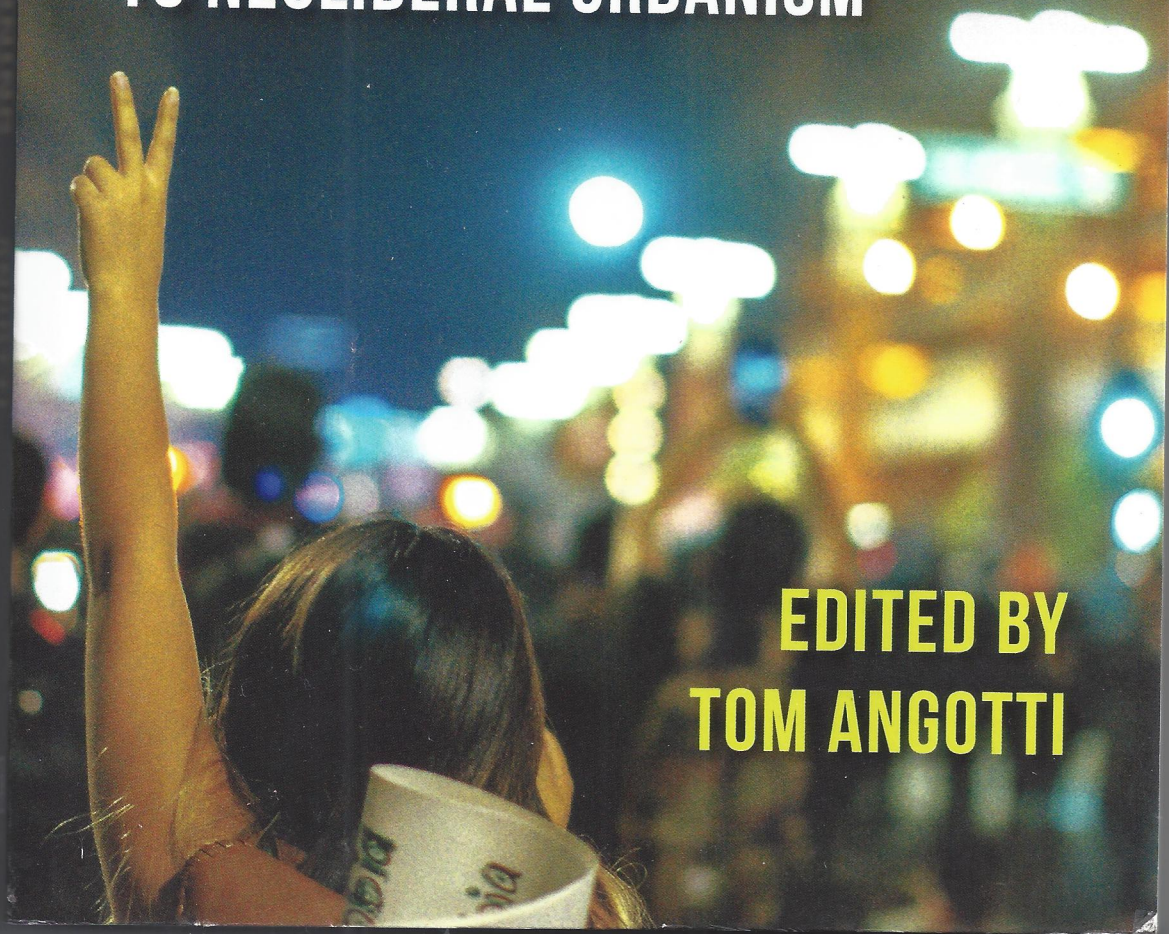
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TRANSFORMATIVE PLANNING

RADICAL ALTERNATIVES TO NEOLIBERAL URBANISM



EDITED BY
TOM ANGOTTI

Rio's Real vs. Unmet Olympic Legacies: What They Tell Us About the Future of Cities

Theresa Williamson

From New York City to Berlin, Hong Kong to London, conflicts have been increasingly recorded in recent years between two urban camps. First there are those who view the city as fundamentally commercial, drawing on the city's origin as a place of exchange made possible thanks to agricultural production – a place of economies of scale and agglomeration economics, most dramatically represented in the concept of the global city.[1] At their extreme, proponents of this vision of the city will insist cities are essential links in a global economic system and that this is what makes them important.

Second are those who experience the city as fulfilling a human need for connection and social interaction. "The city... is a natural manifestation of that social instinct that we have. Cities define us. It's where we're born, get educated, grow up, get married, where we pray and play, where we get old and where we die," explains political theorist Benjamin Barber. This perspective on the city is most clearly represented in those who fight for recognition and implementation of the Right to the City, as explained by David Harvey: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is...a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is...one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."[2]

Those adamant about this vision will argue there is no compatibility with the first vision and that economic localization is the way of the future. And it can be argued to be a central solution to many of the world's current dilemmas, if we are to believe, as Barber insists, that cities are where most important decisions that affect people's lives today are made.[3]

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[1] Aaron M. Renn. "What is a Global City?," *Newgeography*. December 7, 2012. http://www.newgeography.com/content/003292-what-is-a-global-city.

[2] David Harvey. "The Right to the City," *New Left Review*. September/October 2008. https://newleftreview.org/II/53/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city.

[3] "Why Mayors Should Rule the World," *TED*. June 2013. https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_barber_why_mayors_should_rule_the_world?language=en.

In Rio de Janeiro during the pre-Olympic period (2009-2016) the see-saw came thundering down on the side of the heavily commercial approach. A huge one-time Olympics injection of US$20 billion has been applied almost exclusively towards investments that support vision #1. As a result, the underlying nature of this approach and the inherent conflict between these visions has become palpable.

Purported Olympic Legacies

Made possible by the state of exception afforded by Rio's hosting of mega-events, we have seen mass investment in construction – from golf course to public housing, diverse transport infrastructure to luxury developments, not to mention the future Olympic infrastructure – along with promoting rampant runaway real estate speculation, suppression of dissenting voices and exclusion of low-income groups, the building of museums like the Museum of Image and Sound and the Museum of Tomorrow, and using market principles to justify heightening segregation, which in turn fuels inequality and crime.[4]

Though some of these investments appear on the surface to support the second vision (such as the BRTs, public housing and family clinics), upon closer observation each has come at significant cost to the supposed beneficiaries and the lack of consultation and evaluation have not allowed a decisive positive conclusion about their impacts to be reached. On the other hand, all of these have heavily benefited the corporate interests behind them.

According to the Mayor, Rio has gained a great deal from the pre-Olympic period. Such claims are made when relying on broad and sometimes poorly conducted economic projections and expressed through statements like this one made in 2011: "The expected gross economic impact of the 2016 Games on the Brazilian economy is US$51.1 billion," rather than looking at the distribution of those same resources ($1 billion alone is going to one man[5]) or awaiting actual results (like current projections putting revenue at $4.5 billion[6]).[7]

[4] Jules Boykoff. "Six Months Out from Olympics, Rich Not Poor, are the Big Winners," *From Brazil*. February 4, 2016. https://frombrazil.blogfolha.uol.com.br/2016/02/04/six-months-out-from-olympics-rich-not-poor-are-the-big-winners/.

[5] Jonathan Watts. "The Rio Property Developer Hoping for a $1Bn Olympic Legacy of His Own," *The Guardian*. August 4, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2015/aug/04/rio-olympic-games-2016-property-developer-carlos-carvalho-barra.

[6] Andrew Zimbalist. "The Summer Olympics Should Always Be in Los Angeles.

Since the primary public legacy that can be touted is around transport (where 55% of public investments in Rio's Olympics have been directed), numbers are published reflecting the growth in cycle lanes, bus corridors, metro expansion, and mode availability. However, though an increase in modes is easy to market as a legacy, the focus should be on actual impact which, as summarized by the Metropolis Observatory, is not so sunny: "The territorial distribution of mobility investments made until this point in the context of the mega-events appear to reproduce the same logic of organization of space... There are no elements that permit us to infer that the enormous investments in mobility have produced a better distribution of people or jobs in the metropolitan region and, much less, that the system will meet the demands of the metropolis."[8]

All recent Olympics have come with promises of legacies to be left for the host cities and their citizens. Rio's legacy pledges initially included such important promises as: the upgrading of all *favelas* according to the well designed "*Morar Carioca* program" (at his TED Talk Mayor Paes stated that "Rio has the aim to have all its *favelas* completely urbanized by 2020"[9]), the planting of 24 million endemic tropical trees (later changed to 34 million) to offset Olympic carbon emissions, and the cleaning up of the Guanabara Bay and Jacarepaguá Lagoon.

This list later changed. As of August 2015 the Paes administration had made 27 legacy promises to the IOC, under the headings of Mobility, Infrastructure, Sports Facilities and Environment.[10] Housing was now off the list. This was up from a different set of 17 in 2009, which included those mentioned in the previous paragraph. Based on the new list, publicly, the Paes administration recognizes only one unmet

Forever," *Time*. July 13, 2016. http://time.com/4396796/olympic-host-city/.

[7] Helen Trouten Torres. "Rio World Cup and Olympic Legacy: Economics," *Rio Times Online*. September 13, 2011. https://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-business/rio%E2%80%99s-world-cup-and-olympic-legacy-economics/.

[8] "Mega-events: Impacts of the World Cup and Olympics in Brazil," *Observatorio Das Metropoles*. April 30, 2015. http://observatoriodasmetropoles.net.br/wp/livro-megaeventos-impactos-da-copa-e-olimpiadas-no-brasil/.

[9] "The 4 Commandments of Cities," *TED*. February 2012. https://www.ted.com/talks/eduardo_paes_the_4_commandments_of_cities.

[10] "Principais Legados dos Jogos 2016 para a Cidade do Rio," *G1*. http://especiais.g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/olimpiadas-rio-2016/principais-legados-dos-jogos-2016-para-a-cidade-do-rio/.

legacy: the cleaning of Guanabara Bay.

Reflecting on the 'Real' (and Unplanned) Olympic Legacies

Since these highly debatable or unmet official legacy promises are now well known, let's look at what might be considered the 'real' list of legacies – yes, positive ones – from these games for Rio's average, and low-income, citizens. These are not the legacies the city government will tout as such, but the real-world positive outcomes experienced in Rio as a result of hosting the Games.

Real legacy #1: growing quality and quantity of international media attention

Fortunately, the Olympics brought more than a state of exception to Rio. The games also brought a huge swarm of international media attention and scrutiny. Traditionally, global media coverage of Rio had been superficial. Interviews were conducted by phone from São Paulo, Mexico City, or New York since international media rarely had offices in Rio and were not familiar with the inner workings of the city and its government. Articles were issued thanks to press releases or police reports. Rarely did reporters dig deep, and rarer still were everyday cariocas, particularly from the favelas, quoted. Favelas were seen as no-go zones, stereotyped, stigmatized and sensationalized from a safe distance over decades by journalists.

But all of that was about to change. Shortly after the Olympic decision, freelance journalists from a number of countries began setting up shop and seeking to understand the city so they could be in the best possible position to report. Others began visiting Rio regularly, to develop understanding so they could quickly come and go as needed.

They were quickly followed by Latin America correspondents for a number of international outlets, moved from elsewhere in the Americas to Rio, so that they would be well-positioned to report as interest grew over the years to follow. And there were the publications that moved some of their top global reporters to Rio, as well. Finally, in some cases entire regional offices moved to or opened up in Rio. These thousands of journalists were not just visiting Rio for a few days or weeks. They were moving, making Rio home for over a half-decade. Many of them came with families, all of whom would be impacted by and experiencing the city.

As these outlets began reporting more frequently, with increasing nuance, context and understanding, a Crash-like sub-tension could be sensed. There began a significant jump in global reporting on favelas,

with a significant growth in the number of favela residents quoted. Local media for decades had issued an uncreative, sensationalist and counterproductive narrative on these communities that had been perpetuated by the global media: they were criminal by nature, ugly, a blight, there was nothing redeeming about them, they were a lasting reminder of Brazil's failure to develop and of its lack of control.

Rarely did the media discuss hard-won squatters rights, Rio's architectural establishment's conclusions about the importance of favela upgrading, historic improvements in housing due to the favela tradition of self-help and collective action, or even the importance of *favelas* to mainstream carioca culture. And never did the Brazilian mainstream media discuss the systemic and historic legacies that had led us to where we were now.

All of a sudden the international media was doing all of this, beginning with the issue of evictions in *Favela do Metrô* in 2011, for the World Cup, and covered by both The Guardian and Al Jazeera. When The New York Times covered Vila Autódromo's eviction in March 2012,[11] followed by global interest around the case of Amarildo's disappearance and police brutality following the 2013 protests, and through to today where community reporters are actually reporting directly through global platforms, the change has been palpable. The topic of forced evictions alone has been intensely documented as one of the most talked-about negative consequences of the Games, with some 70,000 people removed from their homes in the worst sweep of evictions in Rio history.[12]

A deep centuries-old wound was exposed. *Favela* community threads on Facebook regularly celebrate international reporting with the likes of *Alemão Coletivo Papo Reto*'s post, "One more example of our participation in international media. All this while our own media continue ignoring the favela."

Real legacy #2: deepened questioning and social catharsis

The Olympic Games have thus gifted an unexpected legacy to Rio: the outside perspective that has provided the essential spark for the local

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[11] Simon Romero. "Slum Dwellersare Defying Brazil's Grand Design for Olympics," *New York Times*. March 4, 2012.
https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/world/americas/brazil-faces-obstacles-in-preparations-for-rio-olympics.html?_r=0.

[12] Maria Eduarda Chagas. "Book Maps Forced Eviction of Residents During Eduardo Paes Administration," *Rio on Watch*. May 5, 2015.
http://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=21863.

social catharsis that is inevitable and necessary. Examples include the great Brazil race debate that's been taking place in the international media, while local media are ambivalent. Stories ranging from the multi-month research by *The Globe and Mail* along with smaller pieces in *NPR* and *Global Post* have been translated and shared widely in Brazil.

In addition to ushering in an age of nuance in favela reporting and public debate over Rio's deep historic divides, the global media presence in Rio has led a number of Olympic legacy promises and impacts to be publicly questioned. The investigation that led to the discovery of the extreme level of pollution in Rio's Guanabara Bay where Olympic sailing would take place was led by the *Associated Press*. Water that cariocas had been recreating in for decades and taking for granted as it was, all of a sudden became a public issue in Rio, thanks to the global media.

Real legacy #3: mainstream global questioning of the value of the games

One of the primary legacies of Rio hosting the 2016 Olympic Games is thus what it has taught the world about urbanism, inequality, poorly applied power, and the IOC and impacts of mega-events on cities. Not to suggest that Rio is the first city to experience these costs of Olympic developments, but that it is the first city to experience those costs so publicly, and thus to make them global public knowledge. As a result of Rio and the accumulation of past experience, very few democratic cities are vying for future Games.

The massive investments for the games and presence of the global press in Rio took place in the context of massive growth in social media. Though social media's growth in Brazil has no direct relationship with the 2016 Olympic Games, the fact that the games' implementation cycle occurred simultaneously with the expansion of social media in the country – now second in the world both on Facebook and Twitter – means for the first time in Olympic history the day-to-day impacts were documented by those experiencing them on-the-ground.

It took several years for the mainstream media to catch on, but today one can say that real-time news from the favelas can reach the world in a matter of minutes.

As reported in October 2015: "While the killing of an 11 year old in Caju by the Military Police only one week before was only minimally reported in the national press, and while it took the international media five months to report on the devastating eviction of *Favela do Metrô* starting in 2010 following local reports, Eduardo Santos' execution received widespread attention from both the national and international mainstream media immediately. The evidence filmed by a community witness and quickly uploaded onto social media provoked local mass news reporting that included community perspectives and challenged the authorities' reactions, as was also done by the *BBC* and *The Telegraph*, showing a groundbreaking shift in the ability of community-reported events to break and reach mass in moments."[13] Shortly thereafter, the critical role of social media in this case was highlighted in a Guardian report.

Real legacy #4: growing, more organized and networked civil society

And access to social media, combined with the brute force and sheer volume of resources shaping pre-Olympic Rio, have played a key role in emboldening and uniting social movements and facilitating organizing, including that which led to the largest public uprising in Rio since the early 1990s, the June 2013 protest where at least 300,000 *cariocas* took to the streets. Dozens of events can be identified on any given day, and the interconnectivity among frustrated cariocas is growing dramatically, each day.

The combination of rapid, top-down regeneration of the city in a highly social, democratic context experiencing this boom in social media access and use by traditionally marginalized communities has created the unexpected legacy of the games offering favela residents the chance to reach mass audiences with their own message of indignation, on the one hand, and community qualities, resilience, and strength, on the other.

Real legacy #5: favelas are increasingly viewed with nuance and recognition of their struggle, value and qualities

We are therefore seeing a reduction in the stigmatization of what may be the world's most stigmatized urban communities, due to the combination of community access to social media and global attention. In fact, increasingly, favelas are being recognized for their qualities.

Since the 1992 Earth Summit when the community began its long trek to reestablish a vocation for its residents, *Vale Encantado* – located in

[13] Federico Olivieri and Marta Ill-Raga. "Execution in Providencia Highlights Growing Role of Social Media in Combating Police Violence," *Rio on Watch*. October 6, 2015. http://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=24581.

the middle of Rio's Tijuca Forest – has developed its own local cuisine, opened a cooperative restaurant, installed locally produced solar panels, gardens, and most recently biodigesters – including one recently launched that will make the community's sewage the cleanest in Rio.

If we base ourselves in the traditional stigmatizing view of favelas, Vale Encantado sounds absolutely unique. And it is. But not because it is a rare example of a *favela* containing assets. Rather, because it is uniquely itself. Which is, exactly, what every favela in Rio can claim. The same applies to *Vila Autódromo* whose residents were so committed to their community and its memory that they gave the City of Rio its biggest pre-Olympic marketing battle of all.[14] Or the South Zone's *Vidigal* with its vital history as the 80-year-old favela with luxuriant ocean views that received the Pope in 1980 and successfully organized to end the sequence of favela evictions that marked Brazil's dictatorship in Rio, today known for culture and friendliness that led it to be the focal point of *favela* gentrification in recent years. Or the West Zone's *Asa Branca favela* marked by its keen self-planning culture from the 1990s onwards, that kept drug trafficking at bay and resulted in a particularly walkable and functional community design. Or *North Zone Maré*'s long history beginning as an area of precarious homes on stilts in wetlands, and expanding to boast over one hundred community organizations and newspapers, including a museum that stores artifacts from its entrepreneurial past and present.

Real legacy #6: igniting the possibility of an alternative 'singular city' urban model

Ironically, it is precisely the over-the-top, intensely corporate-dominated vision dominating policy-making and economic development in Rio de Janeiro during the pre-Olympic period, that has ignited alternative visions of Rio, and that could one day give way to a new model of city, termed here the 'Singular City.'

What is a Singular City? A city that recognizes its unique localized attributes and, through careful cultivation of those attributes, through citizen-led channels, develops in singular ways that distribute gains across the population.

Interestingly enough, the heavily corporate city Rio has attempted

[14] Jo Griffin. "Change Beckons for Vila Autodromo, the Favela that Got in the Rio Olympics' Way," *The Guardian*. April 26, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/apr/26/rio-de-janeiro-favela-change-vila-autodromo-favela-olympics.

to create, resulting in exacerbated urban problems of spatial, economic and social inequalities, is creating the conditions for Rio as the Singular City. And it is the special brew that resulted from the mass descent of the global media upon Rio, combined with the simultaneous rise of social media across Rio's favelas experiencing some of the most brutal consequences of urban redevelopment associated with the games, that have resulted in a growing awakening, in which the city's deep divides are coming to a head and creating demand for the Singular City.

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