

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – Instituto Dom

Location: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Venue: Instituto Dom

Intro to the City, Distinctive Aspects and Demographics:

The city of Rio de Janeiro is a large city with approximately 7 million people. Hundreds of low income communities and slums exist in the city and co-exist many times with high income communities. Many of the locations are inaccessible due to safety reasons. Demographically, the city is a diverse mix of ethnic groups, including Afro-Brazilians, European descendants, and some few descendants of indigenous peoples. Portuguese is the official language. There is a mix of young and aging populations and many families live in multigenerational households. The city outskirts have lost its appeal to industries and manufacturing therefore jobs are mostly in the services and tourism sectors. There are high levels of inequality, with sharp contrasts between affluent areas and poorer communities. Issues with violence and crime, especially in underprivileged neighborhoods exist. The city has mountains and is limited by the Atlantic ocean which attracted millions of migrants in the past and limits the city's growth in some directions. Rio de Janeiro embodies a mix of natural beauty, cultural richness, and social complexity, creating a city full of contrasts and energy.

Local Economy: Rio de Janeiro's economy is bolstered by its diverse assets, including tourism, energy, and creative industries. Renowned beaches like Copacabana and Ipanema, iconic landmarks such as Sugarloaf Mountain and Christ the Redeemer, and Tijuca National Park draw millions of visitors annually, supporting tourism and eco-tourism. The Port of Rio de Janeiro serves as a vital trade hub, while the city's petroleum and energy sectors, led by companies like Petrobras, drive significant economic activity. Additionally, Rio's cultural exports, including samba, bossa nova, and its celebrated Carnival, contribute to the thriving creative industries, which encompass film, music, and advertising. Sporting infrastructure such as the Maracanã Stadium and Olympic facilities further enhance the city's economic profile, alongside educational and research institutions like the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

Regional Assets: Rio de Janeiro benefits from a wealth of regional assets that amplify its cultural and environmental significance. Natural features like world-famous beaches, the Tijuca National Park, and Guanabara Bay not only support biodiversity but also underpin tourism and local

livelihoods. Its tropical climate attracts visitors year-round, while historic sites and cultural hubs, including favelas like Vidigal and Rocinha, contribute to the city's dynamic identity. Iconic cultural events like Carnival and a rich musical heritage originating from samba and bossa nova define Rio as a global cultural powerhouse. Additionally, the city's infrastructure, such as Galeão International Airport and a metro system, facilitates connectivity, and its islands and urban parks promote recreation and eco-tourism.

The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Rio's entrepreneurial ecosystem is vibrant yet faces notable challenges. It thrives in creative industries, with startups in fashion, music, film, and tourism showcasing resilience across socio-economic levels. Tech innovation is growing, supported by incubators like Startup Rio, and social entrepreneurship flourishes in underprivileged areas. However, inequality, informal markets, limited access to capital, and regulatory barriers hinder progress. Despite these challenges, opportunities abound, particularly in leveraging favelas as hubs of innovation and advancing digital transformation. Public, private, and nonprofit sectors play pivotal roles, alongside community leaders fostering skills in coding, marketing, and financial literacy.

Poverty and Disadvantage Challenges in Rio: Poverty remains a significant challenge in Rio de Janeiro, where governmental support such as basic income programs can inadvertently discourage entrepreneurship. Limited access to education perpetuates a scarcity mindset, restricting aspirations and innovation. Many micro-enterprises replicate one another, leading to high business failure rates. The lack of time, resources, and knowledge further constrains the ability of entrepreneurs to adopt innovative approaches. This environment necessitates targeted interventions to break cycles of poverty and enable sustainable growth in disadvantaged communities.

Program Management and Annual Cycle: Instituto Dom supports low-income micro-entrepreneurs, primarily women in urban low-income communities, who possess basic business skills and typically operate in food, beauty, or services sectors. Led by President Karl Johnsson, a strategic committee, and an external board, the organization relies on a network of 45 volunteers across Brazil. The program runs projects based on fundraising and employs an e-learning platform featuring online courses and customized GPTs for added support. Plans include developing virtual applications to scale the program, though many participants still value in-person settings.

Program Goals: Instituto Dom aims to expand support to micro-entrepreneurs nationwide by scaling virtual training and services. While virtual models offer efficiency, the program recognizes the continued need for in-person engagement to foster immersive, effective learning. By addressing technological limitations and embracing hybrid approaches, the organization aspires to empower entrepreneurs across Brazil with accessible, impactful resources.

