



Occupy all streets: Olympic urbanism and contested futures in Rio de Janeiro

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BOOK REVIEW

Occupy all streets: Olympic urbanism and contested futures in Rio de Janeiro, edited by Bruno Carvalho, Mariana Cavalcanti, and Vyjayanthi Rao Venuturupalli, New York, Urban Research Publishing, 2016, 212 pp., US\$25 (paperback)

Little remains in Rio de Janeiro of the excitement of 2009, when the International Olympic Committee chose the city to host the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Rio put on two mega-events in a short amount of time (the other was the 2014 FIFA World Cup) in the midst of street protests and the beginning of an acute economic and political crisis. This crisis was linked to rapacious real estate speculation, collusion between politicians and entrepreneurs, new forms of spatial segregation and traumatic evictions, racialized police brutality and everyday violence triggered, in part, by Rio's Olympic urbanism. With the end of the games, the list of missed opportunities (e.g. the cleaning of polluted Bay of Guanabara) mounted and an even more unequal city became one of its most enduring legacies. Yet, the mega-events triggered aspirations for *cariocas* (Rio's residents) for better living conditions, including spatial mobility, ecological rights, access to housing, public spaces, and leisure. New forms of political and community organization and the empowerment of social activism that claim for the right to the city are also among the outcome of the games.

Occupy All Streets is an outstanding collective work on the history of city planning for the Olympics and the competing visions of possible futures for all *cariocas*. The articles, written by an interdisciplinary group of scholars, architects, and activists, offer an exploration of the city that covers far more than the title of the book suggests. The tension between the 'rhetorics of inclusion' and the 'practices of exclusion' (Bruno de Carvalho) cuts across the articles. For the authors, Olympic urbanism is something different than the inconceivable influx of financial capital, construction of monumental infrastructure, public-private partnerships, eradications of poor quarters, and rampant real estate speculation. As Vyjayanthi Rao Venuturupalli puts it, there is not a singular Olympic urbanism but many. They are, 'fragments of urban life and material constructions that generate unexpected paths in their wake, each placed within an open-ended and agonistic field of action where encounter and contestation are immanent' (p. 201).

Beatriz Jaguaribe and Scott Salmon analyse the production of Rio as a global city competing with other global cities. The revitalization of Rio's waterfront in the port area (Porto Maravilha), the expansion of Rio's 'Western frontier' from Barra da Tijuca to Jacarepaguá; the incorporation of the North Zone and the timid (but still significant) production of public spaces of quality for working-class *cariocas* (like the Parque Madureira analysed by Bryan McCann) are central in the analysis of the articles. So is the study of the construction of mass transit infrastructure to connect Rio's North and West Zones via bus expressways (Guilherme Lassance).

The concentration of urban programmes in the West Zone was the outcome of the opportunities for quick returns in public-private partnerships and real estate developments that followed urban sprawl and real estate speculation beginning in the 1970s and 1980s in Barra da Tijuca (Mariana Cavalcanti, Julia O'Donnell, and Lilian Sampaio). The development of the Olympic Park (the athletes' quarters) and the sports and cultural facilities meant the transfer of billions of dollars to two major real estate companies: Carvalho-Hosken (the largest land and property owner in Barra) and Odebrecht (the construction company now famous for bribing governments and politicians of all stripes in Latin America). The state played a key role facilitating juicy profits and fraud. Particularly important was its role in evictions and bulldozing of *favelas* like the Favela do Autódromo, located next to the Olympic Park (analysed by Cavalcanti, O'Donnell, Sampaio; Jaguaribe and Salmon; Theresa Williamson).

Poor *cariocas* living in informal settlements soon understood that Rio was preparing for a party to which they were not invited. The government intervened in the *favelas* using military shock troops

and established the Police Pacifying Units to combat drug organizations. Likewise, affordable housing and urbanization programmes were subsumed to the needs of the Games.

Other popular, informal urbanism developed under the shadows of the formal urban transformations. Favela communities even developed eco-tourism and eco-oriented. Community organizations and activism received global attention and showed all Brazilians a different image of *favelas*, far from the idea of crime-driven urban blight (Williamson). Massive protests in Rio in 2013 showed that *cariocas* would reclaim the street as a space to affirm citizenship and belonging, challenging the privatization, segregation and isolation of market-oriented urbanism (Carvalho; Williamson).

Olympic urbanism certainly produced more inequality and segregation in Rio. Missed opportunities mounted. But the promises of a better city, of a better future triggered by the Olympics, made urbanism a language in which all *cariocas* framed their expectations and aspirations for their right to a just city. The present is sombre for most of Rio residents. The federal militarization of Rio (especially in *favelas*) and the bankrupt municipal finances speak to the downfall of post-Olympics' Rio. But the future is still to be defined. *Occupy All Street* provides thoughtful assessments of the history of Rio and mega-event city planning and, seen from Rio's current situation, is a manifesto for an insurgent urbanism in the shadows of the Olympics.

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