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The Port Area of Rio de Janeiro and Its Potential for Tourism

Rio de Janeiro has mega-city status, and as one of the world's greatest cities it should possess one of the world's greatest waterfronts. The revitalization of the port of Rio de Janeiro provides a unique opportunity for the creation of a distinct regional center, which will reconfigure a new and positive image for the city, region, and country, as well as reap a variety of benefits through the attraction of new visitors and investments.

In order to fully understand the potential of tourism in Rio de Janeiro, it is important to understand how tourism can function advantageously for the physical, economic, and socioeconomic enhancement of cities. Tourism consists of a sector composed of attractions, transportation, general facilities and services, information, and promotions that permit persons to travel for business or pleasure, and allows for the reflection of local cultural and identity (Theobald William, 1994). Impacts from such a system can benefit an area through economic diversification, increase in investments, and development of infrastructure.

However, adverse effects may also occur from unmanaged fluxes of visitors with the erosion of local resources, local displacement, and urban congestion and pollution. Tourism development provides the opportunity to plan for and manage tourism so that minimal impacts occur to the local environment and people. Such a system can achieve a sustainable level of growth where development reaches its economic objectives without compromising environmental resources and local culture.

Tourism development includes a variety of techniques stemming from sustainable principles, such as clustering development to buffer sensitive areas, targeting already prosperous market segments, and creating or enhancing attractions. Another important tool of tourism development is place-making, or strategic place-marketing (Kotler, 2004), which addresses a place's need to administer its image, attract tourists and industry, and find new market opportunities or enhance existing ones.

One example of place-making has been exemplified in waterfront development, a trend which has swept through most of the great cities in the world. San Francisco, California; Baltimore, Maryland; and Capetown, South Africa area all cities which demonstrate excellent examples of enhancing regional image through local waterfront redevelopment.

The Port area of Rio de Janeiro has also reached its pinnacle for revitalization, providing an interesting opportunity to capitalize on and expand the City's already prosperous yet underutilized tourism industry. At first glance, one would wonder why it is even necessary to implement policies and programs to further stimulate tourism, as it is a firmly established industry and has made the city the major port of entry to Brazil. Despite the 4 million annual visitors Rio currently attracts, there is a clear market potential for expansion. According to RIOTUR's (Rio's tourism authority) Plano Maravilha, Rio is only absorbing 6% of its market potential for international tourism, and 21% for domestic tourism (2000).

Comparisons between Rio and other equally world-famous cities, such as Baltimore and Capetown, which attract over 20 million visitors annually, also points to a market potential and the ability to provide for a greater capacity of visitors. According to Kotler's ideas of targeting specific markets, the selection of more promising markets to direct tourism planning efforts, will result in a well-managed and reliable tourism industry more likely to reap greater potential benefits.

Currently, market trends in Rio point to maritime tourism as an up-and-coming market segment with perhaps the greatest potential for expansion. As the world's fastest growing tourism industry with an 8% growth rate (WTO, 2003), and with the number of cruise ship passengers to Rio having increased by 700% since 1994 (RIOTUR, 2004), the City already possesses a steady flow of visitors patronizing this form of travel. Considering that little development has been done to receive maritime visitors, which continue to steadily increase every year, maritime tourism is demonstrating itself as a very promising market for Rio.

The recent revitalization efforts of the Port of Rio present an excellent opportunity to capitalize on its immense potential for maritime tourism. Development of the port area as a

nucleus for tourism has already been set forth as a major focus in both the Plan for Revitalization (IPP, 2001) and the City's Plano Estratégico (2003). Both documents provide the policies for promoting maritime tourism, however they are lacking in the creation of an institutional framework with the power to actually catalyze future development in the Port area. Inter-agency collaboration and the establishment of a central authority needs to be established to coordinate revitalization efforts and create development guidelines and regulations, ensuring a more cohesive and unified pattern of development. Such an organization could initiate a set of goals and policies for development that would generate the opportunities for the expansion and centralization of tourism development.

A responsible agency for the development of the Port area could direct development in those areas most suitable for the creation of a viable waterfront area, as was done in the proposal of this project. Stemming from a thorough analysis of the Port area and its context, the proposed development concept focuses on the areas from Pier Maua to Armazem 7 along the Cais da Gamboa, encompassing two of the focus areas for revitalization where current development efforts are underway. Concentrating development in these areas follows principles of tourism development by preserving sensitive sites such as the Mosteiro de São Bento and Morro da Conceição, and increasing economic gains through facilitating more effective economic clusters.

Goals established for concept development included: to promote maritime tourism with a variety of boating opportunities; to create a distinct and unique identity that is culturally representative and will portray a positive-city wide image; and to provide a comprehensive and sustainable tourism system to support an enjoyable visitor experience without compromising neighborhood quality of life. Features of the proposal include: a new cruise ship terminal, maritime station, and tourism center at Armazems 6 and 7 with a gateway feature signifying the area as an entrance; reuse of Pier Mauá as public open space with a cultural center and revolving restaurant; and the restoration of the existing maritime station as a maritime museum. The Cais da Gamboa is also significantly extended to create a flexible and functional wharf space with mixed use buildings, new marina areas, and two hotel/residential towers terminating in a grand plaza with a distinct central monument and view framing Avenida Barão de Tefé.

The resulting system of urban spaces and uses of this proposed concept aim to transform the Cais da Gamboa and Pier Mauá areas into an attraction for local, domestic, and international visitors of an impressive scale and image. The Cais da Gamboa is an underutilized public good and historical resource. A vast area exists which could be transformed into an intricate system of public spaces that can serve a recreational and cultural purpose, and evoke powerful historical references.

Plans for revitalization of the Port should acknowledge the grander scale and context of the City of Rio de Janeiro. The outcome of development of the Port area will catalyze a series of ripple effects for the coming decades. By capitalizing on its immense potential to draw new visitors and investments through appropriate planning and development, the Port area will be sustained as a historically significant and competitively modern waterfront, and advanced for the greater benefit of the City of Rio de Janeiro.

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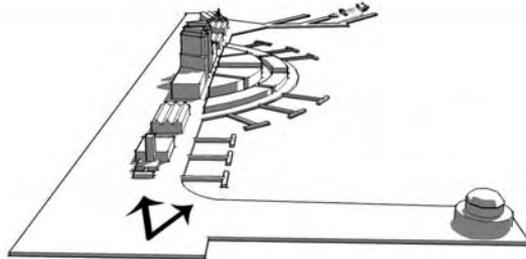


Figure 1. Restoration of Cais de Gamboa and new marina

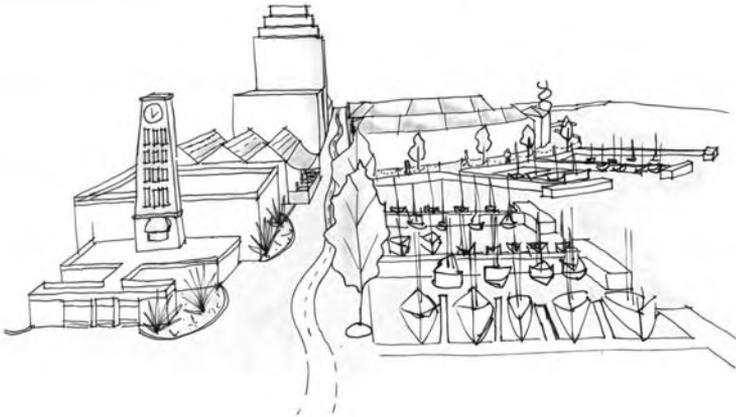


Figure 2. New cruise ship terminal and view of Central Plaza

