

Review: Plazas and Barrios: Heritage Tourism and Globalization in the Latin American Centro Historico

By Joseph L. Scarpaci

Reviewed by Robert D. Hook
University of Idaho, USA

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Joseph L. Scarpaci. *Plazas and Barrios: Heritage Tourism and Globalization in the Latin American Centro Historico*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2005. 267pp. ISBN 0-8165-1631-6 (cloth) US\$45.00. Alkaline paper.

When we travel in Latin America, one of the main points of interest is the plaza or historical center of the cities. We marvel at the architecture of these centers and are amazed at the variety of life, shops and hotels. We see glimpses of their history collaged with the present and wonder how they developed. Scarpaci, a Professor of Geography at Virginia Tech University, is well qualified to guide us through an exploration of this topic. In 2002 he won the *Choice Outstanding Academic Book Award* for *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* which he co-authored with Cuban architect Mario Coyula and Roberto Serge.

In *Plazas and Barrios*, he analyzes the urban cores of nine Latin American cities and their eventual transformations from town plazas to historic centers. He discusses the political, economic and social forces that formed the barrios and continue to shape them. He explores the history, settlement, and economy of each city, and then examines contemporary planning issues. The cities are Bogotá and Cartagena, Colombia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Cuenca and Quito, Ecuador; Havana and Trinidad, Cuba; Montevideo, Uruguay; and Puebla, Mexico. They were selected in order to represent "geographic variety: agricultural versus mining and manufacturing centers, ports versus inland locations, and large versus small cities" (p. 220). Scarpaci has provided insightful information about each of the cities and what has happened to make their historical centers and barrios what they are today. He "explores how heritage tourism and globalization reshape the Latin American historic district "(p 32). "Latin American tourism is increasingly becoming a major source of economic development. It is vying for nearly US\$476 billion spent in 2000 by 689 million international tourists" (p. 31). Latin American cities have no shortage of heritage tourism opportunities both new and more traditional, such as gastronomic heritage tours, military heritage tours and host-guest relationships (p 20).

Scarpaci then provides in-depth case studies of four cities: Havana, Trinidad, Cuenca and Cartagena. In these case studies he shows insights into the differences made by governmental organization alone. In Cuenca and

Cartagena, the historical centers are influenced by investors, tourists and relatives of locals (many living in the US). Cartagena is unique in Latin America because of the influence of the private sector on its historical center and the limited role of the public subsidy. A strong state-run company, Habaguanex, which oversees all aspects of public works and historical preservation with little interference from the party leadership, influences Havana's historical center. Trinidad, on the other hand, is totally controlled by the party leadership and the local government has no say in policymaking.

In this well written book, Scarpaci describes the contemporary condition of the Latin American *centro histórico*. He provides the reader with a better understanding of the social and economic changes occurring today in Latin America. He makes excellent use of photographs of the historical centers (past and present), along with very useful charts, tables and maps. He uses an interdisciplinary approach that includes sociology, public administration, architecture/urban design and planning, economics and history. Scholars in these and other disciplines as well as the general reader will find *Plazas and Barrios* very interesting and readable.

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Robert D. Hook <rdhook@uidaho.edu>, Reference Librarian, University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho 83844-2350 USA. TEL: 208-885-6066.