

The End of the Plastic Bag As Seen from Brazil

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People all over the world are becoming aware of a serious environmental problem: the disposal of plastic bags, which pollutes rivers and streams, clogging drain pipes. The issue is still controversial, but some countries have already adopted drastic policies, such as Ireland, which has imposed a 15% tax on plastic bags.

In Bangladesh, the bags were banished altogether. A plastic bag might take up to 500 years to decompose. Every year, from 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide, and the vast majority ends up in the garbage.

In the southeastern Brazilian city of São Paulo, according to the São Paulo State Supermarket Association (Apas), around 66 million small plastic bags are consumed per month at supermarkets.

The controversy has attracted the interest of entrepreneurs, to whom the substitution of plastic bags represents a good business opportunity, obviously coupled with environmental preservation.

One such company, Gatto de Rua (Street Cat), from the city of Santos, in the São Paulo coastline, has recently launched the Bag Market, a multitask bag that covers up shopping carts and renders plastic bags useless.

Sold by the company for 80 Brazilian reais (approximately US\$ 43) retail, the product is already a success in São Paulo, and has become the flagship of the company.

According to Mário Gaspar, a partner at the company, the aim is not to put an end to plastic bags, but rather to offer customers an opportunity to help preserve the environment.

"It took us four years to develop and perfect the product. The Bag Market is made of fabric-non-fabric (TNT, in the Portuguese acronym) and divided into three compartments: one for food, another for hygiene, and a third one for frozen products."

Gaspar explains that the bag can last up to five years, and was developed for large and medium-sized shopping carts. The bags are available for retail sales in beige colour, but Gatto de Rua can manufacture the bags as promotional items in various colors.

"We have placed the product in the market in March, and since then we have been conducting surveys with supermarket owners, consumers, and managers. The feedback was great. The bag reduces time standing in line, and is a good-looking item."

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