro, urban segregation can be taken literally because the popular developments, generally known as "Baianão", are completely separated from the city centre and coastal areas, hidden from the eyes of the tourists, spreading along the northern border on the opposite side of the regional road and local airport.

#### **4 – The hidden face of touristic urbanisation**

"Baianão" is formed by twelve developments that house an estimated 70% of the total urban population of Porto Seguro<sup>4</sup>. Its territory was and still is responsible for housing a significant proportion of the impressive population growth that took place in Porto Seguro during the last two decades.

An extensive household survey carried out in the "Baianão" developments, provides the main source of original data<sup>5</sup>. Results refer to socio-economic background, source and reasons for migration, housing conditions, employment and involvement with touristic activities.

It seems that the first three developments were produced by the local government in 1989, as a means to attract the necessary labour for the growing touristic activities. Plots and houses are reported to be donated or sold through facilitating monthly instalments. Roads were opened, and basic services as water and electricity were provided by the local government. The name "Baianão" came from the nickname given to the first three developments and is now spread to the whole area. Although exact information was difficult to obtain, it seems that the areas surrounding the original developments continued to be occupied, forcing the local government to promote some degree of urbanisation in the settlements and, at the same time, continued to develop other neighbouring sites.

In such developments, not surprisingly, housing, sanitation and services are very poorly provided. According to our survey, all households have electricity supply and the majority (78%) has piped water coming from public wells. Sewage is disposed in cesspits, without adequate sanitation and health standards and deposition and collection of garbage is a major problem. 99% of the population depend

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<sup>3</sup> More detailed information on the role and nature of the agents involved in the production of such area, although central to the understanding of the different patterns of urbanization of Porto Seguro, is still to be collected, and therefore is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> According to estimates of several local authority officials interviewed during the fieldwork, especially in the Municipal Secretaries of Health, Education and Administration, to whom regionalized population estimates are central for the planning of activities.

on public transportation and have to go to the city centre for work and services in general (banking, health, education, etc.). Most of them complained about the distance and transportation costs for basic living.

The socio-economic background is appalling: 90% of the interviewed have monthly incomes varying from one to three minimum salaries, depending on the tourist season, and 75.5% have less than first elementary education. Informal employment is also rather high, with a declared 81% of employment without legal registration. Employment seems to be gendered biased as in 90% of households, the male was the main responsible for the family maintenance. Also families in Baianão are still relatively big for urban areas as almost two thirds of the families reported 3 or more children.

In spite of the precariousness of the general conditions of reproduction, both in socio-economic and urban-sanitary terms, it is interesting to notice that 92% of the interviewed stated clearly that tourism was the main source of their families' maintenance and also absolutely necessary for local development. Tourism as a source of employment or income, and access to housing were therefore the main factors of attraction of migrants<sup>6</sup>.

## **5 – Last Remarks**

The empirical results obtained reinforce the theoretical discussion involving urbanisation and tourism as a contradictory local development alternative.

The household survey showed interesting information about a complex set of decisions families have to make in their migratory process. Tourism related employment or occupations are key elements in the strategy of survival of families and individuals. Access to housing, even if just as a possibility, also played an important role in the attraction of people to Porto Seguro.

The analysis provides the basis for a preliminary projection of the negative impacts of tourism in the near future, if the patterns of segregation and exclusion remain the same. On the other hand, for the population involved, tourism is also their main source of survival, whatever the social and environmental costs might be.

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<sup>5</sup> The household survey was carried out in June 2000 to a sample of 200 households, approximately 3% of the estimated total number of households in the area.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to notice that the survey has identified several families coming from the South of Bahia, a region where cocoa plantation was decaying and generated substantial unemployment.. More than 70% of the population came from areas surrounding Porto Seguro.

Touristic urbanisation is a very strong and contradictory phenomenon in many urban areas in the Brazilian coast. Porto Seguro provides the most intense example of the social and environmental impacts of such activity, precisely because it relies simultaneously on the maintenance of economic exploitation of the natural heritage and on its very preservation. The population dimension, however, is more perverse inasmuch as people are increasingly necessary for the development of tourism-related activities and have, at the same time, their places of residence hidden from the image of the city prepared for tourist consumption. A radical break in such vicious cycle would require a completely different approach to alternatives of local development.

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