

Photo: Cristina Alves



“The best mobility solution for a city is for workers to live close to work”

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You have a long history of thinking about cities. What is the biggest future challenge for metropolises?

Besides the natural priorities of cities, which are health, education, and child care, three points are fundamental to the future of any metropolis in the world today. The first is urban mobility. The second is sustainability. The third is coexistence. Political power in the world today does not give due importance to cities. One cannot think of economic activities without thinking of people, and people are in cities. The city is the last refuge of solidarity. Let me give the example of mobility. Many people believe that mobility is based mainly on technology and performance, but that is not enough. How the city is designed is more important. Today the world is talking about the driverless car. But the fact is that the car continues to occupy the same space. This is not the solution for improved mobility. That must lie in the design of the city: housing, leisure, work, and mobility have to be together. That's the most important.

Improved mobility in Rio is one of the most important legacies of the Olympics, isn't it?

Yes, important investments were made in light rail, bus rapid transit, and metro rail—integrating significant areas of the city, old and new, restoring historic areas, giving access to areas that were previously invisible.

The project to revitalize the city's “Porto Maravilha” (Marvelous Port), however, failed to carry out housing development as planned. Was it a failure?

I would not say so. The crisis in the national economy and in particular the financial difficulties of the state oil company Petrobras had a major impact on large projects planned for the city and the state. I believe that housing development for the Porto Maravilha will happen once the private sector resumes investing when confidence is greater. Moreover, in addition to housing development at Porto Maravilha, there are other housing possibilities in the central area of Rio.

What would the future Rio metropolis look like?

At this early point, our vision of the future city passes through three axes: reinventing Guanabara Bay, rail lines, and Metropolitan Arch Highway. For the bay,

reinventing means cleaning it. It also means creating points of interest on the shores. Some areas need to be recovered. The biggest example is the Gramacho landfill on the shore, which was closed in 2012 after 34 years of operation. After decontaminating the soil, it will be possible to create a park in Gramacho. Other areas are the Mauá Pier in Magé and São Gonçalo. We would have a reinvented bay, clean, a “necklace” with points of interest for both metropolitan residents and visitors. This project could be thought of as a way to involve the population in solving problems. I strongly believe in the power of a motivated population. I lived it. To launch a project, an idea, it is essential that the vast majority of the population understand how desirable it is. However, there is a general lack of communication between governments and their people. We need to involve and motivate citizens. It can be done.

How would the second highlight, the rail line, change?

On both the east and west sides, trains are part of the physical and historical construction of the metropolis. They make up a mobility infrastructure that should be better exploited, with harmonization of transport and urban density, and development of the areas of commerce and services. The train lines are a great opportunity to bring affordable housing together with services, work, and transport. It is necessary to transform the walls along rail lines too. Those walls are scars on the city, they cut apart what should be one city.

And the Metropolitan Arch Highway?

In this vision of the future, the Metropolitan Arch Highway¹ will delimit the boundaries between urban and industrial dynamics, preservation of the

¹ The Metropolitan Arch in Rio de Janeiro city is a highway designed to connect the five main highways that cross the municipality.

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environment and water reserves, and rural activities for food security. The arch itself is an important infrastructure for spatial and economic organization of the metropolis, connecting several municipalities and economic hubs.

There is debate about whether mass transport must be train or metro rail. In Curitiba, you launched bus rapid transit (BRT), which has been copied around the world. Curitiba recently started to discuss metro rail, but the discussion has not evolved. Why?

Metro rail proved unfeasible. Today many want to make metro rail a political issue. In Rio, of course, metro rail access to the Barra da Tijuca region was important, but in general cities that have spent a fortune to build metro rails have not had good results. Nothing has happened; urban mobility has not improved in Salvador, Porto Alegre, or Teresina.

But hasn't metro rail been effective in many great metropolises?

Though the subway is a good solution for mass

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transportation, it requires investments that are inaccessible. Consider cities where this investment is possible, like São Paulo. São Paulo's four metro rail lines are responsible for only 15% of trips; the other 85% of the population uses ground transportation. So it's ground transportation that needs to be improved. The bus can perform as well as metro rail. The BRT proved it, transporting large numbers of people. We started it in Curitiba in 1974; today there are over 250 cities in the world with BRTs. But the city must be committed to innovation.

What cities elsewhere in the world do you think resolved the mobility issue?

At the core of major European cities, the metro rail was positive, but today there are other technologies. Rails are very expensive. Ground electric bus systems can be an alternative. In a BRT, you live more with the city. The system is more friendly. BRTs today are all over Asia, Europe, the United States, and Latin America. Worldwide, the electric BRT can play a significant role in urban mobility because it is less polluting. It is important that mobility be a network, with transport modes that com-

plement each other. However, the best mobility solution for a city is for workers to live close to work—the solution for mobility is to design for the development and growth of cities.

Looking at metropolises like New York, Paris, and Barcelona, what did they do well and what went wrong?

A city is a very specific environment, as a result of its geography, its people, its history, its dreams, and each seeks a different solution. New York, Paris, and Barcelona have been addressing metropolitan issues for more than two decades. New York has been deepening its environmental resilience, Barcelona reinvented itself in the 1990s as a new benchmark in strategic planning, and Paris since the 1960s has been doing the solid work of integration and distribution of opportunities within the metropolitan area.

You have said that the car will be the cigarette of the future as people will be criticized for using it. But the auto industry is still much encouraged by many governments.

The future city will have to eliminate car dependence because of the space it occupies. Even if the person has the most technologically advanced car, if it takes three hours to move between house and work, it is useless. Cities are taking many other paths, such as “non-proprietary” vehicles, policies adopted in some American cities, or like the Autolib in Paris, which functions as a component of urban mobility [these are electric cars that people can pick up at one station and return at another, as people do with bikes in Rio and elsewhere].

How do you believe coexistence can be addressed in big cities? In many cities around the world, for example, immigrants live in ghettos.

An essential element of a city is diversity. Diversity of

income, age, religion. So we need to find solutions that bring urban solutions for quality housing, work, leisure, and culture in a shared infrastructure.

The city is a sharing space. And you have to choose what is a priority. For example, there are eight million vehicles in São Paulo. Each car takes up about 25 square meters in the house and another 25 square meters at work—a total of 50 square meters, exactly the size of a decent apartment. ... If you could put the apartment in the city close to work, we would have solved the problem. It would be a São Paulo city without suburbs.

You have criticized the social housing program, “My House, My Life.” Why?

Because living is more than having a house! “My House, My Life” is a solution for housing, but not for improving the quality of urban life. You have to replace it with “My House, My Life, My City.” Otherwise, we will have what has happened in other countries and even here: people living far from the opportunities, subjected to painful daily trips, exiled from what the city has to offer. I’ll tell you something that may seem counter-intuitive. In Paris, dwellings are quite small, but social life is there in the neighborhood, restaurants, coffee houses, squares, everything is on the street. The street has an important role.

What are the next steps for the Integrated Urban Development Plan of Greater Rio de Janeiro?

The first step, which we are finalizing, was the diagnosis. Note that the work is divided into six main areas, dealing with spatial reorganization of the metropolis, how it will grow, where people will live, how to relate with the environment, their history and their identity, and how these dynamics interweave

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with mobility. After working on this for 18 months, we are now entering the preliminary design stage, for the “Future Vision,” which will be presented to society for discussion and improvement.

In Curitiba, you were able to involve ordinary citizens. How can this be done in Rio?

For every good project that worked, people understood it as an improvement in their quality of life, in which they participate directly. Rio de Janeiro ... already has a strong identity and self-esteem, as was evident at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. And that goes not only for the locals but for all Brazilians, so that citizens can feel part of a Brazil of excellence. The project team and government are seeking projects to bring qualitative gains for the life of the metropolis—projects that can encourage all stakeholders—government, the private sector, and civil society—to commit to its execution. 