



URBAN AGE CITY SURVEY

By Luci Oliveira and Ben Page

*As part of the 2008 research focus, Urban Age commissioned a city survey about quality of life in São Paulo to better understand the public's perception of current urban trends. **Luci Oliveira**, Manager of Public Affairs at Ipsos Brazil, and **Ben Page**, Chairman of the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute in London, highlight the survey's major findings.*

As one of the biggest cities in the world, São Paulo shares many of the beauties and the tragedies of being a major cosmopolitan centre. What is most striking is the level of inequality and diversity inside this one city. As in many other world cities, in São Paulo one will find modern buildings, the most up-to-date fashion, services and goods, the best brands from all over the world, high-tech commercial and entertainment centres, and modern hospitals and health services, as well as fine art exhibitions. At the same time, it faces the same structural problems as many cities but in very severe forms: appalling traffic, poor public transport, high levels of unemployment, very high levels of crime and violence, very poor air quality and in general high levels of pollution.

How do its citizens feel? Comparing the views of Paulistanos and Londoners, living in a very different global city, both single out job opportunities and the range of shops as the best things about it. In London many people also single out the diversity of the city – London is more diverse than anywhere else in Europe. Interestingly this is not an issue in São Paulo: although the city has a diverse series of migrant communities, most of its inhabitants don't seem to take it for granted – only 5 per cent see it as a positive factor worth mentioning. Perhaps that is the difference between a city built on international migration and one that is thousands of years old but has only changed dramatically by migration recently.

It is when we come to problems and priorities for change that people in the two cities are very different. While for

Londoners the top three issues are the cost of living, traffic, and crime, Paulistanos are more worried about health services, safety and crime rates, and public transport. The top problems in São Paulo are all related to public services – problems aggravated by the fact that the city has grown too fast without adequate planning. In the 1930s São Paulo became an industrial centre, and population in the 'locomotive of Brazil' exploded. In the 1900s, São Paulo had a population of 240,000 people. By the 1960s it was 3.8 million. In the 1990s, the Metropolitan Region had around 15 million, and now it totals more than 19 million people.

While the migration of people to São Paulo is diminishing and the pace of population growth is slowing down, public services are now under huge pressure. Ratings of these are very negative compared to London (where criticising them is a popular hobby, but satisfaction is much higher), and an ageing population will increase pressure on them in both cities, especially in terms of health care. Health services stand out as a huge challenge for São Paulo, with a very low level of satisfaction compared to most European countries.

In fact, the only services the majority of Paulistanos are satisfied with are banks and supermarkets. All others have very low satisfaction scores compared to London or many other 'western' cities. Clearly the quality of public services has a huge impact on how satisfied people are with the city as a place to live. The more satisfied they are with public services the more satisfied they are with the city. But when asked how their city can improve, Londoners also cite healthcare, education and transport,

although their views are less acute and more varied. In São Paulo the problems are more fundamental and there is far more consensus on what is needed. First people want to see the basic needs being supplied: the needs for better health and education services are seen as most pressing. These and public housing are absolutely key for the future of 'Sampa', taking precedence over even crime.

Londoners actually attach more priority to crime levels than São Paulo residents: despite murder and kidnapping rates being much lower, and despite feeling safer in their own local areas than a decade ago, they are appalled by high profile 'signal' crimes such as teenage stabbings that now make the news daily in London.

Interestingly, once we look at the statistical relationship between what people *say* matters most, and what is *revealed* in their views via analysis, crime levels and traffic (among the most startling features for foreign visitors to the City), turn out to matter, if anything *more* than public services for quality of life. São Paulo faces many major challenges that its residents are well aware of.

THE CITY'S TOP CHALLENGES

There are marked differences between the public's perception and that of key stakeholders and experts with regards to the top challenges in São Paulo. The public view (left) was gathered by the Urban Age São Paulo poll conducted by Ipsos Mori in June 2008 of 1,000 residents living within the São Paulo Metropolitan Region. The perception of leaders and experts (right) was extracted from meetings in August 2007 with 44 key individuals working in various urban spheres of government and private practice. Clear differences are the degree to which 'health' and 'crime' are regarded as the top two challenges by the general public compared to 'transport' and 'housing' for urban leaders and experts. The latter view might partially be informed by which services city government is responsible for in contrast to the major overarching societal concerns identified by the general public.

URBAN GOVERNANCE

A peculiar characteristic in São Paulo is that civic and political society seem much less effective than

elsewhere. Its people are less politicised than in other big cities of the developed world. In Brazil voting is compulsory, but half of people in São Paulo cannot remember who they had voted for in the last elections for governor, while around 42 per cent are not sure who they voted to be mayor. In this context, accountability is weak. Satisfaction with the government in general is low, although as in other countries it is a little higher for local government than for the state government, reflecting criticism of health services and public safety.

But despite low satisfaction with so many public services, residents do not see elections and political engagement as an effective way to improve urban life. This illustrates a cyclical problem where lack of education, and the slow development of a 'middle' class, together with a very polarised society contribute to a lack of political culture and participation. São Paulo has a long way to go before it can be considered a developed city, especially given its social and economical inequalities. It needs to keep growing its economy but in a more sustainable manner. It faces huge challenges on quality of life, and to make progress, the city will need to try to reduce social and economic inequality, despite a political system that seems destined to preserve the status quo.

ENVIRONMENT

The high volume of traffic and poor fuel quality (in Brazil, diesel has 500 particulates per million, while in Europe and the US, diesel has 10 particulates per million), as well as the sparse amount of green areas in the city make air quality a serious problem for residents in central areas of São Paulo. In outer areas, sewage systems are seen as more problematic. Interestingly, climate change – a topic which features high among environmental concerns for residents in many European cities – gets little recognition in São Paulo.

SECURITY

São Paulo is a city of dramatic contrasts. As one walks through the city you will see people of all ages on the streets, begging in the traffic jams, prostitution, and huge favelas alongside middle-class neighbourhoods. The latest and greatest example of São Paulo's contrasts is a compelling architecture symbol of the city, the modernist

Ponte Estaiada bridge. Its futuristic design is surrounded by favelas. In São Paulo overall, 11.1 per cent of the population live in favelas.

The same inequalities are vivid when it comes to public investment. Some areas and neighbourhoods have reasonable public services and infrastructure and low crime, for example Jardins, Pinheiros, Itaim, Moema, and Higienópolis. In contrast, neighbourhoods like Campo Limpo, Casa Verde, M'Boi Mirim, Brasília, and Cidade Tiradentes have low public investment and the highest crime levels in the city. According to official statistics, crime rates are in decline across the city as a whole from astronomical levels. Residents are extremely fearful of crime in their own neighbourhoods after dark – twice as concerned as in London (despite Londoners being as or more likely to see crime as a major problem in their city).

The vast majority are worried about being robbed or attacked. And the absence of adequate policing is seen as a big issue. Overall 57.3 per cent report being robbed or a close family member being robbed. Half (47.5 per cent) say they know someone who has been murdered and 4 per cent have direct experience of kidnapping. As a result there is real demand for more visible policing, with more police posts in the city, for a faster and more severe judicial system, and for tougher punishments for teenagers, giving them the same penalties as adults.

The use of CCTV in public spaces is a reality in São Paulo, and the population wants more of it. Use of private security is also extensive, and most people approve of the idea – the lack of police patrols is the third most important reason for fear of crime, and this fear is even stronger in the Metropolitan Region than in the centre. Other typical problems of the developing world can be found here, such as a significant informal economy, drug dealing, and lack of basic infrastructure in some neighbourhoods, poor urban environments and

street furniture, degradation of public spaces and graffiti. A short walk through the city centre presents a mixture of neglected but beautiful architecture together with a massive informal economy and high levels of crime. Even so, education levels and formal employment are improving. The city still needs to answer to some basic needs, especially in terms of public health services.

TRANSPORT

Problems of pollution and traffic are common to cities around the world, but are more dramatic in São Paulo due to the city's role as the economic and financial heart of the country. The richest city in Brazil – and the 19th in the world – faces huge pressures on its infrastructure with economic growth driving some of its most significant problems.

The traffic congestion is due in part to the late development of mass public transport systems; the metro was planned in the 1930s but the first line only started to operate in 1974. Today the metro is still only 62 km long. On the other hand, the city has 18,000 km of streets, and 15,000 urban buses and almost four million cars. Today people spend an average of 42.8 minutes to get to work. But even with terrible traffic, most Paulistanos would not think twice about buying a car if they could afford it. And they would use that car as their main form of transport. Although high concentrations of traffic are disturbing to many visiting Europeans and North Americans it is a phenomenon which the general population can cope with much more easily than inadequate health and education services.

When thinking about what could improve traffic congestion the top two solutions residents point to are investment in the metro system and the expansion of bus corridors in the city. At the same time, the great majority affirm that they would use public transport if there was more of it available and if it was more comfortable, less crowded and faster.

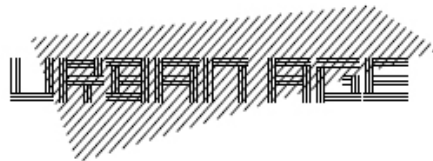
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