AMÉRICAS

JULY/AUGUST, 2004
VOLUME 56, NUMBER 4

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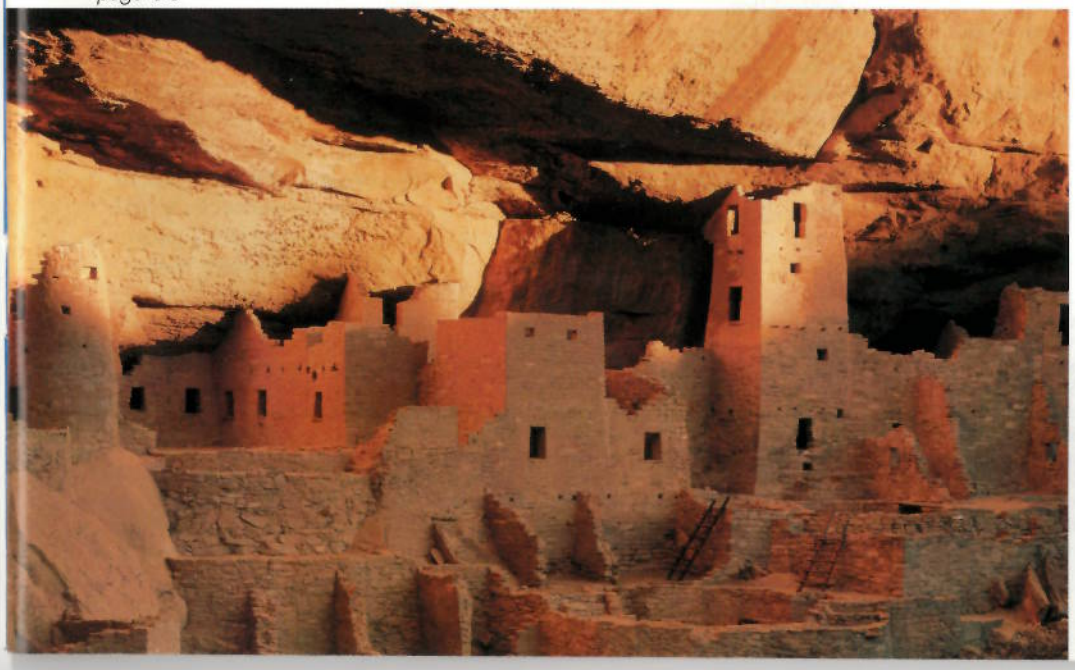

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CITIZENS
SAMELLO

MAP A MEGA CITY

As São Paulo celebrates its 450th anniversary, public leaders and residents unite to develop a comprehensive plan for this fragmented, vibrant metropolis

There are no great mountain ranges, there is no beautiful bay. Its densely crowded streets, filled with frenetic human activity, cover hundreds of square miles. São Paulo, Brazil, the hemisphere's largest metropolis, is simply a city. Just in the last decade its growth has finally slowed, allowing its people time to catch up, to address its many needs, and to create plans for the future. Paulistanos are engaged in a wide-ranging dialogue among themselves, reaching for creative solutions, seeking a new flexibility in government, and searching for ways to prepare the city for the great challenges of the twenty-first century.

This year São Paulo celebrates its four-hundred-fiftieth birthday, marking an interesting moment in the mega city's history. On the anniversary day, last January 25, Mayor Marta Suplicy was dancing to samba rhythms at the head of a parade leading to an enormous open-air concert downtown. Marta (as she is affectionately known), heiress and sexologist, who

An early-evening glow settles on the city of São Paulo, the bustling financial and business capital of Brazil as well as the hemisphere

by Alan Mamoser
Photographs by Carlos Goldrub

once hosted a popular television show, wants people to embrace the city, to reorient their perceptions, and recognize the great assets São Paulo already has. The basis of her policy is to build upon these assets—from the city's old downtown to its teeming periphery.

At first glance, the challenge looks overwhelming. The city is beset with polluted rivers, vast slums, excruciating traffic, and horrific, spectacular crime. One wonders what keeps people there, what invisible force holds the huge place together.

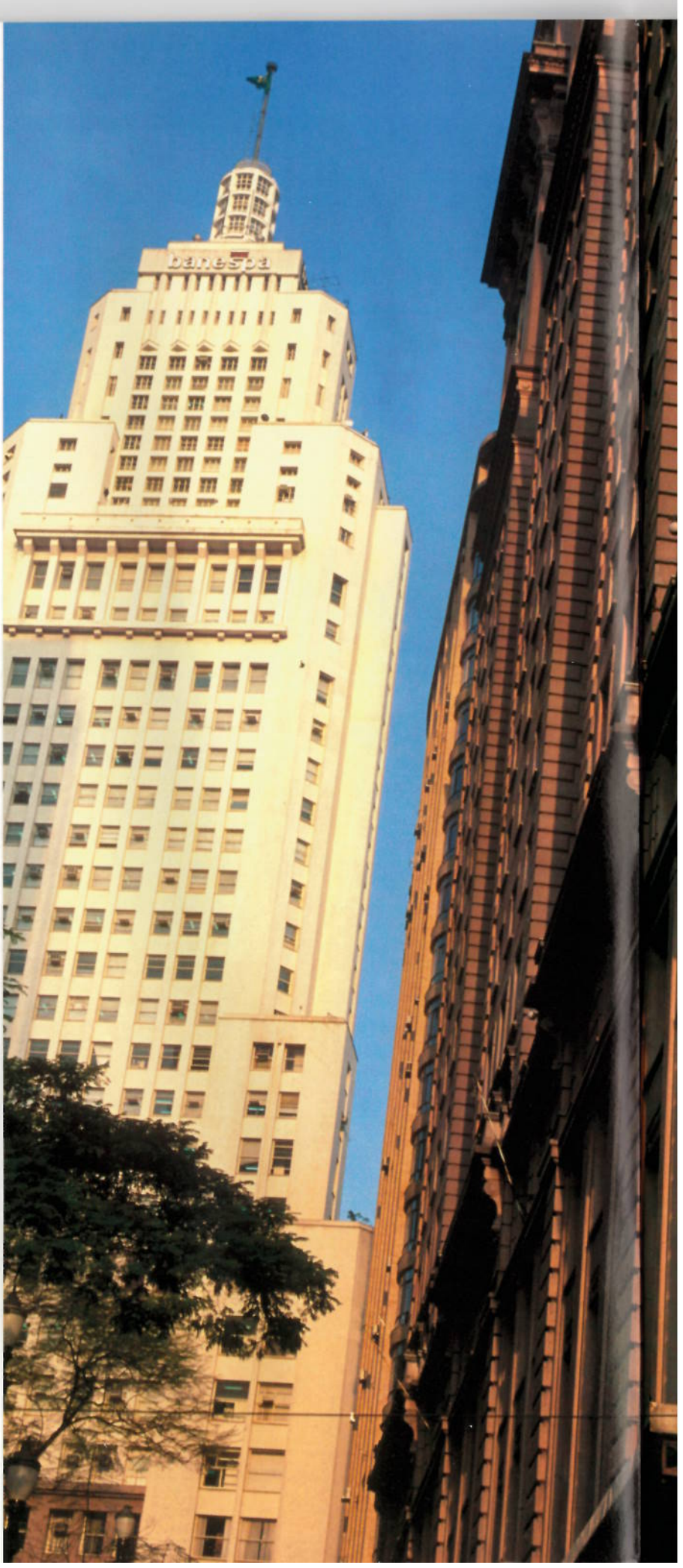
"São Paulo welcomes everybody," says Mariana Carvalho, enjoying a late supper with friends one evening in a bar in the gentrifying Vila Mariana neighborhood. She came from a small city of the interior to study and find a job in the travel industry. "Here are the best jobs, the best opportunities, the most companies and civic organizations. The best schools are here, and great restaurants, and all kinds of people. São Paulo is linked to the whole world in a way that's not so for the rest of Brazil."

While São Paulo's history goes deep into the colonial era, the city really came of age in modern times. Like Berlin, Osaka, or Chicago, São Paulo rose to prominence in the industrial age. Coffee was the catalyst. Planters from the old families of Rio de Janeiro and the Paraiba Valley expanded westward into new territory in São Paulo state, a movement that picked up in the 1880s just as slavery ended. Planters were compelled to seek immigrant workers, and thousands of them came from Europe and later from the Middle East and Japan.

All great cities are made by immigration. By 1900, the city of São Paulo was an economic fulcrum filled with a diverse mix of energetic people. And something quite remarkable occurred—rare in history—when an entrepreneurial planter class arose. Many planters became industrialists, joining their capital to the businesses of newly arrived entrepreneurial immigrants. In time a new elite emerged, a fusion of coffee planters and immigrant bourgeoisie, who made São Paulo into the premier industrial center of Latin America.

This background placed São Paulo on the forefront of modernity in Brazil. It gave the city quite a different feeling from Brazil's other great metropolitan pole, Rio de Janeiro. Rio is known for its characteristic Portuguese and African heritage, for its long history as a colonial capital. Paulistanos see themselves as more cosmopolitan, energetic, and entrepreneurial, and less rooted in traditions. They have led the nation's struggle to modernize economically and in the arts.

Modernism in art began in Brazil in one remarkable week in São Paulo during the 1920s, at a multidisciplinary exposition held in the city's Municipal Theater. Until that time, aesthetic taste in Brazil was dominated by classic French influences. All of this changed during the days of February 13, 15, and 17 of 1922. On the thirteenth, the writer Graça Aranha delivered



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Mayor Marta hopes to refocus the city on its center. Downtown São Paulo was an elegant, exciting place fifty years ago

opening remarks in which he denounced academicism, criticized the Brazilian Academy of Arts, and spoke of the need for artistic liberty. On the fifteenth, the poet Oswald de Andrade read from his works (he would later make the case for indigenous cultures' central role in the development of modernism by famously saying, "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question"), and writer Mário de Andrade gave a lecture entitled "The Slave Who Was Not Isaura," referring to the horrifying beauty of modernism.

The prescient moment inspired a profusion of new artistic endeavors, all of them standing against the alien values then in fashion and proclaiming the strength of a Brazilian culture based upon the nation's unique mix of peoples. A number of Paulista intellectuals were in the forefront, among them painters Tarsila do Amaral and Anita Malfatti, poet Guilherme de Almeida, composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, musician Guiomar Novaes, architect Antonio Moya, and sculptor Victor Brecheret.

During the recent anniversary celebrations, an academic conference, "São Paulo 450 Paris," invited scholars from both cities to consider the main issues facing São Paulo today. What emerged was much talk of fragmentation. Over and over, the academics made the point that, in São Paulo, individual concerns have taken precedent over shared ones. São Paulo has evolved into a city of guarded apartment buildings, walled-off housing for the wealthy, and enclosed shopping malls where parents feel their teenagers can socialize in safety. It is a city where dominance of the private auto has led to a woefully insufficient metro system.

"We are concerned for our children, for their safety. We must be very careful for them," says Antônio Camargo, a civil engineer, sitting one evening with his wife, Vânia, and their two teenage children. They live in a comfortable apartment high above the streets of Mooca, an old neighborhood once famous as an enclave of Italian immigrants. "We would prefer to have a house, but we feel we need the security of an apartment. It makes life easier," he says.

The city's fragmentation becomes apparent on maps laid out by Ivan Maglio, a director in the city's Secretariat for Urban Planning. He points out how the city spreads outward in rings from its aging downtown center, through a huge sea of middle-class and upper-middle-class apartments and homes, to a sprawling low-income periphery around its outside. Finally, many miles from the center, the city reaches a band of green forest. Across this vast urban panorama a favored sector clearly emerges. There is a swath of high-value real estate reaching from the inner neighborhoods far to the southwest.

"There is the first world of São Paulo," says Maglio, indicating the wealthy sector stretching to the southwest and filling in a few pockets to the west and north. "Around this is the third world," he says of the periphery.

In that favored sector are the glass-office towers, corporate offices, and support services of the country's most advanced sectors. Maps show a migration from the old downtown that began in the 1950s, when the mansions of industrialists and coffee barons along Avenida Paulista steadily gave way to commercial towers. The Avenida Paulista is now a fine business avenue, a tight pattern of tall buildings with the metro running beneath. More recent commercial development stretches down long avenues from the affluent Pinheiros neighborhood to the Avenida Faria Lima, and to a growing district along Avenida Luis Carlos Berrini. Now new offices are rising as far south as the Santo Amaro district, where many international firms are placing their regional headquarters. These newer places are more spread out along very wide avenues crowded with cars, far from the metro.

An income map shows the story, with the highest income areas mainly to the southwest. To the east is what some call the "forgotten city," a huge area of working-class neighborhoods running from the center to the large industrial suburbs in the southeast, neighborhoods that have suffered from years of de-industrialization. Around the core is the wide belt of poverty, an area of high unemployment and informal (unregulated) housing where more than 50 percent of the city's people live.

Mayor Marta hopes to refocus the city on its center. Downtown São Paulo was an elegant, exciting place fifty years ago. Fine buildings with ornate stone façades and balconies still form walls along the narrow streets, bespeaking an early twentieth-century opulence. Today many of the old office towers stand nearly vacant, while once-exclusive shops have become chain stores or warehouses that are badly faded. Yet in daytime the streets bustle: some two million people cross the central area on foot each day, most coming from outer neighborhoods to make transit connections. The crowds attract street vendors, who turn the lengths of some narrow streets into quasi-bazaars.

The city government is trying to transform itself in order to transform downtown. The well-known city agency EMURB (Empresa Municipal de Urbanização) has shifted from an urban design function to become a promoter of

Mayor Marta Suplicy, above, *looks to capitalize on city-center assets, among them landmarks like the Banespa building,* opposite, *and the redstone Martinelli,* left, *São Paulo's first skyscraper, now renovated for government offices*

The fragmentation cannot be overcome. It's too late for that now. But it can become more humanized

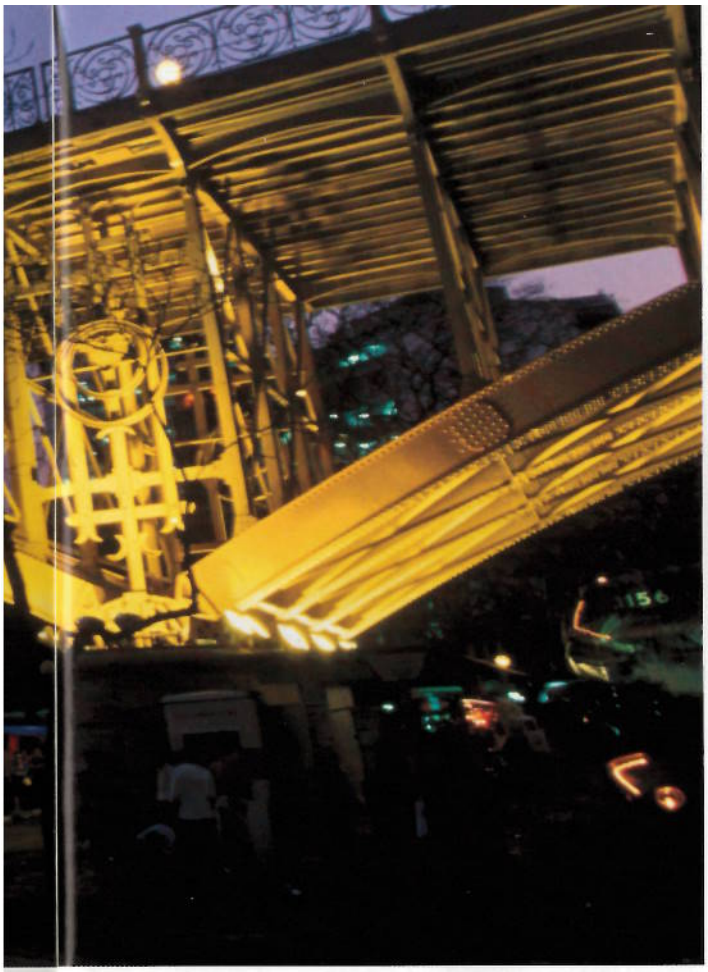
urban development. The agency plays a special interdepartmental role, coordinating the work of the transport and housing secretariats to create a supple approach to boosting downtown land values. Its work puts focus on physical rebuilding, by retrofitting selected buildings with modern network wiring, or overhauling the bus system that currently converges on the center. Yet much of EMURB's work is occurring in the subtle realm of information creation.

"Municipal governments here are responsible for a metropolitan population larger than the country of Portugal," says André Leirner, associate director at EMURB. "We've got to become more flexible, to create easy interaction among the various departments, putting the right people together and empowering them with information." A comprehensive, geographically based electronic data base is being assembled, allowing the city to quickly pinpoint characteristics of individual properties. With this the city can bring information of high value to the marketplace, attracting potential investors and facilitating property transactions. The city can add further value through select tax reductions to get properties moving. So far, government offices are relocating downtown and a new hotel is going in. A group of programs seeks to regularize the street vendors and raise their incomes, even as much cross-through foot traffic is removed from the streets by re-routing the transit system. Yet many observers believe that getting the center to blossom again as a residential and shopping district for higher-income people will be a difficult task. Despite downtown's direct access to the city's metro system, it cannot offer the modern amenities of the newer outlying areas. Yet the work will continue.

"We need to reinforce the centrality of downtown, where we have so much invested in infrastructure," says Leirner. He foresees the possibility of downtown becoming the metropolitan area's premier center of government and cultural attractions.

Many Paulistanos never go to the periphery, although it appears as a familiar enough landscape from the highways that pass through. There are no tall apartment towers. It is a low city of small, crowded houses made of red brick and cinderblock. The poorest people live in small houses made of wood. Residents here build their own houses, gradually assembling bricks into walls. The house walls form a maze of twisting pathways leading off the main streets. Unemployment is high, while incomes are very low. Many with jobs travel for hours to get to work. Some walk to work two hours in the morning to save money, returning home in the evening in the city's few trains or slow-moving buses. Half, and probably more, of São Paulo's population lives in such areas.

The city government's new approach to the periphery goes deeper than attempts to raise the material aspects of life. Social assistance programs are in place, and some have been expanded. But the centerpiece of the new approach is the CEU (Centro Educacional Unificado), a school that serves as a community center with the mission to improve the level of knowledge



and raise people's awareness of the possibilities that the city offers. Some forty-five of the impressive new structures are built, sturdy multi-story buildings in modern designs, with clean new classrooms, computer labs, and open, airy studios for dance and art.

The CEUs are new, handsome landmarks in the peripheral neighborhoods. While functioning as normal grade schools, they remain outside of the troubled public school system. Their staffs are empowered to enter unique arrangements with local civic groups and to open their doors to volunteers who want to teach. On weekends, the buildings open to the whole neighborhood for cultural programs and classes. Of course their reach is necessarily limited. The new CEU in the Cidade Dutra neighborhood promises to raise the educational level and improve prospects for thousands of young people over time. It can accommodate twelve hundred grade-school children each year. But one nearby hospital has a thousand births in a single year. The population is just too large and the resources are too small to serve everyone.

Private initiatives are filling some of the need, under the leadership of creative and energetic individuals. Roberto Boscarriol owns a successful construction company. He and his wife, Rosaly, often drive from his modern office in a quiet residential area, through the affluent Morumbi neighborhood, and far to the city's southern outskirts to an area called Campo Limpo. There he has built a youth center, Casa José Coltro, in honor of his father. It is a simple, inconspicuous two-story structure tucked into a busy street of dingy shops and garages.

"We want to keep kids off the streets and give them some skills they can use throughout their lives," Boscarriol says. There is no shortage of children who want to get involved. Three shifts of them come through daily, before or after their school hours. Four classrooms fill with children ages five to fifteen years old. A small staff teaches them basic computer programs and other life and job skills, even training for telemarketing jobs. "We are very happy to be learning about telemarketing," says one young man. "That is a great opportunity for us to begin working . . . because there are many things to sell."

Nearby, in the desperate Jardim Ângela area, an even more grassroots effort to help children is under way. This is a violent place ruled by drug lords where assassinations occur daily. It is where Sonia Silva lives and where she saw a need. After raising four children in the rough neighborhood, she opened a day-care center in her home. The downstairs rooms of her two-story concrete house are filled with toddlers and preschool children. The children wear shabby clothing and run about barefoot on the concrete floors. Silva has no financial resources. She relies totally upon a few volunteers from the neighborhood to help her care for, entertain, and monitor the children. If she notices a child looking abused, she notifies a social worker.

"I've seen a terrible breaking up of families here, with women having children by different men. It is always bad because the children get neglected," Silva says. Behind her house, in the typical warren of narrow winding paths and houses, is a half-built cinderblock structure that she hopes to transform into two classrooms and a kitchen. She needs to find assistance to finish it. She attracts people to help by the sheer force of her energetic leadership, and her determination to keep small children from growing into street children. She may be one of thousands of such volunteers in these impoverished neighborhoods.

As night falls, Paulistanos make their way beneath the illuminated arch of the Santa Efigênia Viaduct, a main artery in the city center, above left. *A popular draw in Ibarapuera Park is Victor Brecheret's heroic-style* Bandeiras *monument,* top, *honoring the region's pioneers; northwest of the park, in the Pinheiros neighborhood, a restaurant near the Praça Benedito Calixto attracts a lunch crowd,* above

At its furthest reaches the city gradually gives way to trees. São Paulo exists within a remnant of the once-great Atlantic Forest, now known as the Cinturão Verde (Green Belt) and recognized as a unique biosphere by UNESCO. The Green Belt provides invaluable services to the city: climatic balance (there is a twelve-degree Celsius difference in temperature from the warm city-center to the cooler forest hilltops), as well as water filtration and protection of the city's fresh-water reservoirs. The forest also provides a home for abundant species and beauty. Unfortunately, the forest is getting invaded.

Joaquim Neto, of the São Paulo Forestry Institute, stands atop a huge rock outcrop on a hill in Cantareira Park, a protected area in a far northern sector of the city. Below him the hillside unfurls in thick tropical forest where great vines hang down from trees. Beyond this dark green border the massive city spreads outward as far as the eye can see, glittering gray and white in the sun. From that high point he indicates how the Green Belt is breaking up into pieces. The main forces of growth are spreading outward from the city to east and west, and also to the south where illegal settlement is eating into the forest that protects the city's great water reservoirs. Eastward the belt appears intact as it unfurls to the distant Serra do Mar (coastal range) and the state of Rio de Janeiro. But to the west the belt is broken. The unmistakable mark of the gray city appears where informal settlements are spreading into the green. The cutting up of the belt disrupts wildlife corridors and species diversity, threatening the forest's long-term viability.

"We need to be willing to work with everyone around us. The Forestry Institute can guard the parks and reserves, but that's not enough to save the forest," says Neto. "We'll work directly with the communities coming in here, with people who need help to protect trees near their settlements. We'll work with the city of São Paulo, where a discussion is under way about making green corridors directly through the central city."

This proactive stance has led conservationists into direct dialogue with the invading communities. An important result is outreach to youth. The Forestry Institute is training young people to become stewards of the forest, giving them familiarity with the forest and the value it provides. This Programa de Jovens (Youth Program) takes children from the periphery into the forest to learn about tree planting, specialized gardening, and other forest-protection activities. It even teaches the students how to establish local eco-tourism businesses. More deeply, the program tries to

New job centers will give people an important option: To work closer to home, to not have to cross the city to get to a job

imbue leadership skills. The hope is to foster the next generation of conservationists among the very people who are threatening the forest The Forestry Institute has trained about four hundred youth since the program began in the late nineties.

São Paulo is reputed to be a city where planning never occurred. In fact, much urban planning occurred in past decades, but it was often technocratic and the city's rapid pace of growth rendered many plans irrelevant. A simple comparison can illustrate the city's conundrum. In 1954, when São Paulo celebrated four hundred years, it was a large industrial city of about three million, approximately the same size as the city of Chicago. Fifty years later, in 2004, the population of Chicago remains about three million. São Paulo's population has ballooned to ten million (the metropolitan region to seventeen million). It has become a mega city, fourth largest in the world. Yet its metropolitan economy produces less in total value than Chicago's.

Now São Paulo's rate of population growth has slowed, opening new opportunities for comprehensive planning. A new directive plan for the whole city, setting out overall goals and guidelines, was recently approved by the city council. Subregional planning is under way in each of the city's thirty-one subprefectures. Marta's government may be making its most creative contribution in the realm of urban planning, because planners are trying to get people in the neighborhoods directly involved.

Citizens are coming together in plenary meetings in locales across the city, helping to shape the subregional plans as they share their knowledge of the local landscape. Ideas are coming out, and visions of vital city neighborhoods are taking shape. Mapmakers are integrating the designated places into a comprehensive citywide framework of centers and corridors.

Some of the best ideas are coming forth from the city's eastern sector. Here people have put emphasis on bringing back lost jobs and revitalizing the old

The inviting lagoon at the Parque da Aclimação, above, *is one of the city's more popular attractions for adults and children alike.* Opposite: *Along the Pinheiros River, new high-priced apartments rise up alongside poor housing,* top, *while in the neglected southern sector, residents like day-care provider Sonia Silva,* below, *are creating volunteer networks to address unmet social needs*

Citizens are getting together across the city, ideas are coming out, and visions of vital city neighborhoods are taking shape

Avenida Paulista, the city's main artery, above, *shows its glitzy, eclectic style: the historic Casa das Rosas museum, one of the avenue's few remaining mansions, dwarfed by skyscrapers of more recent vintage. Elsewhere, in the fashionable Jardims neighborhood,* center, *the city pulses with the rhythms of daily life*

industrial lands. Planners have identified two areas for new university campuses, including an eastern extension of the University of São Paulo (USP) to balance its main campus in the western sector. A large site for a new industrial park is also on the maps, in an effort to create a new locus of jobs in the east. These ideas for the eastern sector of the city illustrate the real, practical nature of the citizen-based vision. In the poorer south, people are calling for more emphasis on improving public transit and basic infrastructure and social services.

"New job centers will give people an important option. It is the option to work closer to home, to not have to cross the city to get to a job," says Ivan Maglio, of the city's Secretariat for Urban Planning. "The metro needs to be extended, certainly, but what is most needed is a real network of transit, one that decentralizes the movement, takes pressure off the center, and allows people to reach jobs more quickly in all parts of the city."

"The current government is taking a strong proactive approach. Its initiatives are good. Some, like the CEUs, are really wonderful. But it's a drop in the ocean," says Pedro Jacobi, professor of sociology at USP. "What's needed is massive investment in transit systems, massive investment in social services in the periphery, and much greater resources put into environmental conservation."

Jacobi served in previous city administrations and has spent years leading his students into the city's periphery to understand its problems. He has little doubt about the limited capacity of planning to change things. "The fragmentation cannot be overcome," he says, "It's too late for that now. But it can become more humanized."

Yet he sees no irony in the thought of a humanized fragmentation. Instead, he emphasizes the positive: "São Paulo has so much to offer. It is marvelously cosmopolitan. It is adapting, albeit slowly, to the new global economy. New chic hotels are coming in. The fashion industry is growing. All this creates new opportunities for people in both formal and informal ways. This ever-present opportunity, also, is São Paulo."

As a city built by immigrants from all continents, São Paulo has often discovered creative new approaches, ways to break down the limits of the past. Now, as the mega city faces a new century, it continues reshaping itself through the irrepressible energy of its people. ■

Another of São Paulo's leafy escapes is the Parque da Luz, right, *originally founded in 1825 as a botanical garden, where Paulistanos rest in the shade of some of the city's oldest trees; from the Serra da Cantareira,* top, *the city's northern encroachment on the diminishing Green Belt is clear*